

Ecuador's government cuts off all access to Julian Assange

By Mike Head
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According to the Courage Foundation, which has campaigned against the persecution of Julian Assange, the Ecuadorian Embassy in London has forbidden access to all visitors to the WikiLeaks publisher, including his lawyers, until Monday, amid an urgent lawsuit.

Most immediately, the ban obstructs a legal appeal by Assange against an Ecuadorian judge's decision last week to uphold a draconian "protocol" that President Lenín Moreno's government has sought to impose on him, in fundamental violation of the right to political asylum.

The protocol essentially bars Assange from making any political comments whatsoever, because they might be deemed detrimental to the interests of Ecuador's government or any other government.

By ratcheting up the already intolerable conditions of virtual solitary confinement that Moreno's government has inflicted on the courageous journalist and editor since March, the ban is another warning of its preparations to terminate Assange's asylum.

Under intensifying pressure from Washington, by Democrat and Republican leaders alike, the Ecuadorian ruling elite is clearly moving to either evict Assange or create such inhuman conditions that he is forced to leave the embassy, in spite of significant protests internationally and in Ecuador itself.

On October 31, two days after the judge's ruling to endorse the protocol, a demonstration was held in front of Ecuador's presidential palace against a renewed bid by the right-wing, US-linked Social Christian Party to secure a National Assembly vote to strip Assange of his Ecuadorian citizenship. Article 79 of Ecuador's constitution states: "In no case shall extradition of an Ecuadorian be granted."

Brief video footage of the protest, posted on the

WikiLeaks twitter account, shows a determined and sizeable demonstration in defence of Assange, flanked by police.

There is considerable public support for Assange, because of WikiLeaks' long and continuing record of publishing leaked documents that expose the crimes and machinations of governments and their major corporate partners. Moreno's government, however, is intensifying its moves to remove Assange from the embassy building, effectively handing him over to be imprisoned in Britain and then the US.

Ecuador's foreign ministry issued a statement on October 30 immediately hailing the judge's ruling and escalating the threat to end Assange's political asylum for making comments critical about the moves against him.

Ecuador "will not allow unwarranted untrue assertions or insinuations about the conduct of the National Government concerning the diplomatic asylum that was granted to Mr. Assange, in exercise of the prerogative powers of the State of Ecuador," the statement declared.

This was after Assange had tried to use the court hearing the day before to alert the world to plans to evict him, breaking through the wall of silence that Moreno's government has placed around him for seven months.

Speaking via teleconference from the embassy to the court hearing in Quito, Assange said the new protocol was a sign that Moreno had already decided to end his asylum, but had not yet officially given the order. Before he could say more, Ecuador's senior government lawyer, Inigo Salvador cut him off, warning him not to make political statements during the proceedings.

This intervention underscored the travesty of the

hearing itself. The judge refused to rule on the constitutionality of the government's actions against Assange, saying it was a matter for the country's Constitutional Court. She also refused to hear witnesses or accept evidence documenting the extent of the embassy's bans on visitors and communications.

In its statement, conscious of the domestic and global support for Assange, Ecuador's foreign ministry "reiterated to the public the steadfast adherence of the State of Ecuador to the relevant rules of national and international law that govern asylum."

The self-contradictory statement claimed that "the Protocol reestablishes Mr. Assange's access to communications," yet insisted that "pursuant to the international treaties that govern asylum, he may not make statements, transmissions or announcements that interfere with other States or that may affect the interests of Ecuador."

Far from recognising Assange's basic right to communication, the protocol prohibits him from making any political comments deemed detrimental to Ecuador or its "good relations" with "any other state" and makes clear that his communications and visitors will be subjected to surveillance, with the results shared with US and British spy agencies.

The protocol further stipulates that the WikiLeaks founder undergo a medical examination every three months and that doctors can recommend he be evacuated from the embassy if they conclude that he requires urgent treatment.

The statement falsely asserted that the judge's decision confirmed that the protocol "is fully consistent with the right of asylum." The fundamental right to political asylum, an essential international protection against anti-democratic oppression, was reiterated in May by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights.

That court, which has jurisdiction over human rights abuses by members of the Organisation of American States, insisted that Assange had to be free of any threats or coercion that would force him into the hands of a government seeking to persecute him, in this case the US.

The inter-American court also warned the British government: "If the UK continues to ignore the court's decision by insisting that local police will arrest Assange for a breach of bail conditions if he leaves the embassy, this means that the British government will

have wantonly failed to uphold Assange's rights as a legitimate receiver of asylum by Ecuador."

The British government, acting in concert with Washington, has defied the ruling, assisted by the Australian government.

The WikiLeaks founder was forced to seek refuge in the embassy in 2012 after trumped-up Swedish government allegations of sexual misconduct were brought forward as a pretext for his imprisonment in Britain. This would have been followed by extradition to the US to face concocted espionage charges that could see him jailed for life or even executed.

Assange, an Australian citizen, was compelled to turn to Ecuador because the Labor Party-led government in Australia lined up behind the Obama administration and denied Assange his right to assistance and protection.

The US and its allies want to lock away Assange for good in order to intimidate all those who are fighting against militarism, social inequality and the assault on democratic rights. His defence requires the broadest possible mobilisation of the international working class to demand his immediate and unconditional freedom.

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