

Ecuador hands over Julian Assange's possessions to Washington



Quito, May 21 (RHC)-- The Ecuadorean government has decided to hand over some of the belongings of the Australian press freedom activist Julian Assange to the United States more than a month after he was arrested in the country's embassy in the London.

Reports on Monday suggested that the transfer of Assange's possessions had been made possible after Ecuadorean Foreign Minister José Valencia authorized the seizure of the material earlier this month.

The news prompted outrage among Assange's supporters who believe Ecuador is helping Washington to have Assange extradited to the U.S., where he is wanted for breach of laws on confidential data.

Aitor Martinez, a member of Assansge's defense team, deplored Ecuador's move and called it "completely unprecedented in the history of asylum." He told reporters: "Ecuador is committing a flagrant violation of the most basic norms of the institution of asylum by handing over all the asylee's personal belongings indiscriminately to the country that he was being protected from."

Assange was arrested inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London on April 11th, nearly seven years after he fled to the mission to avoid a potential extradition to the United States. The arrest came after the right-wing Ecuadorian government said it could no longer accommodate Assange in its embassy.

Assange is currently in a prison near London serving a 50-week prison sentence for skipping bail in 2011 which was related to rape allegations in Sweden. Swedish authorities said on Monday that prosecutors had issued a renewed request to hold Assange for rape charges some two years after the case was dropped.

The 47-year old Assange, who co-founded whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks in 2007, is charged with an attempt to intrude into government computer systems in the U.S. Washington wants him extradited for what it describes as the largest ever leaks of government secrets on WikiLeaks in 2010. For his "crime" of revealing the truth, Julian Assange could face the death penalty if he is sent to the United States.

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