



Assange Update: Shocking Prison Conditions & Biden Administration Appeals No Extradition Ruling

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Taylor Hudak (TH): Hi, everyone, I'm Taylor Hudak and a welcome back to another Julian Assange case update. On February 12th, the Biden administration filed its grounds for appeal against a British judge's decision to block the US extradition request in the Julian Assange case. Judge Vanessa Baraitser ruled against extradition on grounds that Assange would likely be at risk of suicide if extradited and that the US prison system is not suitable for someone with the mental health needs of Assange, who is diagnosed with depression and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Yet, Judge Baraitser did agree with all other arguments presented by the prosecution during the extradition hearings. This has press freedom advocates and journalists around the world very concerned.

John Rees (JR): Now, it was a bittersweet decision because it was a decision taken simply and solely on the basis, as other panelists have said, that the US prison system is too brutal, too oppressive. Unfortunately, she also ruled that there was no public interest self defense for publishing the information that Julian did, no right for the public to know, no protection for journalists who were trying to expose what their governments were up to. So it was simultaneously a victory for Julian and a very dangerous decision for the freedom of the press.

TH: The Biden administration's decision to continue with the prosecution of Assange contradicts the position of the Obama Administration in which Joe Biden served as Vice President. In 2010, then Attorney General Eric Holder assembled a grand jury to investigate WikiLeaks. But in 2013, the Obama Administration was reluctant to prosecute Assange because it could set a precedent for other journalists to be prosecuted.

Richard Burgon (RB): Joe Biden should, in my view, start his presidency by dropping the cases. That would be a way of breaking with the US war crimes of the past.

Rebecca Vincent (RV): I also think that on appeal, the US government would struggle to make the case any clearer than they already did. I don't see what they could say, what they could

present to the court that they haven't already because they had very adequate time to prepare their case. In fact, one could argue that they had more adequate means of preparing their case than Mr. Assange on his lawyers did with all of the difficulties and obstacles that they faced.

TH: The U.S. appeal under the Biden Administration was filed on February 12th. The defense has been given an extension until March 29th to respond. According to a campaign update from Julian Assange's fiancée, Stella Moris, the defense may cross appeal some aspects of the judge's ruling on January 4th, where she sided with the prosecution on the press freedom arguments. The defense team wants a UK court to refute the other grounds for extradition, as well as in order to clear Assange's name properly. And according to Stella Moris' campaign update, she writes "We wanted a finding that the extradition is an attempt to criminalize journalism, not just in the US but in the UK and the rest of the world as well; and that the decision to indict Julian was a political act, a violation of the treaty, a violation of his human rights and an abuse of process." After the defense submits its response to the court on March 29th, the High Court will decide whether or not to hear the appeal. If the High Court rejects the US grounds for appeal, Assange will be released. If the High Court accepts the US grounds for appeal, the court proceedings are likely to take place within the next several months. If an appeal takes place, the losing party can then appeal to the Supreme Court and or the European Court of Human Rights. This process can take several years. And Assange is approaching almost two years in Belmarsh prison after the judge denied his bail request in January. Belmarsh prison is experiencing high rates of covid infections and the prison is still in lockdown, which means that Assange has not seen his family since October of last year. Additionally, the weather in the UK right now is extremely cold, and Assange is reportedly freezing at night when the temperature drops to below zero degrees Celsius in the prison. Assange still has not received his warm winter clothes that have been sent to him months ago. Assange even has to board up his cell window with books for insulation. These conditions are beyond unacceptable and cruel.

RV: If anything happens to him in this period of custody, it is a legal and moral responsibility of the UK government. We call again for his immediate release.

JR: Every single serious civil rights NGO in the world supports this case. As I said, major trade unions support this case, Apsana and her allies in parliament support this case. For heaven's sake, even the editorial line of The Daily Telegraph of The Daily Mail is in favor of Julian Assange not being extradited.

TH: And more than 20 civil liberties groups have signed an open letter asking the Biden Administration to drop the charges against Julian Assange and to put an end to the extradition proceedings. The open letter reflects on the indictment against Assange, which seeks to criminalize journalistic activity. In the letter, it states, "The indictment of Mr. Assange threatens press freedom because much of the conduct described in the indictment is conduct that

journalists engage in routinely and that they must engage in in order to do the work the public needs them to do. In our view, such a precedent in this case could effectively criminalize these common journalistic practices." For all who are watching right now, there is still so much that you can do to help Assange's situation. You can donate to his fight against extradition campaign set up by his fiancée, Stella Moris. You can also send letters and call the White House to encourage the Biden administration to end Trump era attacks on the free press by dropping the charges against Julian Assange and putting an end to the extradition proceedings. The fight for Assange's freedom continues until he is set free, home with his family and no longer faces prosecution.

JR: Every movement is a mosaic of small acts. Never believe that what you personally do is too small or too irrelevant to count. It isn't. Because aggregated, when we all do it, it makes an enormous change in the political atmosphere.

TH: We at acTVism Munich will continue to follow this case closely and provide you all with the most up to date information. So please make sure that you are subscribed to our YouTube channel and hit that bell so you are notified each time we upload a new video. And if you like the work that we do here, please donate to our organization. Your donations and support for us is what allows us to continue producing content on a variety of issues. And the links to donate are always in the description box down below. I want to thank you guys for tuning in to this Julian Assange case update report. I'm Taylor Hudak with acTVism Munich and I'll see you all next time.

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