



Julian Assange Update: COVID-19 outbreak in Belmarsh & Possibility of a Pardon

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Taylor Hudak (TH): Hi everyone, I'm Taylor Hudak with Actvism Munich and welcome back to another update on the Julian Assange case. On Thursday Nov 26, a mandatory 28 day hearing was scheduled at West Minister Magistrates court before Deputy Chief Magistrate Tan Ikram. Like other remand prisoners, Assange must be presented before a court every 28 days so the judge can choose to either extend or terminate his detention. However, a COVID-19 outbreak in Belmarsh prison, where Assange is being held, prevented him from attending the hearing. It was reported that Edward Fitzgerald, speaking on behalf of the defense, told the court that Assange has waived his right to attend the hearing in fear of contracting COVID-19. A week earlier, on November 18th, a spokesperson for Her Majesty's Prison Service announced that Belmarsh prison would implement stricter coronavirus measures after three inmates tested positive for the virus. Assange and other prisoners are confined to their cell for 24 hours a day. Additionally, showers are no longer open and meals must be provided directly to the prisoners in their cell. Days prior to the recent hearing, 56 people tested positive for Covid on Assange's house block, which holds 168 people. Several were sent to the hospital. And while COVID-19 has a high survival rate for a healthy individual, Assange's chronic respiratory issues combined with the ongoing psychological torture and years of medical neglect, puts him at a greater risk of being impacted negatively by the effects of the virus. On November 22nd, Doctors 4 Assange issued another letter. The letter calls for the immediate end of the torture and medical neglect of Julian Assange. Additionally, the letter states quote "He is at high medical risk from Covid-19 given a chronic lung condition and likely immunosuppression due to prolonged psychological torture. He meets internationally agreed criteria for release of vulnerable prisoners in light of Covid-19" End quote. Assange's mother, Christine Assange, went to Twitter to state — "if my son dies, it will be murder." She cites that the UK government, the court and the prison have all been warned that Assange is vulnerable to the virus, that the UK and US government opposed emergency bail and that Belmarsh prison is placing all Covid positive prisoners in Assange's wing. Because of the recent increase in Covid positive prisoners, Reporters Without Borders, or RSF, has called for Assange's immediate release from prison. The statement from RSF not only reflects on the potential impacts of the virus, but how new Covid safety measures in prison, including isolation, could have seriously damaging effects on Assange's mental health. With Assange's decision to not attend the hearing in fear of contracting the virus, the defense, the prosecution and the court have scheduled for another hearing to take place on December 11th. Meanwhile, outside the courthouse, Assange's supporters gathered for a peaceful protest demanding his freedom and for no US extradition.

(natural sound of protestors)

TH: In other news, President Trump pardoned his former national security advisor General Michael Flynn. This prompted free press advocates and Assange supporters to amp up the pressure on the president to issue a preemptive pardon to Julian Assange. His fiancée and mother of his two children, Stella Moris, posted a heartfelt appeal to President Trump on Twitter asking for a pardon. Including a picture with her two young children, Moris wrote “These are Julian's sons Max and Gabriel. They need their father. Our family needs to be whole again. I beg you, please bring him home for Christmas.” And what better way for President Trump to stand up to what he calls the deep state and the intelligence community, who have been actively working to undermine his presidency, than to pardon the man who exposed their corruption, Julian Assange. And while it is the Trump administration that has charged the WikiLeaks founder, it is never too late to get on the right side of history, prevent further damage and uphold human rights. If President Trump were to pardon the Assange it would not only be a historic move, but it would leave a lasting and positive impact on his legacy. Trump would not only be remembered favorably for preventing the destruction of the first amendment and press freedom worldwide — he would be saving the life of Julian Assange. Both the defense and prosecution submitted closing arguments earlier this month, and the judge is expected to make her ruling on January 4th 2021. Demonstrations in support of Julian Assange will be held on January 4th in London, DC and other locations. To stay up to date on the case make sure you subscribe to our YouTube channel. And if you've missed any of our reporting on the case check out our Julian Assange Case Updates playlist. I'm Taylor Hudak, as always thanks for tuning in, and I'll see you in my next report.

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