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BODIES](#)[NEWS AND  
EVENTS](#)[PUBLICATIONS AND  
RESOURCES](#)[English > News and Events > DisplayNews](#)

## UN experts urge UK to honour rights obligations and let Mr. Julian Assange leave Ecuador embassy in London freely

GENEVA (21 December 2018) – UN human rights experts today repeated a demand that the UK abides by its international obligations and immediately allows Wikileaks founder Julian Assange to walk free from the Ecuadorian embassy in London where he has been for over 6 years, fearing arrest by British authorities if he leaves, and extradition to the US.

“States that are based upon and promote the rule of law do not like to be confronted with their own violations of the law, that is understandable. But when they honestly admit these violations, they do honour the very spirit of the rule of law, earn enhanced respect for doing so, and set worldwide commendable examples,” the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) said.

In December 2015, the Working Group concluded in its [opinion No. 54/2015](#) that Mr. Assange – who at the time had a European arrest warrant issued against him for an allegation of crimes committed in Sweden - was being arbitrarily deprived of his freedom and demanded that he be released.

“Under international law, pre-trial detention must be only imposed in limited instances. Detention during investigations must be even more limited, especially in the absence of any charge” said the experts. “The Swedish investigations have been closed for over 18 months now, and the only ground remaining for Mr. Assange’s continued deprivation of liberty is a bail violation in the UK, which is, objectively, a minor offense that cannot post facto justify the more than 6 years confinement that he has been subjected to since he sought asylum in the Embassy of Ecuador. Mr. Assange should be able to exercise his right to freedom of movement in an unhindered manner, in accordance with the human rights conventions the UK has ratified,” the experts further said

The WGAD is further concerned that the modalities of the continued arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Mr. Assange is undermining his health, and may possibly endanger his life given the disproportionate amount of anxiety and stress that such prolonged deprivation of liberty entails.

“The United Kingdom has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and has a responsibility to honour its commitment, by respecting its provisions in all cases,” the experts said.

“As the High Commissioner for human rights said several years ago, human rights treaty law is binding law, it is not discretionary law. It is not some passing fancy that a state can apply sometimes and not in the other,” the experts recalled.

“In addition, the recommendations of the WGAD Opinions are expected to be implemented by all States, including those which have not been a party in the case concerning Mr. Assange,” said the experts.

“On 10 December, the world celebrated International Human Rights Day. Seventy years ago, on that very day, the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the mother of all rights contained in subsequent conventions, including the ICCPR.

“It is time that Mr. Assange, who has already paid a high price for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of opinion, expression and information, and to promote the right to truth in the public

interest, recovers his freedom," the experts concluded.

*This statement by the United Nations Working Group on [Arbitrary Detention](#) is endorsed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the [situation of human rights defenders](#), Mr. Michel Forst.*

ENDS

**Background:** Mr. Assange, a computer programmer and freedom of expression and information advocate, is the founder of Wikileaks, created to enable whistle-blowers to make public information they deem should be known in the public interest.

Mr. Assange was arrested on 7 December 2010 in the United Kingdom, pursuant to a European Arrest Warrant issued against him after he was accused of sexual misconduct in Sweden. That accusation has not been substantiated and after he was interrogated in London the Swedish Prosecutor decided in 2017 not to pursue the investigation.

Mr. Assange has been *de facto* arbitrarily deprived of his liberty since 2012 without charge or trial. He was first detained on remand and in isolation for 10 days in a prison in London; he then spent 550 days on bail terms constituting house arrest, pending his appeal before the UK's Supreme Court against his extradition to Sweden. When the Supreme Court upheld the extradition decision, he sought political asylum in the Embassy of Ecuador on 16 August 2012, citing fears of being extradited from Sweden to the USA. He claimed that he had reasonable grounds to believe that should he be extradited to the USA, he would face trial for having published, through Wikileaks, thousands of US classified diplomatic cables and documents. Ecuador granted him political asylum and later Ecuadorian citizenship.

The United Kingdom has indicated that Mr. Assange's fear to be extradited to the USA was unfounded. In April 2017, in his first public speech since becoming head of the CIA, Mr. Michael Pompeo described Wikileaks as a "hostile intelligence service" which claimed to act in the name of the defence of freedom of expression, freedom of information and privacy. The same month, the US Attorney General stated that it was a US priority to arrest and detain Julian Assange. On 15 November 2018, evidence emerged that the US Department of Justice was preparing an indictment against him but the charges have remained classified.

As a result of the Swedish Prosecutor's decision not to pursue the investigation against Mr. Assange, the European Arrest Warrant against him was nullified. The remaining ground for arresting him is his violation of the terms of the bail in 2012, when he walked to the embassy of Ecuador to seek political asylum. The terms of bail included reporting daily to the local police station.

The UK authorities have made it clear that should he leave the Ecuadorian Embassy he would be arrested. An arrest warrant has been issued against Mr. Assange by a British court, and police have been assigned since 2012 to stand-by 24/7 at the embassy gate to arrest Mr. Assange should he exit the diplomatic premises.

**\* The experts: Mr. Seong-Phil Hong**, Chair-Rapporteur of the [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#); **Mr. Michel Forst**, Special Rapporteur on the [situation of human rights defenders](#).

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*This year, 2018, is the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration – translated into a world record 500 languages – is rooted in the principle that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." It remains relevant to everyone, every day. In honour of the 70th anniversary of this*

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extraordinarily influential document, and to prevent its vital principles from being eroded, we are  
urging people everywhere to **Stand Up for Human Rights**: [www.standup4humanrights.org](http://www.standup4humanrights.org).*

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