



Wikileaks Editor in Chief Kristinn Hrafnsson on Julian Assange

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Kristinn Hrafnsson (KH): Thank you all for being here tonight.

It's heartening to see so many who are interested in this case, which is of utmost importance. I visited Julian on Sunday and it was good to see that he is a little better after he was moved out of the isolation in the health ward. That was, of course, a result of a lot of pressure by the lawyers, mostly behind the scenes, pressure from the general public, and interestingly enough, because the inmates in Belmarsh Prison petitioned for his release. That is remarkable and inspiring! We live in a world where the prisoners in Belmarsh have more humanity than most people of the government here. But I say it's always difficult to leave him behind when you exit and go out of Belmarsh Prison. Your heart sinks because you know that he has to spend more time there. And I was standing there outside the Belmarsh and looking back on these ugly walls surrounding the prison. And I was thinking about the walls and their history. We recently celebrated that it was 30 years since a wall was torn down, a wall that was raised to imprison people, to keep them inside and to keep the truth on the outside. The wall in Belmarsh is keeping a man on the inside who exposed the truth to us. How on earth did we come to this position that we have to fight for the freedom of an innocent man, a journalist who exposed the truth? That is a serious thing that we are now facing. And in three weeks of course we are going through the hearings. The opposition, the US government, has shown some of its hands. What they are going to maintain, and it's alarming to read through these documents. It's alarming for many reasons.

Of course, they maintain that he is not a journalist to start with, which is outrageous. It's outrageous that some actually in journalism are still maintaining that they have some calls { → problems } about asserting that he is a journalist. I say it's outrageous. We talk about a man who's been a card holding member of the Journalistic Union of Australia MEAA for more than a decade. It's outrageous to call a man not a journalist who has received the highest journalistic award bestowed in his country - the Walkley Award- which is the equivalent of the Pulitzer prize. It's outrageous that somebody will maintain that he's not a journalist, a man that has and the organization that he founded and is an editor of, received almost two dozen awards since then for the publications for the achievement. So, of course, he is a journalist.

And we don't want to live in a society where Trump or Popmeo decide who is a journalist or not or for that matter Boris Johnson. If you give that power to the political elite, that is

basically taking away a lot of press freedom, that's basically giving them the power to decide what is news and what is not. So it's outrageous to see that. But of more concern is that it is maintained in these documents that were submitted just recently, only about a week ago, that they (Americans) are of the opinion, the Americans, that the First Amendment protection does not apply to foreign nationals. What does that mean? It means that at the same time that they are deciding that they can go after any journalist anywhere in the world. At the same time, they decide that they are saying that all non US journalists, all foreign journalists do not have First Amendment protection. That is outrageous. It is totally outrageous. And it puts everybody, every journalist at risk who is covering national security issues, who are covering anything that might embarrass the United States and that they might perceive as being in opposition to their interests. That is of very serious concern. They also outline what kind of condition Julian can expect if he is renditioned to the United States.

We are talking about solitary confinement. They admitted they don't call it solitary confinement. We don't call it "solitary confinement", they say, we call it "special administrative measures" and we know all these word play. I mean what do they call "torture" is "enhanced interrogation techniques". So he is facing terrible conditions and a certain death in America if he's extradited.

And, of course, there will be a huge battle ahead. I'm sure that Jennifer will talk about the precedent being set here for journalists which is extremely serious. This is a basic attack on press freedom. It is outlined that there has been a lot of harm done by the publication of 2010 & 2011. An entire decade has passed that they've not been able to present any evidence of physical harm to anybody. At the same time, what did we think they'd suppose? Let's talk about journalists who were killed. Remember the Collateral Murder video where two Reuters journalists were slaughtered with hollow explosive bullets which are designed to penetrate tanks and armoured vehicles! Let's remember the names. The excellent photojournalist Namir Noor-Eldeen and his assistant Saeed Chmagh from Reuters.

Let's not forget that WikiLeaks disclosed the cover up in Spain, where the government was complicit in covering up the investigation and the justice for Jose Couso, the Spanish cameraman that was bombarded on a balcony of the Palestine Hotel when the U.S. Army entered into Baghdad in 2003. There was a blatant attempt to cover that up. And those are just the journalists that we exposed the killing off and the injustice and the war crime that was basically involved in their deaths.

But all the other war crimes, the corruption, the truth about these two wars, the truth about Guantanamo Bay, that is now why is he is being tried (legally tried) for - that's why they want him basically in US prison for. And make no mistake about the political angle here. And when Mike Pompeo was the Director of the CIA, he coined this term that WikiLeaks was a "non-state hostile intelligence service". What does this entail? Yes, he was giving the argument that this was not journalism but espionage and that they would go after Julian on that basis, the Espionage Act equating journalism and telling the truth with espionage. What a statement is that to a journalist? Pompeo, of course, his fingerprints are all over the Julian

Assange case. And now we know that he is going to be running for the Senate seat. And who is going to be his primary backer? That is a casino magnate called Adelson. Incidentally that's the same person who actually financed the disgusting espionage in the Ecuadorian embassy, the Spanish firm that was supposed to be looking after Julian and his security but spied upon him, spied on meeting with his lawyers, with general doctors. So connect the dots, this is the political corruption we're dealing with. We are dealing here with political persecution. This has nothing to do with justice.

Public Interruption:

Military [corruption] as well!

Kristinn Hrafnsson (KH):

Yes, but we need to fight and tear down this wall around Julian and we need to free him. And I remember when, shortly after he was arrested, we asked him what to relay to the journalists outside? What should we tell them? And his remark was: "Tell them it's not about me. It's about them. It's about the future of journalism". It's the gravest attack on journalism that I have seen in my lifetime. And the most serious attack on journalism in a lot of times. And if this goes ahead, if this extradition goes ahead, we are entering into a new dark ages. And that is why we have to fight. We have to team together everywhere. Thank you.

Moderator:

An eloquent defensive of Julian and of the profession of investigative journalism from the Icelandic investigative journalist who has won three awards from the National Union of journalists in Iceland. We all need journalists who receive that. So, thank you Kristin.

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