

Julian Assange extradition judge refuses request for delay



London, October 21 (RHC)-- Julian Assange has been told there can be no delay in his U.S. extradition case, as he appeared in court in London. The WikiLeaks founder's legal team requested more time to submit evidence and claimed the charges against him were politically motivated at a case management hearing at Westminster Magistrates Court.

After the defense and prosecution clashed over the timetabling of the case, the district judge Vanessa Baraitser refused to grant more time to gather evidence and told Assange his full extradition case would begin on February 25th.

Later, she asked Assange if he had understood events in court. "Not really. I can't think properly," he appeared to say. "I don't understand how this is equitable. This superpower had 10 years to prepare for this case and I can't access my writings. It's very difficult where I am to do anything but these people have unlimited resources."

Julian Assange went on: "They are saying journalists and whistleblowers are enemies of the people. They have unfair advantages dealing with documents. They [know] the interior of my life with my psychologist. They steal my children's DNA. This is not equitable what is happening here."

Attorney Mark Summers, defending Assange, claimed the U.S. had been spying on Assange and said there was a link between the “reinvigoration of the investigation and Donald Trump’s presidency. “This is part of an avowed war on whistleblowers to include investigative journalists and publishers,” Summers said. “The American state has been actively engaged in intruding on privileged discussions between Mr. Assange and his lawyer.”

He referred to reports that Spanish courts are investigating a security company that allegedly worked in conjunction with the U.S. to “obtain information by unlawful acts, thefts and clandestine surveillance within the Ecuadorian embassy ... with increasing intensity from 2017 onwards”, and asked for more time to prepare evidence for the case.

Summers told the court he needed more time for the “mammoth” amount of preparation needed to fight Assange’s extradition to the United States, where he faces the “unprecedented” use of espionage charges against a journalist.

The prosecutor James Lewis QC, representing the government, said he strongly opposed Assange being given more time to prepare evidence, pre-empting their later request.

The 48-year-old Assange faces extradition to the United States over allegations he conspired to break into a classified Pentagon computer and could receive a 175-year jail sentence if convicted.

As he entered the dock, on his third public appearance since his arrest in April, people in the packed public gallery raised their fists in solidarity. The former London mayor Ken Livingstone and the journalist John Pilger were among those in attendance.

Afterwards, the German Bundestag member Heike Hänsel echoed warnings from Amnesty International and warned of a bleak future for journalists publishing “truthful information” contrary to U.S. interests. “The British government and the EU must both reject this extraterritorial political persecution,” she said.

Court proceedings continued while a protest attended by about 100 activists chanting “Free Julian Assange” and “No extradition, there’s only one decision” took place outside. After the hearing, a van believed to be returning Assange to prison was approached by his supporters who slapped the sides of the vehicle.

Assange last appeared in court in May, when he was jailed for 50 weeks for skipping bail by going into hiding in the Ecuadorian embassy in London in 2012. He had done so to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he was wanted in connection with sexual offence allegations. He was remanded in custody in April after Ecuador revoked his political asylum, before the then home secretary, Sajid Javid, signed an order allowing Assange to be extradited to the U.S. over the allegations.

There are concerns over his health, and he has spent time on a medical ward in prison. Information released by Wikileaks revealed the extent of state surveillance in Western countries and the conduct of the U.S. troops in the Middle East, which Assange alleged proved war crimes had been perpetrated.

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