

CPJ perpetually excludes Julian Assange from imprisoned journalists list

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New York, January 27 (RHC)-- For another year, the Committee to Protect Journalists deliberately ignores Julian Assange as an imprisoned journalist and does not add his name to its list.

As of December 1, 2023, 320 journalists were detained or imprisoned, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) census report for 2023. In 2022, the number reached 360 journalists.

According to the CPJ report, Israel has imprisoned 17 journalists in Gaza which is the "highest number of arrests" since the CPJ began tracking arrests in 1992, ranking the occupation among the top six offenders.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and his legal team are readying for a major hearing on February 20 before the High Court of Justice in the United Kingdom, making it his final opportunity to avoid extradition to the United States, where he was charged with violating the Espionage Act in 2019. Hence, Assange currently requires immediate support from all freedom organizations mainly those in the US so they affirm their stand against the Justice Department charges.

The CPJ's report, however, whether for 2023, 2022, 2021, 2020, or 2019, ignored one key prisoner: Julian Assange.

CPJ excluded Assange yet for another year from their database of imprisoned journalists. This prompted Kevin Gosztola, a journalist for Scheerpost, to email the CPJ and demand answers on why Assange is still excluded, however, Gosztola was met with disappointment.

“After extensive research and consideration, CPJ chose not to list Assange as a journalist, in part because his role has just as often been as a source and because WikiLeaks does not generally perform as a news outlet with an editorial process,” CPJ answered matching its exact statement from a 2019 post authored by Robert Mahoney, CPJ executive editor in which he stood by the exclusion of the Australian activist and journalist.

When Gosztola mentioned that “extensive research and consideration” was completed in 2019, CPJ answered: “Yes, there have been many articles about our position on Assange. While you’re free to disagree, our position has been clear, transparent, and consistent for years.”

The “extensive research and consideration” that CPJ did to decide that Assange is not a journalist has never been shared with the public, according to Gosztola who stressed that Assange never held a security clearance or a position in the US government that would allow him access to classified documents.

A U.S. Army intelligence analyst, Chelsea Manning, is the source of the documents at issue in the Espionage Act prosecution against Assange. She submitted over 700,000 files that were classified military and government documents to WikiLeaks and Assange published them in 2010 and 2011.

Noting that CPJ ignored Gosztola's comment on what labels someone as a journalist, they previously defined a journalist as someone who covers the news or comments on public affairs through any media—including in print, in photographs, on radio, on television, and online.”

Assange appeared numerous times on news networks between 2010 and 2017, such as CNN and Al Jazeera English, to comment on WikiLeaks publications as well as public affairs, like National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden, NSA surveillance, and internet freedom.

He often appeared on the independent news program “Democracy Now!” to discuss Google, corruption within U.S. security agencies, and even the Catalonia independence movement in Spain.

Julian is also a member of the International Federation of Journalists, which is the world’s largest federation of journalists. He was granted an honorary membership by 20 affiliates of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), including France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. In addition, he has been a member of the Media, Entertainment, and Arts Alliance, a trade union in Australia since 2010.

In December 2022, CPJ partnered with various civil liberties, human rights, and press freedom organizations and sent a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland demanding that the Justice Department drop all charges against Assange.

On World Press Freedom Day in 2023, CPJ CEO, Jodie Ginsberg, stated at an event hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the UN headquarters in New York that “One thing that the United States could concretely do is drop the charges against Julian Assange.” She emphasized that if Assange was brought to trial it would “effectively criminalize journalists everywhere.”

When asked by Gosztola if they were under pressure from the US, CPJ ignored this question completely. There was no posting on CPJ’s website about Assange through the entirety of 2023, as well as an obvious lack of acknowledgment of Assange’s detention in the UK. CPJ has also ignored the lawsuit against the CIA for allegedly “copying the contents of journalists’ electronic devices” when they visited Assange.

Jacob Weisberg became the chair of the CPJ’s board of directors in 2023. He is the former editor-in-chief of Slate Group and has had a clear stance of opposition to Assange and WikiLeaks in 2015 when they published emails from Sony Entertainment that were hacked. He previously published an opinion article at Slate titled, “Stop Publishing the Sony Hacks.”

“News outlets should obviously cover the story of the hack itself, the effect on Sony, the question of how it happened, and who’s responsible. This is a big and legitimate news story,” Weisberg stated. “But when it comes to exploiting the fruits of the digital break-in, journalists should voluntarily withhold publication.”

Noting that Weisberg has ties to Sony Entertainment chief executive, Michael Lynton, and some of the emails that he sent to Michael were in the published WikiLeaks, Weisberg proceeded to say that “They shouldn’t hold back because they’re legally obligated to— I don’t believe they are — but because there’s no ethical justification for publishing this damaging stolen material.”

Weisberg, when faced by the Washington Post columnist Erik Wemple on how he should've included a disclosure denied the existence of any conflict of interest and countered, “I continue to think that writing articles based on these emails is a massive violation of privacy — now including mine — without any compelling justification.”

Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a press freedom organization, has included Assange in their year-end round-up of detained journalists for three years in a row.

RSF secretary-general Christophe Deloire and RSF director of operations Rebecca Vincent were set to visit Assange at Belmarsh in April 2023. However, the prison warden denied them access when they arrived even though they had approval for the visit. It is also noteworthy that RSF does not list the UK or US as having any detained journalists in their custody.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/index.php/en/noticias/internacionales/345565-cpj-perpetually-excludes-julian-assange-from-imprisoned-journalists-list>



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