

Australian parliamentarians visit Washington to push for Julian Assange's release

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The 200th protest for Assange in Sydney, Australia * Screenshot of the video via the Consortium News channel on YouTube

Washington, October 7 (RHC)-- More than 60 Australian federal MPs have expressed their support for Wikileaks founder Julian Assange. Assange has been in a UK jail since 2019 fighting his extradition to the United States. He previously spent seven years as a refugee in Ecuador's London embassy. In the United States, he faces charges of conspiracy and espionage.

As part of this initiative, six parliamentarians visited Washington D.C. the week of September 27 to press for his release. Democracy Now reported on developments involving his home country of Australia:

A delegation of Australian lawmakers has arrived in Washington D.C. to urge the Biden administration to halt the prosecution of WikiLeaks founder and Australian citizen Julian Assange. More than 60 Australian parliamentarians from across the political spectrum have called for Assange's release.

In an interview with Democracy Now, Green Party Senator Peter Whish-Wilson explained: "The main objective of our delegation, which is cross-party, is to let the Americans, and particularly those in power, know that Australians have a very strong view on this issue. We feel that Julian Assange has suffered enough. He has been imprisoned, in one form or another, for almost a decade simply for publishing the truth. This is an Australian citizen who won the highest award for journalism in Australia."

The delegation is made up of members from across the political spectrum, including the major parties and an independent party. Former Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce was part of the delegation. His National Party is quite conservative and his constituencies are made up of rural, farming and mining communities. The group includes two Green senators, one Liberal member and one Labor member.

The Columbia Journalism Review provided some background on the visit: Delegation members have different reasons for wanting the U.S. to drop the charges against Assange, from describing him as a courageous truth-teller to the fear, Joyce stressed, that allowing extradition for someone who has not been charged with committing crimes in his country of citizenship would set a precedent that China, among other countries, could exploit.

Brazil's President Lula also called for Julian's release in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly. Lula argued: "Preserving freedom of the press is essential. A journalist, such as Julian Assange, cannot be punished for informing society in a transparent and legitimate manner."

The president of Colombia, Gustavo Petro, also showed his support: "He is a journalist, period. And what he did was the work of a journalist, period. It's the biggest mockery of press freedom."

The Australian delegation in Washington has met with members of Congress and Justice Department officials, including controversial House member Marjorie Taylor Greene, who called for the charges to be dropped.

Binoy Kampmark, a university lecturer at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University, ran as a Wikileaks party candidate for the Australian Senate in 2013. He published his views on the visit on Australian Independent Media Network: "These consistent and respectably strong opinions have rarely swayed the Department of Justice loons who continue to operate within the same church consensus regarding Assange as an aberration and a threat to U.S. security. And they can ultimately rely on the calculus of attrition that Washington's allies will eventually collapse, even if they do complain."

Like Binoy Kampmark, many doubt whether the latest efforts will have any impact on the U.S. government. The Reuters report on the visit concluded that support for Assange among U.S. policymakers remains low. If extradited, Assange faces a sentence of up to 175 years in a maximum-security prison.



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