

Why Julian Assange Must Urgently be Freed: Stella Morris

I want my children to believe that inequitable treatment is not tolerated in mature democracies

By [Stella Morris](#)

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The life of my partner, Julian Assange, is at severe risk. He is on remand at HMP Belmarsh, and Covid-19 is spreading within its walls.

Julian and I have two little boys. Since becoming a mother, I have been reflecting on my own childhood.

My parents are European, but when I was little we lived in Botswana, five miles from the border with Apartheid South Africa. Many of my parents' friends came from across the border: writers, painters, conscientious objectors. It was an unlikely centre for artistic creativity and intellectual exchange.

The history books describe Apartheid as institutional segregation, but it was much more than that. Segregation occurred in broad daylight. The abductions, torture and killings occurred at night.

We were totally exposed. These forces operated in a legal and ethical vacuum that engulfed us

The foundations of the Apartheid system were precarious, so the regime met ideas of political reform with live ammunition. In June 1985, South African assassination squads crossed the border armed with machine guns, mortars and grenades. As soon as gunfire burst into the night, my parents wrapped me in a blanket. I slept as my parents raced the car to safety. The sound of explosions carried through the capital for the hour and a half that it took to kill twelve people.

The first person to be killed was a very close family friend, an exceptional painter. South Africa claimed the raid had targeted the armed wing of the ANC, but in reality most of the victims were innocent civilians and children killed as they lay sleeping in bed. We left Botswana within days.

I have absorbed my parents' vivid memories of the raid. If that terrible night shaped my perspective of the world, the incarceration of the father of my children will surely mark theirs.

Forming a family with Julian under the circumstances was always going to be difficult, but our hopes eclipsed our fears. Initially, Julian and I managed to [carve out a space](#) for a private life. Our firstborn visited with the help of a friend. But when Gabriel was six months

old, an embassy security contractor confessed to me that he had been [told to steal the baby's DNA](#) through a nappy. Failing that they would take the baby's pacifier. The whistleblower warned me Gabriel should not come into the embassy anymore. It was not safe. I realised that all the precautions I had taken, from piling layers on to disguise my bump to changing my name, would not protect us. We were totally exposed. These forces operated in a legal and ethical vacuum that engulfed us.

A police raid at the security company director's home turned up two handguns with their serial numbers filed off

I could write volumes about what happened in the months that followed. By the time I was pregnant with Max the pressure and harassment had become unbearable and I feared that my pregnancy was at risk. When I was six months pregnant Julian and I decided I should stop going into the embassy. The next time I saw him was in Belmarsh prison.

The image of Julian being carried out of the embassy shocked many. It struck a blow to my chest, but it did not shock me. What happened that morning was an extension of what had been going on inside the embassy over an eighteen-month period.

After Julian was arrested a year ago, Spain's High Court opened an investigation [into the security company](#) that had been operating inside the embassy. Several whistleblowers came forward and have informed law enforcement of unlawful activities [against Julian and his lawyers](#), both inside and outside the embassy. They are cooperating with law enforcement and have provided investigators with large amounts of data.

The investigation has [revealed that the company](#) had been moonlighting for a US company closely associated with the current US administration and US intelligence agencies and that the increasingly disturbing instructions, such as following my mother or the baby DNA directive, had come from their US client, not Ecuador. Around the same time that I had been approached about the targeting of our baby, the company was thrashing out even more sinister plans concerning Julian's life. Their alleged plots to poison or abduct Julian have been raised in UK extradition proceedings. A police raid at the security company director's home turned up two handguns with their serial numbers filed off.

None of this information is surprising to me but as a parent I ponder how to manage it.

I want our children to grow up with the clarity of conviction that I had as a little girl. Peril lay beyond the South African border. I want them to believe that inequitable treatment is not tolerated in mature democracies. At university in Oxford, I was proud to be at the intellectual heart of the most mature democracy of them all.

It is not just our family who suffers from the infringement of Julian's rights. If our family and Julian's lawyers are not off-limits, then nothing is. The person responsible for allegedly ordering the theft of Gabriel's DNA is Mike Pompeo, who last month threatened the family members of lawyers working at the International Criminal Court. Why? Because the court had had the temerity to investigate alleged US war crimes in Afghanistan. The same crimes that Julian exposed through WikiLeaks, and which the US wants to imprison him over.

Julian needs to be released now. For him, for our family, and for the society we all want our children to grow up in.

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Stella Moris is a lawyer and the sentimental partner of Julian Assange.

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