



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on April 19, 2024

Reports Say U.S. Has Pledged not to Execute Assange

Washington has reportedly concurred with a [range of conditions](#) in response to the U.K. High Court's request for "satisfactory assurances" about the potential trial of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange if he is extradited to the United States on espionage charges. *New York Times* correspondent Megan Specia [shared](#) the signed guarantees in a post on X on April 17.



AP Images
Julian Assange

These assurances seemingly posit that Assange would be able to invoke the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, and would not be prejudiced at trial due to his nationality.

Notably, one of the assurances read, "A sentence of death will neither be sought nor imposed on ASSANGE. The United States is able to provide such assurance as ASSANGE is not charged with a death-penalty eligible offense, and the United States assures that he will not be tried for a death-eligible offense."

Having said that, although these assurances are "binding," the decision on the "applicability of the First Amendment" would lie "exclusively within the purview of the US courts." Moreover, the assurance letter stated that Assange "will have the ability to raise and seek to rely upon" this free-speech protection, a phrase that is hardly comforting for supporters of Assange, including Stella, his wife. In a [post](#) on X, Stella Assange slammed Joe Biden, who recently [stated](#) that he was "[considering](#)" dropping the prosecution against Assange:

Likewise, [Peter Hitchens](#), a writer for *The Mail on Sunday*, while claiming to be no fan of Assange's politics, cautioned that if Assange is handed over to the United States, "he will face the strong possibility of decades buried alive in some federal dungeon, the sort of place intended for mass murderers or terrorists."

Stella Assange [portrayed an even bleaker future](#) for Assange should the journalist face extradition, stating that her husband would "die." As reported by the BBC, Stella declared that she was "[astounded](#)" by the British High Court's ruling to delay her husband's appeal in March.

"Yet what the courts have done is to invite a political intervention from the US," she decried.

Assange is [challenging extradition](#) from the U.K. to the United States, where he is [wanted](#) for his publication of confidential U.S. military records and diplomatic cables in 2010, regarding alleged U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, Reuters reported. Washington claims that his release of these documents put lives at risk. The United States continues to maintain that Assange be handed over to them to stand trial on [17 counts of espionage](#), while Assange [faces up to 175 years in prison](#) if extradited and convicted. At the moment, Assange is not charged with any offense in the United States



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that carries the death penalty. Nonetheless, his lawyers [worry](#) he could be further slapped with treason or espionage charges in the future, which mandate capital punishment.

Although political extradition is explicitly forbidden according to the [UK-US Extradition Treaty](#). Assange's extradition to the United States owing to his publications of classified American government documents has seemed highly likely. In 2022, Priti Patel, former British Home Secretary, [authorized](#) Assange's extradition to the United States, in a move that was [lambasted by WikiLeaks](#).

Since 2019, Assange has been [held in Britain's Belmarsh Prison](#). Prior to that, he spent [about seven years](#) at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he had been given political asylum.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese from Assange's native Australia has hitherto [called on](#) Washington to drop charges against Assange, reiterating that free journalism is "essential to democracy." He added in 2022, "My position is clear and has been made clear to the US administration — that it is time that this matter be brought to a close."

Albanese also juxtaposed Assange's plight with that of the former U.S. army intelligence analyst Bradley "Chelsea" Manning, who was freed in 2017 when Barack Obama [commuted his 35-year military prison sentence](#) for disclosing the information pertaining to the nature of warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last year, the American ambassador to Australia, Caroline Kennedy, [suggested](#) that present espionage charges against Assange be downgraded "in exchange for a guilty plea." The suggested plea would consider the years Assange has already spent in Belmarsh prison, while he could serve the remainder of any sentence imposed by the United States in Australia under a prisoner-transfer agreement between the two countries.

"But there is a way to resolve it," Kennedy admitted in an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, as cited by the *Times*, adding, "You can read the [newspapers] just like I can."

However, Donald Rothwell from the Australian National University [pointed out](#) that one challenge would be that Assange would have to travel to the United States and admit guilt. In comments cited by the *Times*, Rothwell said, "Everything we know about Julian Assange suggests this would be a significant sticking point for him. It's not possible to strike a plea deal outside the relevant jurisdiction except in the most exceptional circumstances."

The next hearing, when judges will decide if the United States has fulfilled its conditions with regard to Assange's extradition, will be conducted on May 20. In the meantime, Assange will continue to linger on within the confines of Belmarsh, estranged from his family and [suffering health-wise](#).



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