

### **Punishment by Process: The torture of Julian Assange** by Dr Deepa G Driver (17 Jan 22)

Julian Assange has now been jailed in Belmarsh for a thousand days. Assange may be indicted by the US, but it is journalism that is on trial in the UK. In a case of extra-territorial over-reach, the US wants to extradite Assange – a non-US national for journalism outside the US – [despite a UK-US treaty that explicitly prohibits extraditions for political offences](#). For revealing accurate information about serious war crimes, Assange faces a sentence of circa 175 years in a US supermax prison under [conditions of extreme isolation that apply even during pre-trial detention](#). The US assurances in respect of Assange's treatment, that are being used to justify the extradition, are [inherently unreliable](#) because the US have previously breached such assurances and because the very intelligence agencies who plotted to kill Assange have a say on his pre- and post-trial detention conditions. This is also the first time that the [Espionage Act](#), which does not include a public interest defence, is being deployed against a publisher. He is expected to be [denied US First Amendment protections to freedom of speech](#).

Assange - whom the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [has found to be arbitrarily detained](#) - has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and depression. Medical experts have also noted that he is suicidal. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, has examined Assange along with a team of experienced medical experts, and has [found](#) that he has been [tortured](#). It is also now known that [Assange suffered a Transient Ischaemic Attack \(mini-stroke\)](#) during the most recent extradition hearings. As Assange's health deteriorates, he suffers the harsh conditions of a maximum security prison, despite not being convicted of any crime, and there is no end in sight to this mistreatment. His fate is similar to that of circa 800 Muslim men held captive at Guantanamo Bay, whose interrogation and [torture](#) he revealed. These men have now been held in [cruel, inhumane and degrading conditions](#) for over 20 years often without trial or charge.

The UK and US engineered Assange's removal from asylum within the Ecuadorean embassy in London in exchange for Ecuador receiving a \$4.2 bn IMF loan. After the eviction – itself a violation of his due process rights under Ecuadorean law - Assange's legally privileged papers were handed over to the FBI. The key witness in the case against Assange, Sigurdur Ingi Thordarson – a convicted serial paedophile and fraudster - has [admitted to fabricating his testimony](#) in exchange for immunity for his own crimes. Former CIA Director Mike Pompeo has also publicly [labelled Wikileaks 'a non-state hostile intelligence service'](#) putting Wikileaks' journalists on a par with enemy agents and potentially evading Congressional oversight for the actions taken in the pursuit of Assange. 30 US government insiders [have confirmed reports](#) that the CIA [spied on Assange](#) and plotted to [kidnap or murder him](#) while he was an asylee, thus breaching international law, medical confidentiality and legal privilege at one go. Given all these facts, there is no real possibility of a fair trial in the US or here, in the land of [Magna Carta](#). The extradition of Assange would also set the precedent for foreign journalists critical of US conduct to be plucked out at will, brutalised and handed down excruciatingly long prison sentences. Repressive regimes are using this case to [mock](#) our commitment to press freedom and free speech.

Assange's slow motion execution in the UK can be stopped. If we are to uphold democratic values, respect the rule of law and safeguard press freedom, Assange should be freed immediately. We therefore ask all UK parliamentarians:

- 1) To ask the governor of Belmarsh prison to urgently facilitate the long-standing request from British MPs to meet with Assange in prison
- 2) To prioritise intervention and press the Home Secretary and US counterparts to halt the extradition process and release Assange
- 3) To join forces with [German](#), [Greek](#), [Italian](#), [Irish](#), [French](#) , [Australian](#) and other [international parliamentarians](#) who are calling for Assange's freedom.

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