

London daily newspaper calls for freedom for Julian Assange

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London, June 16 (RHC)-- The London-based daily newspaper "The Morning Star" has published major piece calling for the freedom of Julian Assange.

The article, entitled "Julian Assange should be free," was written by Member of Parliament Claudia Webbe. She is an MP for Leicester East and writes on the eve of the final decision on extradition to the United States. It is believed that Home Secretary will rule tomorrow, Friday the 17th, on whether or not to allow Assange to go free.

Claudia Webbe's article in "The Morning Star" follows:

It is a fact of grave concern that the Home Secretary currently holds the fate of Julian Assange's extradition to the U.S. — and indeed the future of journalistic freedom and democratic integrity — in her hands.

Assange was charged by the Trump government with publishing the Afghan and Iraq war logs, for which he could face 175 years in jail.

He has been charged with political offences under the Espionage Act from 1917, for publishing true information about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Since the U.S.-British extradition treaty explicitly prohibits extradition for political offences, the Home Secretary must do the right thing and comply with Article 4 of the treaty and free Assange before the deadline for her decision on June 20.

The U.S. government has been determined to indict Assange and WikiLeaks since at least 2010, when the group published hundreds of thousands of war logs and diplomatic cables revealing numerous war crimes and other acts of corruption by the US, Britain and other governments around the world.

One of the most famous WikiLeaks videos was filmed from a U.S. Apache helicopter, Crazy Horse 1-8, as it shot down 11 civilians in July 2007 in Iraq.

The video starkly highlights the indiscriminate nature of the US invasion, in an illegal war that should never have taken place, that led to the killing of men who were neither engaged with nor threatening U.S. forces.

Two of the innocent people Crazy Horse 1-8 killed in east Baghdad were working for the news outlet Reuters.

WikiLeaks also revealed that the total number of civilian casualties in Iraq was 66,000 — far more than the U.S. had acknowledged. It shone an appalling new light on the abuse meted out to Muslim inmates at Guantanamo Bay, including the revelation that 150 innocent people were held for years without charge.

Rather than be held accountable for these war crimes, the U.S. government has moved heaven and earth to destroy the life of the man who unearthed their atrocities.

Previously, in January 2021, Assange's extradition to the U.S. was blocked by a British court. While the decision sided with and adopted the U.S. government's extremely dangerous arguments that undermine press freedom, the decision also found that, because U.S. prison conditions are so deleterious, it would be unjust and oppressive to extradite Assange, citing his mental health and that he would be at risk of suicide.

In December 2021, the High Court ruled in favour of allowing an appeal by the US government.

In March of this year, Assange's permission to appeal against his extradition was rejected. During his three-year incarceration at Belmarsh maximum-security prison, Assange's mental and physical health has considerably deteriorated.

Assurances by the U.S. authorities that they would not put Assange in a maximum-security prison or subject him to abusive special administrative measures, including prolonged solitary confinement, have been discredited by their admission that they reserved the right to reverse those guarantees.

Furthermore, widespread reports that the CIA considered kidnapping or killing Assange during his time in the Ecuadorian embassy have cast even more doubt on the reliability of U.S. promises and further expose the political motivation behind this case.

These revelations follow evidence, that is not contested by the US government, that people allegedly working on its behalf had bugged the Ecuadorian embassy in London, followed Assange's family and associates, and burgled the office of his lawyer.

Indeed, Mike Pompeo, former secretary of state under president Donald Trump, has been summoned by a Spanish court to explain an alleged US government plot to assassinate Assange, according to ABC Spain.

Assange's lawyer, Jennifer Robinson, has also just reached a settlement with the British government after a six-year legal action over breach of her human rights after it admitted she was likely put under covert surveillance. These underhand, illegal tactics have no place in a healthy democracy.

The human rights implications of this case are severe. The UN working group on arbitrary detention issued a statement saying that "the right of Mr Assange to personal liberty should be restored."

Massimo Moratti of Amnesty International has publicly stated that "were Julian Assange to be extradited or subjected to any other transfer to the USA, Britain would be in breach of its obligations under international law."

Human Rights Watch has said that "the only thing standing between an Assange prosecution and a major threat to global media freedom is Britain. It is urgent that it defend the principles at risk."

The National Union of Journalists stated that "US charges against Assange pose a huge threat, one that could criminalise the critical work of investigative journalists and their ability to protect their sources."

This, I believe, is the most concerning aspect of the Assange persecution. The charging document and accompanying extradition request from the US government seeks to criminalise numerous activities at the core of investigative journalism.

The key allegation — that Assange helped Chelsea Manning to crack a password in order to cover her tracks — was long known under president Obama's Department of Justice, which chose not to prosecute Assange because this amounted to standard journalistic practice.

The indictment seeks to criminalise what journalists are not only permitted, but ethically required to do: which is to take steps to help their sources maintain their anonymity.

It characterises as a felony many actions that journalists must take in order to conduct sensitive reporting in the digital age.

We must continue to oppose this attempt to criminalise journalism that involves reporting on classified information. If not, this indictment could set a chilling precedent with grave implications for the functioning of our democracy.

In 2010, WikiLeaks won a great victory for freedom of expression and against state secrecy, and the U.S. government has spent over a decade making every effort to reverse it.

By charging someone with espionage who has no non-disclosure obligation, is not a US citizen and is not in America, the US government is behaving as if it has jurisdiction all over the world to pursue any person who receives and publishes information of government wrongdoing. It is vital that we oppose this hegemonic, neoimperial project.

There is so much at stake. We on the left must continue to fight against the extradition and for Julian's release. It is vital that the Home Secretary understands that the full weight of democratic freedoms and journalistic integrity weigh heavily on her decision, and that she therefore takes the only legally and morally just option which is to free Assange.

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