

*Biden administration will continue to seek Julian Assange's extradition*

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**People celebrate after a UK judge ruled that Assange should not be extradited to the US, London, January 4, 2021. (Photo: Henry Nicholls / Reuters)**

Washington, February 10 (RHC)-- U.S. President Joe Biden's administration will continue to seek the extradition of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange from the United Kingdom to the United States, a U.S. Department of Justice official said.

Spokesman Marc Raimondi said that Washington would continue to challenge a British judge's ruling last month that Assange should not be extradited to the US because he is at risk of taking his own life.

District Judge Vanessa Baraitser said in her January 4 decision that Assange's "mental condition ... is such that it would be oppressive to extradite him to the United States of America." The judge set Friday as a deadline for the U.S. to appeal her ruling.

"We continue to seek his extradition," Raimondi told reporters. His comment comes a day after nearly two dozen civil liberty, human rights and press freedom groups signed an open letter urging the U.S. Justice Department to forgo the appeal and drop the underlying indictment against Assange.

The Wikileaks founder is facing 17 espionage charges and one charge of computer misuse, which carry a maximum sentence of 175 years in prison. "The indictment of Mr. Assange threatens press freedom because much of the conduct described in the indictment is conduct that journalists engage in routinely—and that they must engage in in order to do the work the public needs them to do," said the groups, which included Amnesty International USA, the American Civil Liberties Union and Reporters Without Borders.

"We appreciate that the government has a legitimate interest in protecting bona fide national security interests, but the proceedings against Mr. Assange jeopardize journalism that is crucial to democracy."

Assange's lawyers have argued the case is politically motivated. They say he was acting as a journalist and is entitled to freedom of speech protections guaranteed under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Assange and WikiLeaks shot to fame in April 2010, after the website released a 39-minute video of a US military Apache helicopter firing over and killing more than a dozen Iraqis, including two Reuters journalists.

"The Department of Justice's indication on Tuesday that it still intends to pursue an appeal against the extradition decision in the case of Julian Assange is deeply concerning," Rebecca Vincent, director of international campaigns at Reporters Without Borders, told Al Jazeera. "However, until the United States' grounds for appeal are formally filed, there is still time to right this wrong. We call for President Biden to intervene in the interest of journalism and press freedom and drop this politically motivated case once and for all."

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