

Julian Assange in grave danger as first COVID-19 death confirmed in prison



London, April 8 (RHC)-- Conditions in London's Belmarsh Prison, where Julian Assange is being held, might be worse than officials are willing to admit, WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson told RT, adding that COVID-19 could swiftly tear through the facility.

A prison environment is "like a Petri dish" for a virus, Hrafnsson explained, particularly such a highly infectious one as the novel coronavirus, which has already struck more than 1 million people around the world. The maximum security Belmarsh prison, where the WikiLeaks founder is being kept pending extradition to the U.S., has just reported its first death from the disease. According to Hrafnsson, there are other worrying signs too.

"We have prison guards going in and out. A third of them at least are not showing up to work either because they have the virus or because they are in isolation." He also said he was sure the number of inmates who contracted COVID-19 in Belmarsh is "undoubtedly higher than reported," since prison authorities have simply not conducted enough tests on the population to "know what is going on exactly."

The situation is particularly alarming for Assange, who was in a rather poor state of health even before the outbreak of the deadly disease, Hrafnsson added. "Assange is in very bad shape. He is a very vulnerable individual, especially to a virus like COVID-19. He has an underlying lung condition and would be considered at great risk even if living normally in society. He is in a situation when his life is in danger every day and every hour."

The Wikileaks editor-in-chief said that British authorities are outright neglecting their duties by leaving Assange — as well as other prisoners — behind bars, given the current circumstances. Hrafnsson also slammed a British judge's decision to carry on with Assange's extradition hearing amid the ongoing pandemic, as though nothing has been happening.

The Wikileaks founder is unable to take part in any court sessions now as he has to be moved through the infected prison each time he is about to do that, even via a video link. Assange's lawyers also have lost all contact with their client for about three weeks at this point, since they cannot visit him in prison and cannot talk to him by video chat either, the Wikileaks editor-in-chief said.

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