

NEWS

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RSF condemns the UK High Court's decision allowing for Julian Assange's extradition to the US, and calls for his immediate release

UNITED KINGDOM UNITED STATES EUROPE - CENTRAL ASIA AMERICAS

IMPRISONED INTERNET FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION JUDICIAL HARASSMENT



Reporters Without Borders (RSF) condemns the decision of the UK High Court ruling that Wikileaks publisher Julian Assange can be extradited to the United States, where he faces possible life imprisonment for publishing information in the public interest. RSF calls yet again for Assange's immediate release, and for the US government to drop its more than decade-long case against him once and for all, in line with its stated commitment to protecting media freedom.

On 10 December, the UK High Court issued a ruling in favour of **the US government's appeal (<https://rsf.org/en/news/uk-high-court-set-hear-us-appeal-assange-extradition-case>), overturning the 4 January decision (<https://rsf.org/en/reports/uk-court-blocks-us-attempt-extradite-julian-assange-leaves-public-interest-reporting-risk>)** of the District Court opposing Assange's extradition on mental health grounds. Despite Assange's severe mental health condition and his serious risk of suicide evidenced by a number of expert medical witnesses in the case, the High Court accepted the US government's diplomatic assurances regarding his possible treatment in the US prison system, and ruled that he could be extradited to the United States.

In its 10 December decision, the High Court allowed the appeal, stating that the District Judge ought to have notified the US of her provisional view, to have afforded the US the opportunity to offer assurances to the Court at that time. The Court is satisfied that the assurances now provided by the US to the UK respond to the District Judge's specific concerns. The Court ordered the case to be remitted to Westminster Magistrates' Court, with a District Judge to then send the case to the UK Secretary of State, who will decide whether Assange should be extradited to the United States. Options for appeal remain open to the defence.

“We condemn today’s decision, which will prove historic for all the wrong reasons. We fully believe that Julian Assange has been targeted for his contributions to journalism, and we defend this case because of its dangerous implications for the future of journalism and press freedom around the world. It is time to put a stop to this more than decade-long persecution once and for all. It is time to free Assange,” said RSF Secretary-General Christophe Deloire.

In the United States, Assange **would face trial** (<https://rsf.org/en/news/rsf-reiterates-call-charges-against-julian-assange-be-dropped-us-issues-new-superseding-indictment>) on 17 charges under the Espionage Act, and one charge under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which combined could see him imprisoned for up to 175 years -- likely in conditions of isolation or solitary confinement despite the US assurances, which would severely exacerbate his risk of suicide.

The charges against Assange are based on Wikileaks’ publication in 2010 of leaked classified documents including the Afghan War Diary, the Iraq War Logs, and more than 250,000 diplomatic cables, representing the largest publication of leaked classified information to date. The documents exposed war crimes and human rights abuses for which no one has ever been prosecuted.

Assange would be the first publisher prosecuted under the US Espionage Act, which lacks a public interest defence – setting a dangerous precedent that could be applied to any media outlet that published stories based on the leaked documents, or indeed any journalist, publisher or source anywhere in the world.

“This ruling marks a bleak moment for journalists and journalism around the world, on the very day when we should be celebrating the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to two journalists and urging states to uphold the commitments to media freedom they have just reaffirmed at the US-led Summit for Democracy. We call on the US government to truly lead by example and close this case now before further damage is done. Julian Assange should be immediately

released, and steps taken to ensure no journalist, publisher or source can ever be targeted in this way again,” said RSF Director of International Campaigns Rebecca Vincent.

RSF has been the only NGO to monitor the full extradition proceedings despite **severe restrictions imposed by the courts** (<https://rsf.org/en/news/usuk-julian-assanges-extradition-hearing-marred-barriers-open-justice>), and will continue to monitor any further proceedings and campaign vigorously for the US government to drop its case and for Assange to be released.

The UK and US are respectively ranked 33rd and 44th out of 180 countries in RSF’s **2021 World Press Freedom Index** (<https://rsf.org/en/ranking>).

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