



EXCLUSIVE: Julian Assange loses his appeal against extradition to the US on espionage charges

Description

Julian Assange has lost his appeal against extradition to the US on espionage charges.

The judgment was handed down privately on Monday at the High Court.

WikiLeaks founder Assange, 51, launched the appeal last June after then-Home Secretary Priti Patel signed an order authorizing his removal.

Yesterday his wife Stella said that he will appeal the decision. It will be Assange's last chance to overturn the ruling before his options in the UK courts are exhausted.

The Freedom of the Press Foundation said it was 'highly disappointed by the UK High Court's rejection of Julian Assange's appeal of his extradition to the United States on Espionage Act charges.'

Director of Advocacy Seth Stern said: 'The idea of Assange or anyone being tried in a U.S. court for obtaining and publishing confidential documents the same way investigative reporters do every day should be terrifying to all Americans.'

'If [President Joe] Biden lets this case proceed, future administrations will surely use the precedent of the Assange prosecution, and the unconstitutional authority to criminalize newsgathering that Biden is claiming, to go after journalists they don't like.'

'It's time for Biden to drop this case and show the world he's serious about press freedom.'

There is still a chance that his extradition could be blocked by a last minute intervention from judges in Europe.

In December, Assange appealed to the European Court of Human Rights.

To halt his extradition now, the European Court would have to issue an emergency injunction known as a Rule 39 order.

This allows a judge to effectively block any action until further legal proceedings to decide on the merits of a case.

These so-called 'interim measures' are typically used to suspend an extradition, often by asylum seekers who fear persecution if they are returned to their home country.

Between 2020 and 2022, the ECHR granted 12 of 161 applications for 'interim measures' against the UK government.

Most recently, the order was used to stop the deportation of illegal migrants to Rwanda.

Such an order would be extremely controversial and likely be seen as another attack on British sovereignty, fuelling calls for Britain to leave the European Convention on Human Rights.

Meanwhile, Home Office officials are preparing the paperwork needed to extradite Assange at short notice.

If there are no further legal challenges, his extradition could take place in the next few weeks.

The case is thought to be one of the longest extradition battles in the last decade.

In 2019 he was charged by US authorities over almost 500,000 documents leaked in 2010 and 2011 about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

If convicted in the US, Mr Assange faces a possible penalty of up to 175 years in jail, his lawyers have said.

However the US government has said the sentence was more likely to be between four and six years.

In a long-running legal battle, a district judge at Westminster Magistrates Court initially blocked his extradition in January 2021 due to a real and 'oppressive' risk of suicide.

But this decision was overturned at the High Court after US authorities provided assurances that Mr Assange would be spared highly restricted prison conditions.

Yesterday Assange's lawyers, Birnberg Peirce said no one was available to comment on the ongoing case.

Assange's wife, human rights lawyer Stella, tweeted: 'On Tuesday next week my husband will make a renewed application for appeal to the High Court.'

'The matter will then proceed to a public hearing before two new judges at the High Court and we remain optimistic that we will prevail and that Julian will not be extradited to the United States where he faces charges that could result in him spending the rest of his life in a maximum security prison for publishing true information that revealed war crimes committed by the US government.'

by Chris Pollard and Rebecca Camber

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1. Crime-Justice-Terrorism-Corruption
2. Freedom-Free speech-Resistance & H-rights
3. Main
4. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

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