

Julian Assange Prepares for Last-ditch Legal Appeal After UK High Court Dismisses Plea Against Extradition

As the Wikileaks founder is brought “dangerously close” to being extradited to the US, Assange and his family will attempt a last-ditch effort with a renewed appeal to the UK High Court

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*In a major setback to jailed WikiLeaks founder and journalist, **Julian Assange**, a UK High Court judge dismissed his appeal against his extradition to the US. In a 3-page decision handed down on Tuesday, June 6, **Justice Jonathan Swift** of the High Court of Justice in London rejected all eight grounds of appeal against the extradition order that was [sanctioned by the UK Home Office](#) around a year ago.*

Despite the setback, Assange is expected to file a renewed application challenging Justice Swift’s decision. According to a statement released by lawyer and Assange’s wife Stella, the defense will be preparing a renewed application for appeal to be filed by Tuesday, June 13, challenging the decision before two different High Court judges in a public hearing. This appeal attempt is the last legal recourse for Assange who has been fighting against the US extradition attempt for over three years.

In her statement announcing the decision to appeal, Stella Assange said that they “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 U.S. government.”

Expressing the disappointment of the family and supporters, Assange’s father John Shipton said, “Julian’s family watch on, horrified, and all fair-minded people the world over watch with profound disquiet and alarm.” He added that his son’s grounds for appeal were “clear, firm and just.”

Years-long legal ordeal

The US extradition plea was initially rejected by a district court judge in London in January 2021 on grounds of Assange's mental health and the risk of suicide and other bodily harm if he was extradited.

This decision was overturned by the High Court in London in December that year based on diplomatic assurances given by the US after the district court's decision. In June 2022, the UK Home Office sanctioned the extradition based on the High Court's decision.

Assange, who was arrested and dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy in April 2019, has spent four years without a charge or conviction throughout this litigation period in a high-security prison in Belmarsh in the outskirts of London.

Rights groups condemn verdict

The decision by Justice Swift has raised alarm among press freedom advocates around the world, with Reporters Without Borders (RSF) pointing out that Assange is now "dangerously close" to extradition.

"It is absurd that a single judge can issue a three-page decision that could land Julian Assange in prison for the rest of his life and permanently impact the climate for journalism around the world," said Rebecca Vincent, director of campaigns at RSF, in a statement released in response to the judge's decision.

If extradited, Assange will stand trial before a federal grand jury in the US on 18 charges that carry a combined prison sentence of 175 years. Of the 18 charges leveled against him, 17 are under the infamous US Espionage Act. The indictment against him, initiated under the Donald Trump administration and continued under President Joe Biden, is the first time ever a publisher has been charged under the Act.

"The historical weight of what happens next cannot be overstated; it is time to put a stop to this relentless targeting of Assange and act instead to protect journalism and press freedom," Vincent added.

In their statement, the RSF reiterated their demand to President Biden to drop the charges against Assange, close the case against him, and allow for his release without further delay.

In the dismissed appeal, Assange's defense team had raised several issues with the extradition sanctioned by former UK Home Secretary Priti Patel during the Boris Johnson-led Conservative government. Among the key grounds raised by the defense was that if extradited, Assange will face a politically-motivated trial in the US, in violation of the extradition treaty between the two countries.

The defense also raised matters like Assange's deteriorating mental and physical health; the fact that he was being prosecuted for publishing what falls within the ambit of protected speech; unsafe prison conditions in the US; and also how the US has misrepresented several facts throughout the course of the extradition trial.

In the meanwhile, calls have been raised from Assange's home country of Australia demanding the intervention of the Labor-led government of Anthony Albanese. Andrew

Wilkie, an independent federal legislator who leads the Parliamentary Julian Assange group, has reiterated his stand against the extradition.

“Mr Assange is an Australian citizen and journalist, whose matter should not even be before a court, as the case has always been an intensely political matter,” Wilkie said in a statement responding to Justice Swift’s decision. “Enough is enough. The US must drop the extradition and discontinue these charges immediately. And the Australian Government must continue to speak up and push for an immediate end to this matter as Julian’s life is at stake.”

Similarly, Green Party senator **Peter Whish-Wilson** tweeted that the Australian prime minister “must pick up the phone today to call Joe Biden and intervene. Julian Assange must not be extradited to the US where press freedoms will die the minute they seal the door of his high-security gaol cell.”

Progressives and Assange supporters in Australia are also mobilizing to protest against the looming extradition. In Melbourne, a [rally has been organized](#) outside the UK consulate, with Gabriel Shipton, Assange’s brother, expected to address the protesters. Similar such mobilizations are expected in different parts of the country.

While the Albanese government has repeatedly expressed concerns about Assange’s case and has claimed that they are making use of diplomatic channels to secure his release, the closed-door nature of these diplomatic negotiations have raised concerns from progressives regarding the government’s dedication on the matter.

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