

# United Nations Special Rapporteur: Julian Assange is being tortured

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Nils Melzer, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, yesterday issued a statement demanding an immediate end to the “collective persecution” of Julian Assange and condemning the US and its allies for inflicting “psychological torture” on the WikiLeaks publisher.

Assange, Melzer stated, “has been deliberately exposed, for a period of several years, to progressively severe forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the cumulative effects of which can only be described as psychological torture.”

Melzer’s statement confirms the comments of Assange’s father, John Shipton, who said last month that his son had been subjected to “touchless torture,” and the warnings of the WWSW that the attempt to extradite Assange was being conducted as a quasi-legal procedure akin to the extraordinary renditions carried out by the United States.

Melzer’s statement is an indictment of the eight-year campaign by the US and its allies, including Britain, Sweden and Ecuador, to railroad Assange to an American prison and end the activities of WikiLeaks, the publication he founded in 2006.

It demonstrates that Assange has been subjected to an unprecedented political and legal vendetta over his role in the exposure of US war crimes, mass surveillance operations and global diplomatic conspiracies.

This has included the bogus Swedish “preliminary investigation” into concocted allegations of sexual misconduct against Assange, Ecuador’s termination of his political asylum in April, the trumped-up British bail charges he was subsequently convicted of, and the attempts to extradite him to the US to face espionage charges over WikiLeaks’ constitutionally-protected publishing activities.

Significantly, Melzer has acknowledged that he was initially unsympathetic to Assange, and “had been

affected by the same misguided smear campaign as everybody else.” But after a months-long investigation, which included a meeting with Assange at Belmarsh Prison in April, Melzer published a moving and humane statement, which exposes all the lies and slanders directed against the WikiLeaks founder.

The UN official, who met with Assange at Britain’s Belmarsh prison last month, said the WikiLeaks founder “showed all symptoms typical for prolonged exposure to psychological torture, including extreme stress, chronic anxiety and intense psychological trauma.”

His statement was released a day after WikiLeaks warned that it had “grave concerns” for Assange’s health, following his transfer to the prison medical ward. Assange’s Swedish lawyer had previously told the press that he was unable to have a conversation with the WikiLeaks founder on May 24, because of serious ill-health.

Melzer stated that if Assange is extradited to the US on 17 espionage charges carrying a maximum sentence of 170 years imprisonment, he faces the prospect of further “torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

In words that echo the feelings of millions of people all over the world, the UN official declared: “The collective persecution of Julian Assange must end here and now!”

Melzer wrote that since 2010, “there has been a relentless and unrestrained campaign of public mobbing, intimidation and defamation against Mr. Assange, not only in the United States, but also in the United Kingdom, Sweden and, more recently, Ecuador.”

He stated: “In 20 years of work with victims of war, violence and political persecution I have never seen a group of democratic States ganging up to deliberately

isolate, demonise and abuse a single individual for such a long time and with so little regard for human dignity and the rule of law.”

Melzer wrote that Assange had been targeted with “deliberate collective ridicule, insults and humiliation, to open instigation of violence and even repeated calls for his assassination.”

This is a condemnation, not only of the governments directly involved in the persecution of Assange, but also of those publications and media outlets, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Guardian*, which have conducted a systematic campaign to demonise the WikiLeaks’ founder.

Among a litany of slanders, the *New York Times* has previously branded Assange as a “paranoid creep,” while *Guardian* columnist James Ball suggested that Assange was “a narcissistic creep who’s a danger to civilised society.”

The US late-night talk shows have provided the crudest example of the “deliberate collective ridicule” referenced by Melzer. Seth Meyers, host of NBC’s “Late Night,” for instance, responded to the WikiLeaks’ founders April 11 arrest by joking that he was “dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy looking like Santa Claus with a manifesto.”

All of these institutions and individuals are accomplices in the torture of a persecuted journalist.

While the *New York Times* and other corporate publications have written editorials formally condemning the Espionage Act charges, they have downplayed the unbearable conditions Assange has faced during his imprisonment. Neither the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or the *Washington Post* have featured Assange’s inability to appear for his extradition case, or the report of Melzer, on their front pages.

They have signalled that they do not have any principled objections Assange rotting in prison for the rest of his life. The *Washington Post* last week, for example, complained that “the federal government could have locked up Mr. Assange for years without challenging the First Amendment” through an espionage act prosecution.

Melzer’s statement also underscores the shameful role of a host of organisations, including the pseudo-left and the trade unions, that have either abandoned Assange, or joined the campaign against

him.

*Jacobin*, the flagship publication of the US pseudo-left, after remaining silent for over a week after the Trump administration brought new charges against Assange, published a pro-forma statement Friday opposing his persecution under the espionage act.

But *Jacobin* could not resist insulting the persecuted journalist, declaring that the defense of Assange is like being “against torturing a terrorist,” or upholding “a felon’s right to vote even if they committed a horrific crime.” With friends like these, who needs enemies?

The only social force that can and will free Assange is the international working class. Assange is rightly viewed by millions of workers, students and young people around the world as a hero for revealing the truth about US war crimes, spying, and mass murder.

The defence of Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and all other class war prisoners must become a central demand of the resurgent struggles of the working class all over the world.

The WSWS, the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Parties around the world are fighting to mobilise the broadest opposition to Assange’s threatened extradition to the US and for his complete freedom. We urge our readers to contact us to get involved in this crucial fight!

Oscar Grenfell

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>