

Australian prime minister says he hopes Biden will drop charges against Julian Assange

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Canberra, April 11 (RHC)-- Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he is encouraged by a comment made by U.S. President Joe Biden that he is considering dropping charges against Julian Assange.

Biden has said he is “considering” a request by Australia to end the decade-long push to prosecute WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange over the release of troves of classified documents.

Asked by a reporter about Australia’s request on Wednesday, Biden said, “We’re considering it.” Biden, who made the comment in Washington, DC, while meeting with visiting Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, did not elaborate.

The Australian prime minister said Biden's remarks were encouraging and the issue "needs to be brought to a conclusion."

Australia's parliament in February passed a motion calling for the release of Assange with the backing of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Assange, an Australian citizen, has been held in the United Kingdom since 2019 as he fights extradition to the U.S. to face espionage charges. Before he was remanded at Belmarsh Prison in London, Assange spent seven years holed up in the Ecuadoran Embassy in London.

"Mr. Assange has already paid a significant price and enough is enough. There's nothing to be gained by Mr. Assange's continued incarceration in my very strong view and I've put that as the view of the Australian government," Albanese told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Assange's wife Stella in a social media post called on Biden to "do the right thing" and drop the charges.

Assange, 52, has been indicted on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse over his role in the 2010 leaking of classified documents related to U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. His prosecution has been denounced by press freedom and human rights groups, including Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders.

The High Court in London last month delayed a decision on Assange's extradition pending assurances by U.S. authorities that he would not face the death penalty. The court is expected to make a final decision on Assange's appeal on May 20 after providing the US three weeks to make further submissions in the case.

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