

To the British Ambassador to Norway Jan Thompson
The British Embassy in Oslo
Norway

February 16th, 2024

Free Julian Assange

We, the undersigned organizations, urge the British authorities to cease the extradition process and release Julian Assange.

The final and crucial hearing in the case of whistle-blower and publicist Julian Assange will take place in the High Court of Justice in London on February 20-21. In the US, Assange is charged under the Espionage Act, and face up to 175 years in prison. Extradition and imprisonment could have dire consequences for press freedom worldwide, at a time when freedom of expression is already under severe pressure.

The case raises three serious questions of principle and human rights:

WikiLeaks, where Julian Assange was the founder, published content from official documents exposing war crimes committed by US forces and their allies. If extradited to the US, the charges would equate journalistic disclosures with espionage, as the actions described in the charges are common methods used by journalists to obtain information. This includes disclosure of leaked, classified information. It would be the first time US authorities uses the espionage law against a publisher. Extradition and potential imprisonment in the US would have a chilling effect on whistle-blowers and others who reveal or help to reveal war crimes and information about abuse of power by states.

Julian Assange is an Australian citizen, and he published the material on the Internet while residing in the United Kingdom. If the UK comply with the extradition request and the US prosecute a foreign citizen for exposing war crimes under espionage law, it would set a dangerous precedent and be a blatant attack on freedom of expression worldwide.

Julian Assange is in prison for his fifth year without conviction for anything other than violating bail provisions. He has faced harsh prison conditions, and his health has significantly deteriorated during this time. Both current and former UN Special Rapporteurs on torture, Alice

Jill Edwards and Nils Melzer, have expressed grave concerns about the treatment meted out to him and his deteriorating health. On February 6, 2024, Edwards urged the British government to halt the extradition. Former Norwegian Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and long-time Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, believes Assange's treatment may violate Article 3 and Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

We, the undersigned organizations, urge:

- The British authorities to cease the extradition process and release Julian Assange.
- The US authorities to drop the espionage case against Julian Assange.
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs in Norway, Espen Barth Eide, to call upon Great Britain and United States to halt the process, which constitutes a blatant attack on press freedom and freedom of expression.

Ann-Magrit Austenå

Chair of PEN Norway

Rebekka Borsch

Chair of The Norwegian UNESCO Commission

Hege Fagerheim

Deputy Chair of The Norwegian Union of Journalists

Elin Floberghagen

General Secretary of The Norwegian Press Association

Berit Nising Lindeman

General Secretary of The Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Reidun Kjelling Nybø

General Secretary of The Association of Norwegian Editors

Randi Siren Øgrey

Managing Director of The Norwegian Media Businesses' Association
