

# Press Freedom : Assange facing extradition to US : where is the outrage ?

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The US government has won its appeal against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, with the UK's High Court overturning an earlier decision to block Assange's extradition to the US. The case will now be sent back to the Magistrates Court with instructions to allow the UK Home Secretary Priti Patel to approve or deny the extradition request.

This is a massive blow to press freedom. Assange faces one charge of conspiracy and 17 espionage charges, begun by the Trump administration but continued by the Biden administration. These 17 espionage charges relate to the publication and release of secret government documents, a crucial right for serious journalists trying to hold governments to account. As a statement from Wikileaks in response to the ruling puts it, Assange is "accused of publishing true information revealing crimes committed by the US government in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and details of CIA torture and rendition".

For telling the truth about these war crimes Assange has faced a decade long campaign of persecution. As Amnesty International's Europe Director Nils Muižnieks said in response to the High Court decision : "The US government's indictment poses a grave threat to press freedom both in the United States and abroad. If upheld, it would undermine the key role of journalists and publishers in scrutinising governments and exposing their misdeeds, and would leave journalists everywhere looking over their shoulders." Muižnieks has labelled the decision a "travesty of justice".

In the earlier decision in January which blocked Assange's extradition, District Judge Vanessa Baraitser ruled that the harsh conditions of the US prison system would put Assange at an unreasonable risk of suicide. The High Court has allowed the appeal against this decision on the basis of various "assurances" given by the US government to Assange. These included assurances that he would not be subjected to Special Administrative Measures which restrict contact with the outside world, and that he would be allowed to serve his sentence in Australia if the Australian government made such a request.

These assurances, however, come with caveats. The US government has said that they must be allowed to hold Assange in these restrictive conditions if they fear he could be

responsible for a “breach” of “national security”. As Muižnieks argues “The fact that the US has reserved the right to change its mind at any time means that these assurances are not worth the paper they are written on”.

Earlier this year an investigative report from Yahoo ! News revealed that leading figures in the US government had discussed the possibility of kidnapping or assassinating Assange during the seven years he was taking refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. Over the last decade it has subjected Assange to a campaign of persecution which Nils Melzer, the United Nations special rapporteur on torture, says amounts to psychological torture. The idea that this same government is now able to give assurances that it cares about the health and safety of Assange is absurd. As Stella Moris, Assange’s partner, says “How can it be fair, how can it be right, how can it be possible, to extradite Julian to the very country which plotted to kill him ?”

Moris is a part of Assange’s legal team and says they will be appealing the decision. Such an appeal would be heard by the UK Supreme Court. Assange, meanwhile, remains imprisoned indefinitely in a maximum-security UK prison.

As one of the world’s most high-profile political prisoners, and an Australian national, the Australian media and government might be expected to be up in arms over the plight of Assange. But the shameful lack of concern about his fate persists. Loyalty to the US empire, and willingness to cover up its many crimes, comes first for Australian capitalism.

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P.-S.

- Red Flag. 11 December 2021 :  
<https://redflag.org.au/article/assange-facing-extradition-us-where-outrage>