

Right-Wing Ecuadorean Presidential Candidate Vows to End Asylum for Julian Assange



Quito, February 13 (RHC)-- Ecuadorean presidential candidate Guillermo Lasso, leader of the right-wing CREO party, pledged that if he wins in next week's presidential elections he will revoke the asylum granted to Wikileaks publisher Julian Assange, arguing it is no longer necessary.

"The Ecuadorean people have been paying a cost that we should not have to bear," Lasso said during an interview in Quito. "We will cordially ask Señor Assange to leave within 30 days of assuming a mandate."

Assange has been trapped in Ecuador's London embassy since 2012 when the government of Rafael Correa granted Assange asylum over concerns about his political persecution — and potential torture — if he were deported to the U.S., given WikiLeaks' publication of 500,000 secret military files related to U.S. war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Assange was detained by U.K. authorities over allegations of a sexual assault in Sweden, and yet because both the U.K. and Swedish governments refused to guarantee that they would not deport him to the U.S. — where whistleblower Chelsea Manning had been held in conditions the U.N. said amounted to

torture for sharing documents with Wikileaks — Ecuador granted him asylum under international conventions protecting individuals from political persecution.

Just last year the U.N. ruled that the U.K. and Swedish governments were guilty of arbitrarily detaining Assange for continually refusing to guarantee they would not deport him to the United States.

While polls suggest Lasso is still far behind the leading left-wing candidate Lenin Moreno, of the Alianza Pais party, the threat of revoking Assange's asylum takes on new meaning given U.S. President Donald Trump's 2010 statement that the WikiLeaks founder should face the death penalty for his work with Chelsea Manning.

While Trump's views on WikiLeaks appear to have softened since it published a series of e-mails damaging to Hillary Clinton's election campaign, the U.S. president's apparent disdain for judicial process appears to validate the Ecuadorean government's initial doubts that Assange could receive a fair trial in the U.S. where it is widely suspected a secret grand jury has authorized charges against the Australian national.

Ecuadorean Foreign Minister Guillaume Long acknowledged the toll the asylum has taken on both embassy staff and Assange, saying the arbitrary detention "has been going on for far too long."

However, he emphasized the blame lies squarely on the punitive intransigence of the Swedish and U.K. authorities and reiterated that Ecuador continues to work towards ensuring Assange's rights are respected and international conventions respected.

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