



The Persecution of Julian Assange | Everything You Need to Know by Taylor Hudak

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

Moderator: Taylor, I need to add something because I ask all the speakers of the new media conference to just say what they want to say, what they think is of utmost importance at this time. So they would let their fellow media people around the world know what they think is important to know right now. And when I emailed you first, Taylor, I said, everybody can speak whatever they want because the topic is freedom of speech. And I knew she would take that topic, but I said, I really need and want you to speak about Julian Assange. And of course, you are doing this today. Thank you so much for that. I can tell you so much. We have lots of colleagues here who really appreciate that you have done so much work on this very important topic, how they treat Julian Assange. And I think there are some good ideas by some journalists and they will tell you later and I think this is going to be the great kick-off start for something amazing, a big campaign. Thank you so much.

Taylor Hudak: Thank you very much. And thank you all for having me, I am so pleased to be here speaking about what not only I consider to be the greatest threat to press freedom, but would also many civil liberties organisations, human rights organisations and press freedom organisations consider to be the greatest threat to press freedom. And that is the prosecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. This case is extraordinary. Here we have an award winning Australian journalist who is facing 175 years in a maximum security prison in the United States because he published information in the public interest and he published the truth. I will do a quick overview here. Is the presentation available? You don't have one? Okay, I'll just keep going here. I'll do a brief case overview. Julian Assange is, of course, the founder of WikiLeaks. He founded this organisation in 2006. And WikiLeaks really shaped the way that people viewed media in general. This was mainly because of the technology that was used in the very secure Dropbox that allowed for whistleblowers to securely and anonymously provide classified material to WikiLeaks. And even WikiLeaks staff members

would not know who was providing this information. And then also to the funding model here, we hear a lot about independent journalism. Well, that all started with WikiLeaks, because they created this idea that you can fund a media organisation from donations and from the public. WikiLeaks has published numerous documents, of course, exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan that really shaped people's perspective on these wars; human rights abuses, including torture programmes in Guantanamo Bay, and also unlawful CIA spying on innocent citizens through Vault 7. And this journalism, this work won Julian Assange numerous awards. So this is a very important point that I want you all to remember, and that is that the journalism that won Julian Assange numerous awards is the same journalism that has him in a prison today. He is in Belmarsh Prison in England, which is a maximum security prison, and it houses some of the most notorious, dangerous and violent criminals in England. That is where a journalist is sitting right now. It's absolutely shameful. And just to bring you back to what had happened on April 11th, 2019, of course, Julian Assange was arrested, charged with 17 counts related to espionage, one related to computer intrusion; the espionage charges are related to the receipt and publication of classified material. And I'll continue on here with the persecution of Julian Assange. So as a result of doing this work, we all know many people suffer from disinformation campaigns and targeting campaigns against them. And eventually, Julian Assange had no choice but to enter the Ecuadorian embassy in London in June 2012 to seek asylum there. Unfortunately, he spent seven years in this embassy as an asylum seeker. During this time, he lacked proper medical care, access to sunlight, proper time with his family, he was confined to a very small room; of course, unable to leave the embassy. And these conditions were considered to be torturous conditions after UN special rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer, examined Assange and determined that that was taking place and that he was exhibiting symptoms of torture. So this is someone who has suffered extraordinarily as of this point. And, of course, WikiLeaks was still operating throughout this time. And then this is what brings me to when the persecution really started to increase and become very vicious. And it's interesting to note the timeline here. In 2017, WikiLeaks made an announcement that they were going to release information related to CIA spying, and this eventually became the greatest CIA leak in history. And shortly after that, the US intelligence services- we believe that to be the CIA- contracted the embassy's security firm. Oftentimes, embassies have security firms; this one did, and it was Undercover Global, UC Global. The job of this company was to protect Julian Assange, to protect the people who worked at the embassy and also the visitors. But instead, US intelligence invited the CEO of this company to read the network and rewire the security system into a surveillance system to gather information on Assange; all of his contacts, even his attorneys. His attorney client privilege was being violated. The privacy of his friends, his family members, himself was being violated. And the case is still moving forward. So, again, visitors had to provide the embassy employees with their devices. They had their data taken from them against their will, without their knowledge, and this was sent to US intelligence services. And some of the very grotesque things that happened as a part of this surveillance operation is that there was a camera placed into the women's bathroom, and even the DNA of Assange's infant son was taken from a diaper. That is how depraved these individuals are and

