



## **Nils Melzer on the Psychological Torture of Assange & the Importance of Individual Action**

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**Zain Raza (ZR):** Thank you for joining us today. For our young viewers in Germany, could you just briefly introduce your work and how you got involved with Julian Assange?

**Nils Melzer (NM):** I'm the Special Rapporteur on Torture of the United Nations. I am appointed by states to visit prisons, to evaluate the compliance of states with the prohibition of torture worldwide. I also deal with individual torture victims, try to protect them from torture and extradition to countries where there might be torture. And that's exactly where I got involved with the Assange case, because he's threatened to be extradited to the United States, where human rights organizations agree that the conditions of the detention that he would be facing, at the trial he would be facing, would be clearly unfair and amounting to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

**ZR:** You mentioned in your speech you had a very different opinion, and most of the people have a different opinion about Assange because the media, most of the media, focuses on a lot of personal issues. Talk about what changed your opinion about Assange when you met him?

**NM:** Well, when his lawyers initially asked me to intervene on his behalf with the government, I declined. And spontaneously, I had the impression, oh this is this narcissist, this rapist, this hacker, this spy, he's just going to manipulate me. And so they had to send me a couple of pieces of evidence and to ask me, almost to beg me to look at it, and when I did, I started to see that, really the public narrative that we know about Assange has been fabricated, it's not true. The evidence is contradictory.

In fact, you know, the whole rape charges have been fabricated by the Swedish police, and the women who are supposedly his victims even said so in text messages that exist. You know that the police has railroaded and pushed them into fabricating this rape charge, which has kept him in confinement for nine years, and has completely turned the public opinion against him. And most importantly, it has turned away the focus of public opinion about what is really important, namely, what Julian Assange has published, the secrets he has revealed, which have proven, have given evidence of war crimes by these states, war crimes that have been proven but have not been prosecuted. Instead, the person who has exposed these crimes is being prosecuted and faces 175 years in prison.

**ZR:** You talked about psychological torture that Julian Assange is facing. Could you provide some details on what you mean by that, and what the effects are on a person?

**NM:** I think it's very important to know that the torture really is a psychological process. It is the instrumentalization of pain and suffering in order to coerce a person, to make them confess, or to intimidate them, or to punish them. But always in the end, you are targeting the mind and the emotion of the victim. You can do it by causing physical pain and affect the mind through that avenue. Or you can do it through psychological manipulation – psychological manipulation, psychological torture, really aims at destabilizing and destroying the individuality and personality of a person to the point where they break, and their will becomes completely manipulated by the torturer. And that obviously is what has been done to Julian Assange. You do that by first isolating the person completely from the environment and then exposing him to a completely arbitrary and threatening environment which overstimulates the nervous system to a point where he collapses.

**ZR:** There is a reporter called Florian Warweg, he works for Russia Today. And in every press conference that German government holds, he cites your report and asks the German government whether they have read it. And every press conference that follows, they say we haven't read it, or they deny it, or they say it doesn't exist. Putting this in context, how has your feeling been within the United Nations and member states like Germany? Have they taken your report seriously?

**NM:** No. First of all, I have reported to the four states that were responsible for causing the persecution and torture of Julian Assange, and that's the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and more recently, also the new government of Ecuador. I have also informed other states through these official reports, but they have been very reluctant to actually look into the matter because it would force them, obviously, to see the truth, and to confront these other states about these wrongdoings. And that's very uncomfortable politically. So they're trying to evade it.

That's why I'm not surprised at the attitude in the press conferences that you just referred to. But I have to say that, last November, I was invited by the German Foreign Office to a meeting in Berlin to discuss this case. So I actually went to see the human rights division of the Foreign Office (of the Auswärtiges Amt). And I asked them in the meeting, well, you know, you asked for a meeting to discuss this case, have you read my official interventions? And they say no, we haven't read it and frankly, we don't have the time to do that. And then, you know, that's why also in the Bundestag meeting, I was very outspoken and also said, well, that's not acceptable. You see, my reports are written to be read by states. And just because, you know there's something uncomfortable in there, I think, precisely Germany with its history, you know there's one piece of history you can also be proud of. It's not the crimes that were committed in the Second World War, but how it has then dealt with it. That's one of the only states in the world that is actually bringing its own war criminals to justice. And it has done so and it is proud of it. And so it should be an example, and instead of hiding and not confronting the truth, it should read these reports and then turn to Britain and Sweden and all these states and say, look, I know it's hard, but you owe it to your people to face the truth and tell the truth and deal with your war criminals and discipline them and reform your systems and to make sure that you're respecting the rule of law in the future.

**ZR:** So my last question for a lot of people, things become very abstract when you talk about national security and the United Nations. What do you tell the young people who want to

change something, support press freedom, support against the inhumanity that's been levied on Assange? What can they do tomorrow to influence positive change?

**NM:** Well, the first thing is this. When you're in a dark room, one person switching on the lights will make everyone see. Right? Don't look for the light somewhere else. Go and switch it on yourself. The second thing you have to realize is that you have power because the state's power is not the property of the government. It is your property. You are delegating your power to the government and they need to respond to you on how they are using this power, or they don't deserve it. Secrecy is precisely what prevents this from happening. So power plus secrecy means tyranny because it disempowers the people, it prevents them from exercising control over power. So secrecy is the most dangerous ingredient of governance.

**ZR:** Thank you so much for your time.

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