

Latin American leaders condemn possible extradition of Julian Assange



Buenos Aires, April 18 (RHC)-- A group of Latin American social leaders headed by Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel have signed a statement of international solidarity with Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks who was arrested last week at the Ecuadorean Embassy in London.

Nora Cortiñas of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, as well as former presidents from around the region including Fernando Lugo of Paraguay, Mel Zelaya of Honduras, former Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño, and former Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba are among those who have signed the joint statement. Argentinean social leaders Jorge Rivas, Oscar Laborde, Carlos Aznarez, Jorge Kot, Francisco Cafiero and the writer Elsa Osorio among others also signed on.

"Julian Assange ... has revealed important and necessary information for humanity all about the atrocities and brutalities committed by the U.S. Empire around the world," the statement reads.

"We repudiate the ... treacherous attitude of the nefarious president of Ecuador Lenin Moreno," the statement adds. "This is just an absurd maneuver to kneel before the British Crown and the president of the United States, Donald Trump."

The letter also demanded Assange not be extradited to the United States, where the WikiLeaks founder faces unsubstantiated allegations of computer hacking crime by a grand jury in Alexandria, Virginia. "The struggle against the Empire, injustice and world equality makes us brothers and sisters. We demand the immediate freedom and respect for human rights (of Assange)." the statement concluded.

The Wikileaks editor and cyber activist took refuge in the embassy of Ecuador in London in 2012 after the British Supreme Court ruled against him and ordered his arrest and subsequent transfer to Sweden, where a prosecutor had issued an international arrest warrant, claiming that Assange was suspected of having committed a sexual crime.

The Swedish prosecutor eventually shelved the investigation after Assange took refuge in the embassy. Assange was arrested when he was expelled from the embassy last week for having violated his U.K. parole, meaning the Swedish legal case could reopen as well.

Just hours after Assange's arrest, a software developer and advocate of digital rights Ola Bini was arrested by Ecuadorean authorities in the capital, Quito, for allegedly attempting to destabilize the government by "collaborating" with Assange.

Bini was placed in preventative detention by Ecuador's Criminal Unit judge for the crime of cyber-attacking computer systems. The judge also ordered a 90-day fiscal investigation of Bini's accounts which have also been frozen.

"Nothing in this story connects Ola Bini with any crime," said David Kaye, United Nations special rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression.

The judge dismissed allegations of human rights violations against Bini claimed by his lawyer, Carlos Soria who said that Bini was arrested without his rights explained to him in his native language. The Swede was also unable to contact his lawyer after he was taken into custody on April 11th for more than thirty hours. Ecuadorean law establishes that initial detentions cannot exceed twenty-four hours.

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