

UN Special Rapporteur: US extradition of Assange would be violation of international law

By Oscar Grenfell
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Following WikiLeaks' warning yesterday that Julian Assange faced imminent eviction from Ecuador's London embassy, widespread opposition has emerged to the illegal plans to terminate his political asylum.

Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, issued a statement calling upon the Ecuadorian government of President Lenín Moreno to "abstain from expelling Mr. Assange ... or from otherwise ceasing or suspending his political asylum."

Melzer warned that if Assange was removed from the embassy, he was "likely to be arrested by British authorities and extradited to the United States," adding, "Such a response could expose him to a real risk of serious violations of his human rights, including his freedom of expression, his right to a fair trial and the prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Senior Ecuadorian officials have sought to deflect any questions about WikiLeaks' claims that a high-level source within the country's state apparatus indicated that Assange's expulsion from the embassy building would take place "within hours or days."

Outside the Ecuadorian embassy Friday, the country's ambassador to Britain, Jaime Marchan, told the press that there was "no change in the Señor Julian Assange situation" and that he was "offended" by reports to the contrary.

Marchan, who has played a central role in creating a hostile environment for Assange within the embassy, was then asked, "Is he going to be released in the next couple of hours?" He responded, "We are definitely not going to comment on that."

The country's foreign minister, Jose Valencia, declared on Twitter that WikiLeaks' statements were "unfounded" and that his government would not be "giving a running

commentary" on "rumours" that it found "insulting."

Valencia then effectively confirmed WikiLeaks' warning, stating, "Diplomatic asylum is a sovereign power of a state which has the right to grant or withdraw it unilaterally when it considers it justified."

The suggestion that political asylum can be granted and withdrawn, based on political expediency and the immediate interests of national governments, makes a mockery of international law. Political asylum is either inviolable, or it does not exist at all. Assange's status as a political refugee has been repeatedly confirmed by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other international rights organisations.

Valencia pathetically added that any decisions taken by his government would be carried out in a "sovereign manner independent of other countries."

The foreign minister's claims notwithstanding, world public opinion already recognises that the Moreno regime is operating as a vassal of the US government. Within Ecuador, the government enjoys an approval rating of less than 20 percent and is seen by the bulk of the population as a corrupt lackey of American imperialism.

The pretext for the attempt to evict Assange from the embassy is universally viewed as a monumental fraud.

The Ecuadorian government has, over the past week, made entirely unsubstantiated claims that the leaking of Moreno's iPhone and Gmail data to an opposition lawmaker last February was the product of a conspiracy hatched by Assange and WikiLeaks. They are well aware that the release of the material, and related documents, which implicate the regime in corruption, bribery and perjury, had nothing to do with Assange, whose internet access and communications were cut off by the Ecuadorian government in March, 2018.

The evasive and duplicitous comments of senior

Ecuadorian officials result from the fact that they, along with their co-conspirators in the US and British governments, are engaged in a sordid task.

They are seeking to present their plans to illegally abrogate the political asylum of a journalist and publisher, whose only “crime” has been to expose the predatory wars, diplomatic intrigues and mass surveillance operations of the major powers, as a legitimate and proper exercise.

WikiLeaks has further exposed the backroom machinations aimed at forcing Assange from the embassy, publishing earlier today what it stated was the summary of a “press strategy” agreed upon by the Ecuadorian and British governments.

Under the secret deal, the British government would “take the lead” following Assange’s eviction. The Ecuadorian regime would state that Assange had broken the “asylum terms” contained in an illegal protocol it issued last October, banning him from making any political statements, including about his own plight.

The British government would then declare that it would not allow the Trump administration to “kill” Assange in the event of his extradition to the US and would posture as a defender of “due process.” Ecuador would present this as a “concession” and say that the initial granting of asylum to the WikiLeaks founder was only aimed at preventing him from facing the death penalty.

The agreement resembles nothing so much as a deal between criminal gangs, to carry out an extrajudicial kidnapping operation in violation of all national and international laws.

Any measures along these lines will be opposed by millions of workers and young people.

An attempt to extradite Assange to the US would rightly be viewed by the world’s population as illegal and illegitimate. It would be bitterly contested in the courts by WikiLeaks’ internationally-renowned legal team.

Last year, US prosecutors revealed, apparently by mistake, that they had already filed charges against Assange, likely over WikiLeaks 2010 publication of the US army’s Iraq and Afghan war logs and hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables, revealing war crimes and diplomatic intrigues on a global scale.

The Trump administration, however, has signalled that it does not have a case for Assange’s prosecution that could withstand judicial scrutiny under British, US or international law, setting the stage for a protracted legal and political battle over any extradition request.

For the past three weeks, the US government has held Chelsea Manning, who leaked the 2010 documents to WikiLeaks, to try and force her to give perjured testimony against Assange. The courageous whistleblower has refused to participate in this legal travesty.

The widespread support for Assange and Manning among workers, students and young people stands in stark contrast to the silence of all of the official political parties in the United States, Britain and Australia.

Jeremy Corbyn, who, prior to becoming leader of the British Labour Party, claimed to defend Assange, has said nothing about the stepped-up assault on the WikiLeaks founder.

In Australia, the Liberal-National government of Scott Morrison, the Labor Party opposition, the Greens and the trade unions have remained silent, in line with the protracted collaboration of the entire political establishment in the US-led vendetta against Assange, who is an Australian citizen.

This demonstrates that a movement to free Assange and Manning must come from the working class, not the capitalist parties that are engaged in online censorship, an accelerating drive to war and the evisceration of democratic rights.

Workers must be made aware that the mass social and political struggles into which they are entering, are inseparable from the defence of courageous journalists and whistleblowers, who are being persecuted in order to establish a precedent for the suppression of all opposition to militarism, austerity and dictatorship.

The WSWs and the Socialist Equality Parties (SEP) around the world are committed to playing a central role in this crucial fight.

The SEP in Britain has called for maximum participation in protests organised outside Ecuador’s London Embassy. The Australian SEP has today issued a statement, reiterating its demand that the Australian government fulfil its responsibilities to Assange and compel the British government to allow him to leave the country, and return to Australia, with a guarantee against extradition to the US.

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>