what they did to a journalist who deeply embarrassed the US government and the intelligence apparatus. And lastly, I will point out as well that the CIA, in fact, plotted to assassinate Assange. Many of you may be looking at me like, okay, this is maybe a step too far. Come on; you're just speculating. They wouldn't possibly do that. Or, how could you really prove that? Well, the reality is we had 30 former US officials who went to Yahoo! News and revealed this. Yes, in fact, there were serious plans to kidnap and assassinate Assange while he was in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. Fortunately, this plan did not come to fruition, but there were serious plans to kill this individual, to assassinate him. And think about this, the UK recently just approved the extradition order. How could it be that the UK government approved the extradition of a man to a country whose intelligence agencies conspired to assassinate him? That is the state of our media right now. That is the state, the Western Empire, the Western intelligence agencies in Western countries, in particular, the United States government and the UK government working in cahoots and together. I will go through the prosecution here quickly. In 2018, there was an indictment filed against Assange. Again, this came after Vault 7. Likely this could have been a retaliation for the Vault seven publications but the governments of the United States sought to basically criminalise his work, in particular exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. And this was the information that was provided by whistleblower Chelsea Manning. Assange was then, of course, arrested April 11th, 2019. Extradition hearings took place in London in February of 2020, in October of 2020; I covered these extensively, listened in on all of the court hearings and then a few months later, on January 4th, 2021, a Magistrates Court issued a decision on extradition and it was stunning. We were very happy with this decision. The judge actually rejected the extradition order on grounds that it would be oppressive to extradite Assange under Section 91 of the UK Extradition Act of 2003. This was due to the fact that Julian Assange is suffering from Aspergers and it would be oppressive to extradite him to the United States. Then the Crown Prosecution Service, which is representing the US government, appealed this decision and the Crown Prosecution Service won the case on appeal. And then, UK Home Secretary Priti Patel eventually approved the extradition order. And now Assange's legal team has filed its perfected grounds on appeal and now it is up to the High Court judges to make a decision on extradition. And I think that you can gather from what I just said, that this has been somewhat of an abuse of process and also it is oftentimes that the process itself is the punishment. Now, what happens if Assange is extradited to the United States? Unfortunately, we learnt a lot of very disturbing information about what could happen to him if extradited throughout the extradition hearings. He would likely be tried in the Eastern District Court of Virginia, where no national security defendant has ever won a case there. Let me repeat that. No national security defendant has ever won a case in this court. The majority of the jury pool would be made up of ex-intelligence, their family members and their friends. The case would also not be public and the press would not have access to cover this case because it is a national security case and CIPA regulations would be put into effect. And as a national security defendant, Assange himself would also likely be placed under SAMs or Special Administrative Measures. He would be housed in a specific unit, isolated from the public. This is actually beyond just solitary confinement. This is

