



## Julian Assange Testifies on U.S. Prosecution

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange testified during a Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) hearing, and spoke about his U.K. imprisonment at HM Prison Belmarsh and his plea deal with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). Assange said he chose freedom over justice, stating:

I eventually chose freedom over unrealizable justice, after being detained for years and facing a 175 year sentence with no effective remedy.... Justice for me is now precluded, as the U.S. government insisted in writing into its plea agreement that I cannot file a case at the European Court of Human Rights or even a freedom of information act request over what it did to me as a result of its extradition request. I want to be totally clear. I am not free today because the system worked. I am free today because after years of incarceration I plead guilty to journalism. I plead guilty to seeking information from a source. I plead guilty to obtaining information from a source. And I plead guilty to informing the public what that information was. I did not plead guilty to anything else.



AP Images  
Julian Assange

Assange noted while former President Barack Obama's administration chose not to indict him, former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo targeted him during the Trump administration, alleging Pompeo ordered his assassination, stating:

President Obama's Justice Department chose not to indict me, recognizing that no crime had been committed. The United States had never before prosecuted a publisher for publishing or obtaining government information. To do so would require a radical and ominous reinterpretation of the US Constitution.... However, in February 2017, the landscape changed dramatically. President Trump had been elected. He appointed two wolves in MAGA hats: Mike Pompeo, a Kansas congressman and former arms industry executive, as CIA Director, and William Barr, a former CIA officer, as US Attorney General.... CIA Director



Written by [D. Michael DeRidder](#) on October 1, 2024

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Pompeo launched a campaign of retribution. It is now a matter of public record that under Pompeo's explicit direction, the CIA drew up plans to kidnap and to assassinate me within the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and authorized going after my European colleagues, subjecting us to theft, hacking attacks, and the planting of false information.

Speaking about WikiLeaks releasing classified U.S. military video titled "Collateral Murder," Assange criticized the dangerous precedent set by the U.S. DOJ, alleging they criminalized journalism for exposing atrocities committed by the U.S. military:

I see more impunity, more secrecy, more retaliation for telling the truth and more self censorship. It is hard not to draw a line from the US government's prosecution of me — its crossing the Rubicon by internationally criminalizing journalism — to the chilled climate for freedom of expression now.... When we published Collateral Murder, the infamous gun camera footage of a U.S. Apache helicopter crew eagerly blowing to pieces Iraqi journalists and their rescuers, the visual reality of modern warfare shocked the world. But we also used interest in this video to direct people to the classified policies for when the U.S. military could deploy lethal force in Iraq and how many civilians could be killed before gaining higher approval.

Assange asserted the U.S. DOJ prosecuting a foreign national set a dangerous precedent, claiming other national governments such as Russia could follow suit:

If the situation were not already bad enough in my case, the U.S. government asserted a dangerous new global legal position. Only U.S. citizens have free speech rights. Europeans and other nationalities do not have free speech rights. But the U.S. claims its Espionage Act still applies to them regardless of where they are. So Europeans in Europe must obey U.S. secrecy law with no defenses at all as far as the U.S. government is concerned.... Now that one foreign government has formally asserted that Europeans have no free speech rights, a dangerous precedent has been set. Other powerful states will inevitably follow suit. The war in Ukraine has already seen the criminalization of journalists in Russia, but based on the precedent set in my extradition, there is nothing to stop Russia, or indeed any other state, from targeting European journalists, publishers, or even social media users, by claiming that their secrecy laws have been violated. The rights of journalists and publishers within the European space are seriously threatened.

Assange concluded his testimony, stating journalism is a pillar of a free and informed society, and urged Europe to not allow the prosecution of journalists for doing their jobs, even if that means allowing classified government information to be exposed:

The fundamental issue is simple: Journalists should not be prosecuted for doing their jobs. Journalism is not a crime; it is a pillar of a free and informed society. Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates, if Europe is to have a future where the freedom to speak and the freedom to publish the truth are not privileges enjoyed by a few but rights guaranteed to all then it must act so that what has happened in my case never happens to anyone else.





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