

After UK rejects appeal, activists say Biden must drop Julian Assange's extradition



London, June 9 (RHC)-- Press freedom groups on Thursday said that following the United Kingdom High Court's rejection of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's appeal against his extradition order to the United States, U.S. President Joe Biden has a choice to make: continue with the federal case against the publisher or stand on the side of journalists everywhere and drop the charges against Assange.

High Court Judge Jonathan Swift on Tuesday handed down the decision rejecting Assange's appeal of an extradition order that was signed a year ago by U.K. Home Secretary Priti Patel, leaving Assange's legal team with less than a week to submit another appeal to a panel of two judges.

The judges could convene a public hearing on the case of Julian Assange, who has been charged in the U.S. with violating the 1917 Espionage Act for publishing classified military documents that revealed the

United States' alleged war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Press freedom organizations and human rights activists have maintained that Assange has been prosecuted for publicizing government information just as newspapers routinely do and have demanded that the White House drop the charges.

"The idea of Assange or anyone being tried in a U.S. court for obtaining and publishing confidential documents the same way investigative reporters do every day should be terrifying to all Americans," said Seth Stern, director of advocacy for Freedom of the Press Foundation. "It's time for Biden to drop this case and show the world he's serious about press freedom."

The Daily Mail reported Thursday that the U.K. Home Office is currently preparing paperwork to rapidly extradite Assange and that he could be sent to the U.S. "in the next few weeks."

Human rights lawyer Stella Assange, who is married to the WikiLeaks publisher, said Assange will "make a renewed application for appeal to the High Court." "We remain optimistic that we will prevail and that Julian will not be extradited to the United States where he faces charges that could result in him spending the rest of his life in a maximum security prison for publishing true information that revealed war crimes committed by the U.S. government," she said.

Assange's extradition was originally blocked in 2021 when a Westminster Magistrate Court judge ruled that he should not be sent to the U.S. because of the risk that being held in an American maximum security prison would pose to Assange's mental health.

The High Court overturned that ruling after the U.S. claimed Assange would not be held in highly restrictive prison conditions.

Christophe Deloire, secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders (RSF), denounced the continued prosecution of Assange as "judicial harassment" and "an attack on global media freedom." Along with the possibility of a ruling by the High Court in Assange's favor, the European Court of Human Rights could block the extradition following the journalist's appeal to the court last year.

Rebecca Vincent, director of campaigns for RSF, called on Biden to take action instead of leaving it up to British and European judges, in order to end a case that could "land Julian Assange in prison for the rest of his life and permanently impact the climate for journalism around the world."

"The historical weight of what happens next cannot be overstated," said Vincent. "It is time to put a stop to this relentless targeting of Assange and act instead to protect journalism and press freedom. Our call on President Biden is now more urgent than ever: Drop these charges, close the case against Assange, and allow for his release without further delay."

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