



WORLD

# The U.K. says Julian Assange can be extradited to the U.S. to face spying charges

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WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange pauses as he makes a statement to media gathered outside the High Court in London in 2011.

*Kirsty Wigglesworth/AP*

LONDON (AP) — The British government has ordered the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States to face spying charges. WikiLeaks said it would appeal.

Home Secretary Priti Patel signed the extradition order on Friday, her department said. It follows a British court ruling in April that Assange could be sent to the U.S. over WikiLeaks' publication of a huge trove of classified documents more than a decade ago.

The Home Office said in a statement that "the U.K courts have not found that it would be oppressive, unjust or an abuse of process to extradite Mr. Assange."

"Nor have they found that extradition would be incompatible with his human rights, including his right to a fair trial and to freedom of expression, and that whilst in the U.S. he will be treated appropriately, including in relation to his health."

The decision is a big moment in Assange's years-long battle to avoid facing trial in the U.S. — though not necessarily the end of the tale. Assange has 14 days to appeal.

The U.S. has asked British authorities to extradite Assange so he can stand trial on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse. American prosecutors say Assange unlawfully helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

"Today is not the end of the fight. It is only the beginning of a new legal battle," said Assange's wife, Stella Assange. She said the U.K. decision marked "a dark day for press freedom and for British democracy."

"Julian did nothing wrong," she said. "He has committed no crime and is not a criminal. He is a journalist and a publisher, and he is being punished for doing his job."

A British judge approved the extradition in April, leaving the final decision to the government. The ruling came after a legal battle that went all the way to the U.K. Supreme Court.

Journalism organizations and human rights groups have called on Britain to refuse the extradition request.

Supporters and lawyers for Assange, 50, argue that he was acting as a journalist and is entitled to First Amendment protections of freedom of speech for publishing documents that exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. They argue that his case is politically motivated.

Assange's lawyers say he could face up to 175 years in jail if he is convicted in the U.S., though American authorities have said any sentence is likely to be much lower than that.

Assange has been held at Britain's high-security Belmarsh Prison in London since 2019, when he was arrested for skipping bail during a separate legal battle. Before that, he spent seven years inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault.

Sweden dropped the sex crimes investigations in November 2019 because so much time had elapsed.

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