

U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530-0001  
October 15, 2021

Attorney General Merrick Garland:

We, the undersigned press freedom, civil liberties, and international human rights advocacy organizations, write again to share our profound concern about the ongoing criminal and extradition proceedings relating to Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, under the Espionage Act and the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act.<sup>1</sup>

In February, members of this coalition wrote to the Acting Attorney General, urging that the criminal charges against Mr. Assange be dropped.<sup>2</sup> We now renew that request with even greater urgency, in light of a recent story in *Yahoo News* describing alarming discussions within the CIA and Trump administration before the indictment against Assange was filed.<sup>3</sup> The *Yahoo News* story only heightens our concerns about the motivations behind this prosecution, and about the dangerous precedent that is being set.

As we noted in our earlier correspondence, the signatories to this letter have different perspectives on Mr. Assange and his organization. We are united, however, in our view that the criminal case against him poses a grave threat to press freedom both in the United States and abroad. We were disappointed that the Department of Justice appealed the decision by Judge Vanessa Baraitser of the Westminster Magistrates' Court to reject the Trump administration's extradition request.<sup>4</sup> Especially in light of the recent news report, we urge you to drop that appeal and dismiss the underlying indictment.



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<sup>1</sup> “WikiLeaks Founder Julian Assange Charged in 18-Count Superseding Indictment.” Department of Justice. May 3, 2019. <<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/wikileaks-founder-julian-assange-charged-18-count-superseding-indictment>> and “WikiLeaks Founder Charged in Superseding Indictment.” Department of Justice. June 24, 2020. <<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/wikileaks-founder-charged-superseding-indictment>>

<sup>2</sup> Savage, Charlie. “Civil-Liberties Groups Ask Biden Justice Dept. to Drop Julian Assange Case.” *The New York Times*. February 8, 2021. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/08/us/politics/julian-assange-indictment.html>>

<sup>3</sup> Dorfman, Zach; Naylor, Sean D.; Isikoff, Michael. “Kidnapping, assassination and a London shoot-out: Inside the CIA's secret war plans against WikiLeaks.” *Yahoo News*. September 26, 2021. <<https://news.yahoo.com/kidnapping-assassination-and-a-london-shoot-out-inside-the-ci-as-secret-war-plans-against-wiki-leaks-090057786.html>>

<sup>4</sup> Order of District Judge (Magistrates' Court) Vanessa Baraitser In the Westminster Magistrates' Court, January 4, 2021. <<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/USA-v-Assange-judgment-040121.pdf>>



As we explained in our earlier letter, journalists routinely engage in much of the conduct described in the indictment: speaking with sources, asking for clarification or more documentation, and receiving and publishing official secrets. News organizations frequently and necessarily publish classified information in order to inform the public of matters of profound public

significance. We appreciate that the government has a legitimate interest in protecting bona fide national security interests, but the proceedings against Mr. Assange jeopardize journalism that is crucial to democracy. In our view, a precedent created by prosecuting Assange could be used against publishers and journalists alike, chilling their work and undermining freedom of the press.

Major news organizations share this concern. The charges against Assange have been condemned by virtually every major American news outlet,<sup>5</sup> even though many of those news outlets have criticized Mr. Assange in the past.

In light of these concerns, and in light of the shocking new reporting on the government's conduct in this case, we respectfully urge you to drop the ongoing appeal of Judge Baraitser's ruling and to dismiss the indictment of Mr. Assange.

Respectfully,

*(in alphabetical order)*

Access Now

American Civil Liberties Union

Amnesty International USA

Center for Constitutional Rights

Committee to Protect Journalists

Defending Rights & Dissent

Demand Progress Education Fund

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Fight for the Future

First Amendment Coalition

Free Press

Freedom of the Press Foundation

Human Rights Watch

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<sup>5</sup> Fassett, Camille. "Press freedom advocates and news outlets strongly condemn new charges against Julian Assange." Freedom of the Press Foundation. May 24, 2019.

<https://freedom.press/news/press-freedom-advocates-and-news-outlets-advocates-strongly-condemn-new-charges-against-julian-assange/>

Index on Censorship

Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University

National Coalition Against Censorship

Open The Government

Partnership for Civil Justice Fund

PEN America

Project on Government Oversight

Reporters Without Borders

RootsAction.org

The Press Freedom Defense Fund of First Look Institute

Whistleblower and Source Protection Program (WHISPeR) at ExposeFacts

