



Assange's fiancée Stella Moris speaks at the Int. Symposium of Parliamentarians

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OPENING SCREEN: International Symposium of Parliamentarians on the Julian Assange case. 17th April 2021.

Stella Moris (SM): Last Sunday was the 2 year anniversary of Julian's arrest and incarceration in Belmarsh, and there were protests and vigils on 5 continents and the story was in the major U.K. newspapers. A double decker bus was filled with people and draped with free Julian Assange (banner). And it followed the path from Julian's arrest at the Ecuadorian embassy to Belmarsh Prison, where Julian has been buried from public view for the past 2 years. If it weren't for Julian's calls with me and a limited number of people, he would have no idea what was going on, not only around the world, but just 50 yards from the cell that holds him. This is what a prison like Belmarsh is for, to seal you off, to make you feel that you are alone and forgotten to the world. Julian spends most of the hours of the day alone. When we speak, it's only 10 minutes at a time. Imagine being forced to communicate with your loved one in this way. Imagine having to explain to our children, Max, who's 2, and Gabriel, who's 3, why Daddy was speaking to them one second and then disappeared the next. Imagine telling them that their father wants to come home, but they won't let him, yet.

I don't know how to describe what I have had to witness. Terms such as Monumental Injustice, Aberration come to mind. And I think of alluding to basic democratic principles and human rights. But all these are words that ultimately feel stale and abstract. I have not yet found the words for what we are going through. Julian is the most considerate, principled and generous person I know. And what is being done to him is cruelty in its rawest form.

Julian has spent two years in a high security prison. The Obama administration decided not to charge Julian because Julian's conduct was no different to that of the rest of the press. Charging Julian would mean criminalising journalism. Obama pardoned the alleged source, Chelsea Manning, who was freed. The charges brought by Mike Pompeo and the Trump administration do just that. They criminalise journalism. To date, Julian has suffered severe punishment through process, surrounded by the worst murderers and drug dealers in Britain. He's in a prison where prisoners are killed through murder or suicide every few months. He faces 175 years or however many life sentences, if you want to quantify. All this for publishing information of the highest political and historical interest.

On the 4th of January, the lowest court in this country in the U.K., blocked the extradition because the judge concluded that extraditing Julian to the brutal and inhumane treatment he would receive would inevitably kill him. The DOJ is appealing and the high court will decide in the coming weeks if and when the appeal was heard. A reversal of the decision to block extradition would mean a death sentence for Julian. This case should be understood with the urgency and importance of a capital case.

The U.S. government says it has the prerogative to decide what foreign press can publish about its abuses committed abroad. It is extending its criminal laws to the rest of the world to prosecute a publisher who has won the highest awards for journalism and for doing his job. An Australian living and working in London, Paris and Berlin for a Europe based publishing organisation, a card holding member of his press union whose allegiance is to the public. Let's pause and think about what the U.S. case against Julian is actually saying. The U.S. government is claiming that journalists all over the world have no freedom of expression rights and protections because they are not U.S. citizens. That U.S. criminal laws apply to them but the First Amendment does not, even when they are in their own countries. If everything else was the same, if Julian was in London working for WikiLeaks but he had an American passport, then he might have a defence. But because of the single fact that he does not have an American passport, he doesn't. If the case would have been brought by any other country, it would have been immediately thrown out and publicly ridiculed. The case against Julian is the ultimate realisation of Trump's America first policy. It has added an aggressive new dimension to American exceptionalism that removes our rights as non-Americans in our own countries and infringes our sovereignty. Reporters Without Borders and the National Union of Journalists in the U.K. have said that as long as Julian is in prison and faces extradition, the U.K. is not a safe place for journalists and publishers to work. The Trump administration advanced this perversion and other countries will inevitably follow, leading to a global race to the bottom for freedom of expression. The effect of this extraterritorial, discriminatory intrusion is to erode freedoms globally, so the far reaching consequences of this case cannot be overstated. At the same time, the case is an embarrassment to all the governments involved. It is obvious to everyone that the U.K. and the U.S. cannot advance their human rights and press freedom foreign policy agendas effectively with Julian in prison. Across the world, the detention of Julian is causing real harm right now, not just to him but to human rights defenders everywhere, because the principle of press freedom is being hollowed out by its loudest proponents. For human rights abusers who are criticised by the West for incarcerating journalists, political dissidents and human rights defenders, their answer is simple, immediate and devastating. What about Assange? From Amnesty (International) to the OSCE to the Council of Europe and the UN, the voices clamouring for Julian's release are strong and mutually reinforcing. They must grow louder and louder until there is nowhere for the U.K., U.S. and Australian governments to turn. Those governments must constantly crash into this case, just like Saudi Arabia does with the Khashoggi assassination. It is too late for Khashoggi, but it is not too late for Julian. As lawmakers, you have unique avenues and powers at your disposal to press for Julian's release and call for an end to his persecution. I'd

like to thank Richard Bergin for organising the symposium, the cross parliamentary groups in Australia & Germany and the U.K. For the work they have already done to put an end to this and to each of you, individually and collectively, for stepping up to save Julian's life and our collective freedoms.

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