

Why I tabled an Early-day Motion Calling for the U.K Government to Free Julian Assange

CHRIS WILLIAMSON MP explains why we must fight the imprisonment and extradition of the Australian 'spy for and of the people'

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The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) recently published a video entitled "Journalism is not a crime." It boldly states that "you can't kill the truth," that "everyone deserves access to information," that "it's vital to hold governments to account" and that "freedom of expression underpins all human rights."

It therefore begs the question: why the hell is Julian Assange languishing in solitary confinement in Belmarsh high security prison, particularly now that he has served his sentence for breaching bail conditions?

He was due to be released on September 22, but district judge Vanessa Baraitser told him that in her view she had "substantial grounds" for believing that if she released him, he would "abscond again." Consequently, she said Assange's status in jail would change "from a serving prisoner to a person facing extradition."

An obvious fact was ignored by the judge, which was that as one of the most well-known individuals on the planet, the chances of Julian Assange absconding anywhere are virtually zero. The decision to continue to detain him is a stain on Britain's reputation and shows up the FCO's video as a complete fraud.

The charges brought against him in the US include "computer misuse" and the "unauthorised disclosure of national defence information." But these charges are incongruous, because what he revealed were war crimes by the US and the appalling abuse of state and corporate power. By disclosing this information, he performed an international public service and he should be venerated and celebrated, not demonised and denounced for his efforts on our behalf.

When Assange was dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy, Slavoj Zizek wrote:

"Assange characterised himself as the spy of and for the people: he is not spying on the people for those in power, he is spying on those in power for the people."

It is therefore little wonder that the establishment on both sides of the Atlantic want to shut him up and deliver a warning to anyone else who dares to shine a light on their dirty dealings.

Assange risked everything to expose the misuse of power, which has resulted in him being subjected to a systematic, and deeply sinister, smear campaign ever since for his efforts on our behalf.

Having been the subject of a smear campaign myself, I certainly empathise with him, however the sheer scale and volume of the vile slurs thrown at him are of a completely different magnitude.

But as the FCO itself has said, you can't kill the truth. Step forward Fidel Narvaez, a former diplomat who worked in the Ecuadorian embassy during the period that Julian Assange sought refuge there. In [an article for The Grayzone](#) he refuted the lies being peddled about the years Julian Assange was forced to live in the embassy. These ranged from ludicrous accusations about meddling in the last US presidential election to lurid assertions about smearing faeces on the walls.

He is now awaiting an extradition hearing, which if he loses could see him sentenced to 175 years in captivity. In other words, he would have to live out the rest of his natural life in a US jail because he told the truth about war crimes.

As if that wasn't bad enough, eminent journalist John Pilger described the conditions in which Julian Assange is currently being held as "barbaric" after visiting him in Belmarsh. He tweeted that

Julian is "isolated, denied proper exercise, access to the library, a laptop, he cannot prepare his defence. He is even denied calls to his US lawyers. His UK lawyer wrote to the governor on June 4. Silence. How lawless."

Jeremy Corbyn is absolutely right to say any attempt to extradite Julian Assange to the US should be opposed by the British government. But predictably the Tories take the opposite view and the then home secretary, Sajid Javid, willingly signed an extradition request to the US.

There have been a number of rallies outside Belmarsh, but we need to do more to raise the profile of this case, which has huge ramifications for all of us. That is why I tabled an early day motion (EDM) this week opposing any extradition and condemning the on-going mistreatment and imprisonment of Julian Assange.

The motion highlights the fact that the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has stated that his treatment appears to contravene the principles of necessity and proportionality envisaged under human rights standards.

It also refers to the broader consequences for media freedoms, freedom of speech and civil liberties in the UK, and calls on the government to release him and offer compensation for his mistreatment. I would like to see every backbencher in the House of Commons signing the EDM and would urge readers to ask their MPs to sign EDM 2746.

This is one battle for democratic accountability that we absolutely must not lose. If ever there was a time to invoke Pastor Niemoller's piercing poem — "First They Came" — it is now. If we don't speak up for Julian Assange to prevent this monstrous misuse of the judicial system, who will dare to speak up for us in the future?

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