

Irish Nobel Peace Prize winner calls on Joe Biden to release Julian Assange in letter handed to U.S. Consulate



By Paul Ainsworth *** published in THE IRISH NEWS / April 23, 2024

Nobel Peace laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire has urged U.S. President Joe Biden to release Julian Assange from custody as the WikiLeaks founder faces being extradited to America.

Mrs Maguire, who co-founded the Peace People movement, wrote a letter to Mr Biden that was delivered to the US Consulate in Belfast by fellow Peace People member and activist Ann Patterson.

The appeal to the president was written as Mr Assange continues to fight against extradition to the US from the UK to stand trial on criminal charges relating to the leaking of military records.

The leaks on the Afghanistan and Iraq wars were published unredacted on the Wikileaks website, and Mr Assange has denied the charges against him, claiming he was acting as a journalist.

The 52-year-old Australian national was last month granted permission by the High Court in London to appeal the extradition.

Mrs Maguire's appeal to Mr Biden comes as the president said this month he was considering a request by the Australian government to drop the charges against Mr Assange.

The Belfast peace activist nominated Mr Assange for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021, alongside American whistleblowers Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden.

In her letter to Mr Biden, she described meeting Mr Assange twice during the seven years he stayed at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he claimed political asylum to avoid extradition to Sweden over a sexual assault case that has since been dropped.

"I found him a gentle kind man whose concern for the children of Iraq and Afghanistan was deep and sincere," she wrote. "Julian's only crime was as a publisher and journalist to speak truth to power and for this he has been punished severely. Surely, Mr President, it is time to release Julian and let him go home to his family and friends."

She said in the letter of the Wikileaks founder: "His health is deteriorating and it is feared by his family he would not survive should he be extradited to America."

Mrs Maguire co-founded the Peace People after the death of her sister, her niece and two nephews in 1976.

Anne Maguire had been walking in the Finaghy Road North area of Belfast with her six-week-old son, his two-year-old brother and their eight year old sister when a car driven by an IRA man who had been fatally wounded by a pursuing British army patrol ploughed into them.

Two of the children died instantly, while the two-year-old boy died of his injuries the following day. Ms Maguire, who suffered severe injuries in the collision, later took her own life.

Mrs Maguire and Betty Williams - who witnessed the fatal collision - led marches for peace and were jointly awarded the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize. Ms Williams died in 2020 at the age of 76.

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