

Julian Assange Case Update: UK Judge Issue Order of Extradition

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Taylor Hudak (TH): Hi, everyone, I'm Taylor Hudak with acTVism Munich. Wednesday, April 20th marked a significant moment in the case of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. A UK judge issued the order of extradition to the United States during a hearing at Westminster Magistrates Court. The judge stated that he is duty bound to send the order of extradition to UK Home Secretary Priti Patel for approval. And while this is a formality under Section 87 (3) of the UK Extradition Act, human rights organisations continue to warn that the case will have serious implications for press freedom.

Simon Crowther, Amnesty International: Why this case is really important is the implications for press freedom. Julian Assange is being prosecuted for Espionage, for publishing sensitive material that was classified. And if he is extradited to the US for this all journalists around the world are going to have to look over their shoulder because within their own jurisdiction, if they publish something that the US considers to be classified, they will face the risk of being extradited.

TH: So how did the case get to this point? Well, after nearly four weeks of evidentiary hearings taking place throughout 2020, District Judge Vanessa Baraitser ruled against extradition on January 4th 2021. Baraitser determined that it would be oppressive to extradite Assange under Section 91 of the UK Extradition Act. But as expected, the Crown Prosecution Service representing the US government appealed this decision, and a two day appeal hearing was held in October 2021. Two months later, on December 10th, ironically on Human Rights Day, I might add, a panel of three judges overseeing the appeal hearing ruled in favour of the US government. This overturned the lower court's decision. But not all hope was lost, the defence had an option to apply to appeal at the UK Supreme Court, and they did. However, in March 2022 the Supreme Court refused to consider the appeal, and the case was then sent back to the lower court. And this is what brings us to the April 20th hearing at Westminster Magistrates Court. So during the hearing, Julian Assange attended via video link from Belmarsh Prison. He verbally provided his name and date of birth to the court. Clair Dobbin was present on behalf of the US government in Mark Summers QC for the defence. The defence has until May 18th to issue submissions to Home Secretary Priti Patel, who will

either approve or deny the extradition order. Summers told the court that there are fresh developments in the case that will be submitted to the Home Secretary. And so it is clear now that for Julian Assange and his legal team, the next four weeks are crucial. And given that the extradition is now to be determined by Home Secretary Priti Patel, Reporters Without Borders opened a new campaign urging for Patel to uphold press freedom and reject the extradition.

Rebecca Vincent: So today, Reporters Without Borders is launching a new FreeAssange petition, specifically targeting Priti Patel. We ask for your support in finding it and sharing it, and helping to build up an international outcry, specifically calling on Priti Patel personally to now intervene to ensure that this is brought to an end. That Julian Assange is not extradited to the United States and that he is immediately released. He should not be held a single day longer in Belmarsh prison.

TH: The case against Julian Assange poses a grave threat to the future of the free press and will fundamentally shape the future of journalism. If Julian Assange is prosecuted in the US, it will set a precedent that criminalises basics in normal journalistic activity, such as news gathering techniques and source protection. And let's be clear, the prosecution of Assange is wildly unpopular. The UK government is about to extradite Julian Assange to the very country whose intelligence agencies conspired to assassinate him. Extraditing Julian Assange to the United States is to sentence him to death and will destroy any shred of press freedom we now have.

Kristinn Hrafnsson, WikiLeaks: Now Julian's life is in the hands of Priti Patel and Boris Johnson. They need to do the right thing. You need to make sure they do the right thing. They have the power to stop this, to end this, to save a man's life.

TH: The ability of journalists to do their duty and the right for the public to have access to information is at stake. Currently, Julian Assange remains in Belmarsh prison and has been remanded into custody. AcTVism Munich will continue to cover this case and keep you up to date on the latest developments and keep you all informed. So please make sure that you subscribe to our YouTube and Rumble channels, and also join our Telegram channel under acTVism Munich official. Please also consider donating to our organisation because we depend on your support to continue with our work and our non-profit news and analysis. I'm Taylor Hudak with acTVism Munich and thank you all for watching.

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