

Australia seeking to persuade U.S. to bring Assange matter to a close

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Canberra, December 1 (RHC)-- Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has been approaching U.S. government officials to persuade them to drop the espionage charges filed against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Albanese said on Wednesday that he had raised the issue of the continued detention of Assange in meetings with US officials and was seeking to bring the matter to a close.

Albanese said he would continue to advocate for Assange's release, even though he disagreed with him on "a whole range of matters." "I have raised this personally with representatives of the United States government," Albanese told the parliament. "My position is clear, and has been made clear to the US administration, that it is time that this matter be brought to a close."

Assange's critics say his journalism endangered US national security with the release of the classified documents in 2010. Supporters say he is a hero victimized for exposing US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. If extradited to the United States, he would face a sentence of up to 175 years in a maximum-security prison.

Earlier this week, major news outlets had called on the Biden administration to drop charges against Assange. The Guardian, Le Monde, Der Spiegel, El Pais, and The New York Times jointly opposed the charges against Assange, insisting that publishing the material WikiLeaks had released was not a crime. Obtaining and publishing sensitive information is a core part of the daily work of journalists, the outlets wrote on Monday.

The U.S. government must drop its prosecution of the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange because it is undermining press freedom, according to US-led media groups. Julian Assange, who is an Australian national and is currently imprisoned inside a British jail, is awaiting extradition to the United States, where he faces charges of espionage under a law designed to prosecute World War I spies.

Since his arrest at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in 2019, Assange has been held in London's Belmarsh prison. He had spent the previous seven years living inside the diplomatic premises to avoid arrest over now-dropped sex charges in Sweden. He was eventually arrested by British police for charges filed at a British court for a case of alleged hacking of a government computer in the UK.

An American political analyst says Julian Assange's arrest shows the US and EU do not respect press freedom. In June, the then -UK Home Secretary Priti Patel approved the whistle-blower's extradition to the U.S., but Assange's lawyers are appealing against that decision.

Since WikiLeaks was founded in 2006, it has published hundreds of thousands of purported secret files and diplomatic cables. But the non-profit media organization owes the bulk of its global prominence to leaking US diplomatic cables that revealed the extent of corruption, horrifying killings, and abuse of civilians by American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During Barack Obama's presidency, the US government indicated it would not prosecute Assange for the leak in 2010 because of the precedent it would set. The media outlets are now appealing to the administration of President Joe Biden, who was vice-president at that time, to drop the espionage charges against Assange.

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