

Australian lawmakers approve motion urging UK to return Julian Assange to Australia



Canberra, February 15 (RHC)-- Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and federal members of parliament have approved a motion urging the United Kingdom to return jailed WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to Australia as the United States still pressures London to get the whistleblower extradited to the country.

Approved on Wednesday, the formal proposal put forward by lawmaker Andrew Wilkie stresses that 52-year-old Assange should be released from London's Belmarsh Prison where he has spent nearly five years and returned to Australia.

This is while Britain's High Court will hear Assange's appeal next week against his extradition to the US on espionage charges. "It will send a very powerful political signal to the British government and the US

government that the British government should not entertain the idea of Mr. Assange being extradited to the U.S.," Wilkie told the parliament on Wednesday.

In 2010, the Australian national published a series of damning leaks provided by US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, including about 750,000 classified military and diplomatic documents related to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars which exposed the U.S. military's crimes against humanity in these countries.

Julian Assange was arrested in England in 2019 after Ecuador revoked his diplomatic asylum at the country's embassy in London, where he spent seven years. American authorities seek to bring Assange to trial over the release of classified military documents, charging him with 18 counts. If convicted, Assange could face up to 175 years in prison in the United States.

Wilkie warned that if Assange is sent to the U.S. to face trial it would be a direct attack on media freedom, as it would set a "frightening precedent for all journalists that they, too, are at risk of being locked up just for doing their job."

A group of Australian lawmakers plan to visit the United States later this month to demand an end to Washington's push to get WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange extradited to the country.

Lawmaker David Shoebridge, for his part, sounded the alert that "If Julian loses next week, he will be immediately extradited." "We were told for the first time that Attorney General Mark Dreyfus raised Julian's case with his U.S. counterpart last week," he added.

If the UK's High Court rules against Assange next week, he could be extradited to the US within 28 days of the verdict.

Julian Assange is praised worldwide as an anti-establishment hero, who has been targeted by the West in a politically motivated assault on journalism and free speech.

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