



Australian Citizens Party

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Assange trial may determine your fate

This media release is an article that was published in the Australian Alert Service on 26 February 2020. Julian Assange's extradition hearing commenced on 24 February. Following a week of legal argument the proceedings were adjourned and will continue with three weeks of evidence scheduled to begin on 18 May. In the lead-up to the May trial, it's vital for Australians to demand justice, and that Assange be exonerated and free to return to Australia.

We face perilous times should the British Crown Court uphold the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States. A 25 February tweet by Nils Melzer, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, makes this clear: "This is not just about Julian Assange. This is a battle over press freedom, the rule of law and the future even of democracy. For democracy cannot co-exist with secrecy. When you deprive the public of their right to know, you deprive them of the tools to control their government!"

Assange should be hailed as a hero who has exposed war crimes and systemic corruption. Yet he faces torture and life in jail. If we as a society collectively accept such a miscarriage of justice through our inaction and indifference, we risk going to our deathbeds with a nagging pain that we failed to act when we could. We risk leaving our world to tyrannical leaders and a miserable future for many generations to come.

In a 24 February interview on RT's Going Underground, Melzer explained the media stonewall he experienced last June. "I was unable to place an op-ed demasking the torture of Julian Assange after having visited him and examined him with medical experts. I contacted the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the Australian mainstream media, the British mainstream media; it was impossible to place it."

The mainstream media operates in a straitjacket under increasingly overt fascist control. It disseminates non-stop propaganda for vested interests, but at times competent, honest journalists can air an important story. The injustice suffered by Assange has inspired many journalists with a conscience to speak out. As of 26 February, over 1,300 journalists from 99 countries have signed a powerful statement demanding the immediate release of Julian Assange. The list includes several notable Australian journalists such as former ABC Four Corners host Kerry O'Brien and former chief of staff and acting foreign editor of the *Australian* newspaper Andrew Fowler.

Where does Amnesty International (AI) stand on Assange? They have refused to name Assange a prisoner of conscience and have almost ignored him. Melzer explained that when Amnesty uses its worldwide influence to exclude individuals such as Assange it becomes "very problematic, especially when we are talking about a journalist who has been exposing grave violations of human rights and who is prosecuted precisely because he has exposed violations of human rights." On 17 May 2019, the Julian Assange Defence Committee received a response from Amnesty International UK in which it stated: "Julian Assange's case is a case we're monitoring closely but not actively working on. Amnesty International does not consider Julian Assange to be a Prisoner of Conscience." AI has taken the same position for Assange's collaborator, US Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning. This should not be a surprise. AI was founded in 1961 as a specialised British intelligence agency. Its founders had deep ties to the British Foreign Office, and human rights was always a cover for foreign meddling.

The show trial

Lawyer James Lewis, representing the US government, claimed that Assange's WikiLeaks put lives at risk by publishing names in classified material, but he was not capable of naming any victims. Moreover, such claims of lives being put at risk contradict previous statements. For instance, in 2010 a US official was told in a State Department briefing that the impact of the leaks "was embarrassing but not damaging", according to Reuters. By contrast the illegal Anglo-American war against Iraq caused over 1.2 million unnecessary deaths.

US Prosecutors want to deny Assange the First Amendment right to free speech because US law doesn't apply to non-citizens, and at the same time they seek to prosecute him under the US *Espionage Act*. How can they have it both ways? Veteran journalist John Pilger provided an answer in a 24 January tweet: "In court, US lawlessness drives the Julian Assange extradition. The protection of the US Constitution for journalists does not apply to him, they say. And when extradited, he will be subject to Special Administrative Measures that cut him off from all humanity. This is fascism."

The Special Administrative Measures to which Pilger refers are a secretive form of extreme isolation in US federal prisons, combining the brutality and isolation of maximum-security units with additional restrictions that deny prisoners almost any connection to the human world. It would put Assange and his lawyers in separate cells with a grill between them, making eye contact and the sharing of documents impossible.

It's encouraging that MPs George Christensen and Andrew Wilkie have tirelessly worked together in justice for Assange. Normally seen to be on opposite sides of the political divide, their collaboration shows how a fight for principle can unite us. Their recent high-profile visit to London could not be censored, and so more Australians are becoming aware of the implications of what is at stake. In Question Time on 25 February, Greens Senator Peter Whish-Wilson asked Foreign Minister Marise Payne: "A few days ago, it was revealed that meetings between Julian Assange and his lawyers had been secretly taped and filmed. This is a clear and egregious breach of legal professional privilege. Minister, do you believe that Julian Assange will get a fair trial in the US, or do you agree with Nils Melzer that, for all intents and purposes, Julian Assange is a political prisoner and he should not be extradited to the US, where he would face nothing but a politically motivated show trial?"

While Payne dodged the question, pressure is mounting. Australians must demand more from our elected leaders, most of whom are still silent on the fate of Julian Assange.