

Brits inflict 'psychological torture' on Julian Assange

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, has published a scathing condemnation of the “psychological torture” and injustice inflicted on Julian Assange. In his 31 May statement, Melzer said the evidence is overwhelming and clear. “Mr Assange has been deliberately exposed, for a period of several years, to progressively severe forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the cumulative effects of which can only be described as psychological torture.”

UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt snapped back, tweeting: “This is wrong. Assange chose to hide in the embassy and was always free to leave and face justice. The UN Special Rapporteur should allow British courts to make their judgements without his interference or inflammatory accusations.” Melzer quickly fired back: “With all due respect, Sir: Mr Assange was about as ‘free to leave’ as a someone sitting on a rubber boat in a shark pool. As detailed in my formal letter to you, so far, UK courts have not shown the impartiality and objectivity required by the rule of law.”

Melzer told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Australia is a glaring absence in this case. They’re just not around, as if Assange was not an Australian citizen. That is not the correct way of dealing with that.” Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade immediately released a statement rejecting “any suggestion” by Melzer that the Australian Government is complicit in psychological torture or has shown a lack of consular support for Assange.

The token consular support from the Australian government does not fool thinking Australians. Any government with integrity would condemn the British show-trial and US extradition order, and applaud Assange’s courage in exposing war crimes, indiscriminate murder, and systematic corruption. But the Australian government has opted for fake justice. Not such a surprise, considering its full support for illegal regime change wars, including the 2003 Iraq War which killed over one million Iraqis.

US intelligence agencies claim Assange put lives at risk by recklessly publishing classified material. But these agencies have a disturbing track record of false claims. Remember Iraq’s alleged WMDs! So, what is the truth? In his book *What Uncle Sam Wants: US Foreign Policy Objectives in Australia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave, May 2019), Prof. Clinton Fernandes of the University of NSW examines the contents and consequences of the release of WikiLeaks’ cables. He concludes that Assange and WikiLeaks did not identify people and put no-one’s life at risk.

Melzer has clearly recognised a grave injustice: “In 20 years of work with victims of war, violence and political persecution I have never seen a group of democratic States ganging up to deliberately isolate, demonise and abuse a single individual for such a long time and with so little regard for human dignity and the rule of law,” Melzer concluded. “The collective persecution of Julian Assange must end here and now!”

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