

Julian Assange's Lawyer Asks Sweden to Drop Arrest Warrant



Stockholm, May 3 (RHC)-- Julian Assange's attorney filed a new request on Wednesday in Stockholm for Sweden to drop the arrest warrant against the WikiLeaks founder, arguing that the order should be torn up and Assange allowed to live out his asylum in Ecuador in the face of Washington's desire to arrest the whistleblower.

Holed up in Ecuador's London embassy for nearly five years, Assange faces an arrest warrant in Sweden over a 2010 rape allegation, which he fears could be used as a pretext to extradite him to the United States. In the U.S., Assange could face decades in jail for charges related to WikiLeaks' release of hundreds of thousands of secret U.S. documents and diplomatic cables.

Assange's lawyer, Per Samuelson, argues that now that the U.S. has explicitly expressed its desire to arrest the whistleblower, the arrest warrant in Stockholm should be dropped to protect him from extradition.

"Given that the U.S. is obviously hunting him now, he has to make use of his political asylum and it is Sweden's duty to make sure that Sweden is no longer a reason for that fact he has to stay in the embassy," Samuelson said. "If they rescind the detention order, there is a possibility he can go to Ecuador and then he can use political asylum in an entire country."

The request, similar to a previous petition that was denied on the grounds that extradition to the U.S. was unlikely, comes after U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions said recently in response to a question about Assange that the White House was ramping up its efforts to stop secretive leaks from happening.

"Whenever a case can be made, we will seek to put some people in jail," Sessions said, suggesting arresting whistleblowers like Assange would be a "priority."

Separately, CIA Director Mike Pompeo referred to WikiLeaks last month as a "hostile intelligence service." The organization describes itself as a "multi-national media organization and associated library" that "specializes in the analysis and publication of large datasets of censored or otherwise restricted official materials involving war, spying and corruption."

Assange's lawyer said Swedish courts are expected to consider the new request in the coming weeks.

Ecuador granted Assange asylum in August 2012 citing the danger he could face as a "determined defense to freedom of expression and freedom of press" and President Rafael Correa announced he would be staying in the London embassy indefinitely.

Swedish prosecutors questioned Assange last November in the London embassy over 2010 rape allegations after longstanding reluctance to do so despite the whistleblowers openness to such a process. Previous sexual assault charges had already been dropped when the five-year limitation on the charges expired months earlier. Sweden is still considering whether to proceed with the investigation.

Assange has denied all allegations of sexual assault and rape, claiming his sexual relations in Sweden were consensual and the accusations were fabricated as part of a smear campaign to facilitate his extradition to the U.S. to face trial for WikiLeaks whistleblowing.

His attorney has said that prosecutors could still continue their investigation even if Assange was allowed to go to Ecuador. "If they want to charge him and go to trial, which can happen just as well with him at liberty in Ecuador since that's the only place he can be," Samuelson said. "It does not mean there would be any disadvantage to Sweden."

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