



Assange Verdict: Statements from WikiLeaks, Assange's Partner, Reporters Without Borders & more

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Rebecca Vincent: We welcome today's decision. We are relieved that Mr. Assange will not be extradited to the United States. We share concerns about his health and his mental health. We have been highlighting this for quite some time, that he has been vulnerable, we have stated, and I'll repeat today, that his extradition was a possible matter of life or death. So in this regard, this was the right decision. But we were concerned by many other elements of what we heard this morning. It is very clear that on substantive grounds, this country would have handed Mr. Assange over to the United States to face trial there. We disagree with the judge's assessment that this case was not politically motivated. We disagree with her assessment that it was not about free speech. We remain convinced that Mr. Assange has been targeted for his contributions to journalism. As we all know, the publication of the leaked information informed extensive public interest reporting.

The public had a right to these stories and the public still has a right to these type of stories. We're concerned that this decision leaves the door open for further prosecutions in this regard. If this happens to somebody that did not suffer from the mental health issues that Mr. Assange suffers, they could easily be handed over.

Somebody else could just as easily be made an example of in the same way. So regardless of the fact that he will now not go to the United States, a clear signal has been sent that the arms of the US can reach everywhere, that journalists everywhere have to be a bit concerned about what they publish, particularly related to national security issues pertaining to the United States government. I would have liked to see a stronger position from this court and indeed the U.K. government in support of press freedom, of freedom of expression, of human rights in this regard. So we continue to make a point on the broader principles here and know as well that the Espionage Act must be reformed. It lacks a public interest defence. If anybody else is pursued in this way, they cannot adequately defend themselves. No publisher, no journalist and no source. And here, too, in this country, the Official Secrets Act lacks a public interest defence.

So until these broader issues are addressed, journalists remain at risk in this country, in the

United States and internationally. Also call urgently for Mr Assange to be released without further delay. We urge the judge to grant bail without any further delay in this as he faces serious health risks in prison. Now, with covid infections sharply on the rise in his prison block, if anything happens to him, well, he should now be released. It is fully the UK's legal and moral responsibility, so we call again for his immediate release. Actually, what we face this morning was outrageous. So many of you know our position about open justice restrictions. In this case, we have documented extensive and involving barriers to open justice since day one of this case. This is why we've been the only NGO to systematically monitor, because we've been left to fight our way in every step. And this was only possible thanks to the support of this community of grassroots activists. The public stepped in where this court failed to recognise the role of professional NGO observers in ensuring scrutiny of these proceedings and ensuring open justice. But this morning, at the last hurdle, we were out here before 5:00 a.m. this morning and faced extensive police pressure for the first time in my 15 year career. I repeatedly faced the threat of arrest this morning in attempting to get into court to do my job to monitor a case of concern. This is unacceptable in the United Kingdom in 2021. So there are also broader issues here of open justice that must be addressed. Proceedings, in any case of public interest must be open to scrutiny by the media, by NGOs such as myself, professional observers that do this in countries around the world and by members of the public. The restrictions we saw in this trial were unacceptable. So we will continue to advocate for reforms to open justice in the United Kingdom. Thank you.

Fidel Narvaez: This is a victory of all the people who never gave up. The British judicial system wanted to save their face today. For those who were in sight listening to the judge, it was like listening to the prosecutor's statement to begin with. If it is not for the very, very fragile health condition of Julian Assange. He will be already extradited. Every journalist should be concerned about what was said today in court because the political arguments provided by the United States were upheld by the British judicial system. I repeat, it's only the doctor's assessment of the fragile health condition of Julian Assange that have saved him from extradition. The judge had to recognise they are pooling their oppressive conditions of the US prison system under a special administrative measures for espionage cases and the risk of Julian going for suicidal if he is extradited. That was the only thing that stopped that. So be aware. Be aware that freedom of expression is still under attack. Thank you, all of you. This was a case not only about freedom of expression, it was also a case about human rights. It was a case about the right for political asylum. And I want to say something. I feel very proud for my country, protecting Julian Assange for so many years against all international pressure. I feel ashamed about the decision of the Ecuadorian government in 2019 to give up and to sign Julian over to the Americans and to the British. Let's hope that Julian will be walking free as he should and keeps defending himself in freedom. Too much damage has been already done. Who is going to compensate him for 10 years of persecution, of defamation, of calling him a Hacker or calling him a rapist, of treating him as a criminal? This is the world upside down, the war criminals in impunity. The ones who revealed the crimes are still persecuted. But let's celebrate today this victory. This victory belongs to all of

you.

Stella Morris: Thank you for coming. I had hoped that today would be the day that Julian would come home. Today is not that day, but that day will come soon. As long as Julian has to endure suffering and isolation as an unconvicted prisoner in Belmarsh prison and as long as our children continue to be bereft of their father's love and affection, we cannot celebrate. We will celebrate the day he comes home. Today is a victory for Julian. Today's victory is the first step towards justice in this case. We are pleased that the court has recognised the seriousness and inhumanity of what he has endured and what he faces. But let's not forget, the indictment in the US has not been dropped. We're extremely concerned that the US government has decided to appeal this decision. It continues to want to punish Julian and make him disappear into the deepest, darkest hole of the US prison system for the rest of his life. That can never happen. We will never accept that journalism is a crime, in this country or any other. Let's not forget that US agents plotted to kill Julian on British soil, his British solicitors were deliberately targeted by name and their documents were stolen, their illegal operations even targeted our six month old baby. It is sickening and it is also a threat to everyone. On behalf of Julian and myself, I want to thank the millions of people around the world and the institutions that are already calling for this persecution to end. I ask you all to shout louder, lobby harder until he is free. I call on everyone else to come together to defend Julian's rights, not just Julian's rights, they are your rights too. Julian's freedom is coupled to all our freedoms and our freedoms are lost in the blink of an eye. I call on insiders to come forward to expose the full extent of the misconduct that has led to Julian's imprisonment. And I call on the president of the United States to end this now. Mr. President, tear down these prison walls. Let our little boys have their father. Free Julian, free the press. Free us all.

Kristinn Hrafnsson: It is a day, a day with win for Julian Assange, but we have to be cautious. It is not necessarily a win for journalism. I want to thank the lawyers for their work in bringing this about, which is quite extraordinary. I am told on this level the magistrate court, I am concerned that instantly, upon giving her decision, the lawyers for the U.S. government indicated they would appeal the decision. They should not. And there should be a callout and pressure on the other side to drop the appeal, to say enough is enough. We've had enough of this. We have plenty to deal with in this new year, but not this. So as I said, I want to say thank you to all the supporters, many of you are here today. I want to say thank you to all the organisations and the media, the editors that have stepped to the plate and have actually started to support Julian's cause, especially in the last few weeks and months. But let's be cautious in our celebration and our victory celebration because the fight is not over. As Stella said, it will be not over until Julian will go home and be with her and the boys. Thank you.

END