



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 6, 2022

Mexican President: Dismantle Statue of Liberty if Assange Is Convicted

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador took the occasion of America's Independence Day to declare that the Statue of Liberty should be torn down if WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is extradited to the United States and convicted of espionage.

Assange is currently facing extradition from the United Kingdom to the United States, where he has been charged under the Espionage Act of 1917 for having published classified material revealing, among other things, potential war crimes committed by the U.S. military. If convicted, he could be sentenced to up to 175 years in prison.



AP Images
WikiLeaks' Julian Assange

The Australian journalist [appealed](#) his extradition to the U.K.'s High Court Friday.

According to the [Mexico Daily Post](#), during a Monday press conference at the National Palace in Mexico City, López Obrador called for "conven[ing] a meeting of the most important press in the world to exhort, request, call, so that a pardon be granted to Assange."

"If they don't do it," he added, "they will be tarnished and we will have to start the campaign that if they take him to the U.S., and sentence him to the maximum sentence and die in prison, they will have to dismantle the Statue of Liberty that the French delivered and that is in New York because it is no longer a symbol of freedom."

López Obrador isn't alone in coming to Assange's defense. London-based [PEN International](#), a worldwide writers' association, "strongly condemn[ed]" U.K. Home Secretary Priti Patel's decision to extradite Assange and called on the U.S. government to drop all charges against him. Noting that Assange is "the first publisher to be charged under the Espionage Act" in its 105-year existence, the group asserted:

Assange's prosecution raises profound concerns about freedom of the press. Invoking the Espionage Act for practices that include receiving and publishing classified information sends a dangerous signal to journalists and publishers worldwide. The state's desire to keep matters secret does not automatically override the public's right to know, particularly where there is strong evidence of human rights violations or corruption.

Assange's treatment can hardly be justified under the U.S. Constitution. As columnist [Ilana Mercer](#) observed, "First-Amendment jurisprudence is clear-cut with respect to the guerrilla journalism of WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks operators have committed no crime in publishing what is undeniably true, newsworthy information, with probative value. Besides, why has America any jurisdiction over a foreign entity (WikiLeaks) and a foreign national (Julian Assange)?"



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López Obrador has gone beyond merely stumping for a pardon for Assange. At least twice, he has offered to grant Assange [humanitarian asylum](#) and Mexican citizenship — assuming Assange can get to Mexico or one of its embassies. In 2020, he wrote a letter to then-U.S. President Donald Trump asking him to pardon Assange; he claims Trump never responded. On Monday, he said he was also “going to ask President [Joe] Biden to address this matter.”

“I am aware that it goes against the severe hardliners that exist in the United States as in all countries, but humanism must also prevail,” he declared.

The Mexican president, while undeniably a man of the Left, has made other sensible statements in recent years.

In January 2021, after Trump was kicked off social media, López Obrador also invoked the Lady of the Harbor, [saying](#), “I don’t know if you’ve noticed that since they took these decisions, the Statue of Liberty in New York is turning green with anger, because it doesn’t want to become an empty symbol.”

“What we want in Mexico is that liberties are guaranteed,” he said. “Zero censorship. Prohibition is prohibited.”

In addition, López Obrador has been a longtime opponent of foreign interventionism. Last month, he [condemned](#) NATO’s involvement in provoking and extending the war in Ukraine, saying it amounted to “I’ll supply the weapons, and you supply the dead,” a policy he deemed “immoral.”

“I believe in the need to change the policy that has been imposed for centuries, the exclusion, the desire to dominate ... the lack of respect for the sovereignty of the countries, the independence of every country,” he explained.

Assange could do far worse than to have López Obrador in his corner. Besides, he’s getting considerably more help from Mexico’s leader than he is from [his own prime minister](#).



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