something much more strict. And his access to his attorneys, his ability to prepare his case would be seriously hindered. And it would not be a situation in which he would be able to effectively and properly prepare his defence with his attorneys. In fact, one of the defence witnesses, Yancey Ellis, who is an attorney and often represents people who are housed in this particular unit at this prison- and that is the Alexandria Detention Centre- this person had stated that when he speaks with his clients in this unit, they have to scream at each other because of the steel doors preventing them from having a normal conversation. So that is the level of interference we have when someone in this position is trying to prepare a case. So the point here to take away is that Julian Assange will not at all receive a fair trial in the United States if extradited. And if convicted, he is likely to be held in ADX Florence or another maximum security prison. ADX Florence in Colorado houses some of the country's most notorious criminals and offenders like Ted Kaczynski, the Boston Marathon bombers, all of those type of criminal offenders. And again, this is where the United States government would like to place an award winning journalist and publisher because he embarrassed the United States and exposed intelligence corruption. And also, too, because he's being charged under the Espionage Act, he would not be able to provide a public interest defence. And here is a visual of the prison conditions that he would be subjected to. You could see the cell, again, 3.5 metres by two. That's seven feet by 12 feet. So not the best of conditions, of course. And also, he would be held in his cell for 22, 23 hours a day and limited access to the outside world. And also for many of the doctors here, I wanted to make note of this, that Julian Assange, unfortunately, is also a torture victim, I alluded to this earlier, and if you are concerned about Julian Assange's health, as many doctors are, you can join Doctors for Assange by visiting doctorsforassange.org and you can sign the petitions, become involved and help make a difference in this case. Now, some of you may be wondering, okay, but why should I care? I'm not a journalist. I'm not necessarily an activist. This case doesn't really impact me. Well, it certainly does, because this case has an impact on the public's right to know and the public's right to access information. The Assange case criminalises standard and normal journalistic activity that journalists engage in every single day, specifically related to source protection in newsgathering techniques. The Assange case also sets a global precedent that empowers governments to extradite foreign citizens for political purposes. And lastly, the Assange case is a threat to the First Amendment, which has become the global standard for press freedom. Again, to reiterate what I had said earlier, this is an attack on access to information. We have had a tremendous attack on access to information also when it comes to COVID 19 and a number of other subjects. We see immense amounts of censorship. And again, this case is very important. Assange's fate is inherently tied to your faith and again, your ability to access the truth. Because without access to truthful and accurate information, we cannot fight for a better future. We cannot fight for anything because without access to the truth, we cannot understand and we cannot confront the real issues that are ahead of us and that need to be addressed. And of course, I need to close here with ways on how to help because this case is not over. Assange is not extradited to the United States. He is still in Belmarsh Prison under horrible conditions. The situation is dire not only for the broader press implications that are there, but also his general well-being and health. So I

encourage you to please act. And I made this font intentionally, very large, so you can all take pictures with your phone and that you'll go home and you'll remember to to take action, visit these websites, attend these events. And this is a little bit more information about myself. I am a journalist with acTVism Munich. Many of you may be pleased here to know that my Assange reporting is also translated into the German language. I'm very proud to work for acTVism Munich, we are a non-profit, independent news organisation based in Germany and we publish in English and German. I also report for thelastamericanvagabond.com. I'm active on Twitter and Telegram, but if you would like to stay up to date with my work, you can there. And lastly, if there is time, I have a very special message from Christine Assange, who is the mother of Julian Assange. I thank her for allowing me to share this message with you all. Many of you here are parents, you are mothers. You can relate to Christine. She is a mother. And at the end of the day, we all must remember that Julian Assange is a human being. He is a son. He is a father, a brother, a friend, and he is suffering tremendously. And those around him who love him are also suffering tremendously. And I just would like you all to hear a message from Christine, because I think there is no better person who can advocate for you than your own mother. And I wanted to end off on this note, and I thank you all very much for listening to this presentation. It's been my pleasure to speak to you about this case. And if you could just take two minutes to hear this plea, it should be embedded into the PowerPoint. Thank you all very much.

Christine Assange: Today, on the back of the UK Government's decision to extradite Julian to United States, I respectfully make my plea directly to the parties involved, including US President Joe Biden, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and the lead solicitor of Julian's UK legal team, Gareth Peirce. After 11 and a half years in pre-trial detention and with legal proceedings dragging on with no end in sight it has become clear to all following that this case is political and requires a diplomatic solution. When people become very invested in winning at all costs, the collateral damage is truth, justice and humanity. I implore all sides to take a step back from the heat of the fight for a moment and to reflect. I ask all sides to consider a diplomatic solution. Negotiating an end to conflict is a normal part of civilised existence; within a marriage, the boardroom long running legal cases and disputes between nation states. In the spirit of bringing this to an end both sides will need to give a little. Julian has been detained long enough to satisfy any needs for revenge from those pursuing prosecution. He has suffered enough to satisfy those wishing to make him a symbol for press freedom. I beseech those who say they really care about Julian to put his needs as a suffering human being first. And I have faith that with goodwill on both sides, a resolution can be reached. Thank you for hearing my plea.

END