

Top UN Anti-Torture Official Urges Trump to Send Message of ‘Justice, Truth, and Humanity’ by Pardoning Julian Assange

"WikiLeaks fights secrecy and corruption throughout the world and, therefore, acts in the public interest both of the American people and of humanity as a whole."

By [Brett Wilkins](#)

Global Research, December 23, 2020

[Common Dreams](#) 22 December 2020

Region: [Europe, USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

Echoing calls from global grassroots campaigners, the top United Nations anti-torture official on Tuesday asked President Donald Trump to pardon jailed WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is languishing in London's notorious Belmarsh prison as he awaits his fate regarding possible extradition to the United States to stand trial for what critics say are unwarranted espionage charges.

In a [letter](#) to the outgoing American president, Nils Melzer, the U.N. special rapporteur on torture, noted that "Assange has been arbitrarily deprived of his liberty for the past 10 years," a "high price to pay for the courage to publish true information about government misconduct throughout the world."

"I visited Mr. Assange in Belmarsh," wrote Melzer, "and I can attest to the fact that his health has seriously deteriorated, to the point where his life is now in danger. Critically, Mr. Assange suffers from a documented respiratory condition which renders him extremely vulnerable to the Covid-19 pandemic that has recently broken out in the prison where he is being held."

Melzer continued:

I ask you to pardon Mr. Assange, because he is not, and has never been, an enemy of the American people. His organization, WikiLeaks, fights secrecy and corruption throughout the world and, therefore, acts in the public interest both of the American people and of humanity as a whole... Mr. Assange has never published false information.

The cause for any reputational harm that may have resulted from his publications is not to be found in any misconduct on his part, but in the very misconduct which he exposed... Prosecuting Mr. Assange for publishing true information about serious official misconduct, whether in America or elsewhere, would amount to "shooting the messenger" rather than correcting the problem he exposed. This would be incompatible with the core values of justice, rule of law, and press freedom, as reflected in the American Constitution and international human rights instruments ratified by the United States.

Melzer appealed to Trump's campaign promise to "pursue an agenda of fighting government corruption and misconduct," writing that "because allowing the prosecution of Mr. Assange to continue would mean that, under your legacy, telling the truth about such corruption and misconduct has become a crime."

UN Special Rapporteur on torture has published a letter requesting a presidential pardon for Julian Assange <https://t.co/YAFuOijtZN>

— Freedom of the Press (@FreedomofPress) [December 22, 2020](#)

"In pardoning Mr Assange," he added, "you would send a clear message of justice, truth, and humanity to the American people and to the world. You would rehabilitate a courageous man who has suffered injustice, persecution, and humiliation for more than a decade, simply for telling the truth."

"Last but not least, you would give back to Mr. Assange's two young sons the loving father they need and look up to," Melzer wrote.

"For these reasons, I respectfully appeal to you to pardon Julian Assange," he concluded. "I believe that, after a decade of persecution, this man's unjust suffering must end now."

According to the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the 49-year-old Australian has been [arbitrarily deprived](#) of his freedom since his arrest on December 7, 2010. Since then he has been subjected to house arrest, imprisonment in Britain, and seven years in political asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

While none of the people implicated in war crimes and other misdeeds revealed by WikiLeaks in the [Afghan War Diary](#), [Iraq War Logs](#), [Guantánamo Files](#), the "[Collateral Murder](#)" video, and other leaks have been seriously punished, Assange and Chelsea Manning—the U.S. Army whistleblower who provided much of the published material—have [faced the full fury](#) of the U.S. government.

Assange is due back in court on January 4, when he will likely learn whether he will be extradited. If found guilty in the U.S. of violating the 1917 Espionage Act and Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, Assange could be sentenced to spend the rest of his life behind bars, most likely in a Colorado supermax prison, which a former warden [called](#) "a fate worse than death."

In recent months there have been [growing calls](#) from activists and public figures around the world for Trump to pardon Assange before leaving office next month. In addition to Melzer, former National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden, filmmaker Oliver Stone, actress and activist Pamela Anderson, and other leading press freedom advocates are among those urging Trump to act.

There is also a [bipartisan push](#) for Trump to pardon for Snowden, who is living in exile in Russia as a result of [releasing](#) classified documents regarding the U.S. government's global mass surveillance program.

Democrats silence on a pardon for Edward Snowden is both shameful and bad strategy. He's seen as a hero around the world, and especially by younger voters. Letting the right pretend to be the true defenders of human rights makes me sick to my stomach. <https://t.co/E85moiKhKE>

— Evan Greer (@evan_greer) [December 22, 2020](#)

Trump is reportedly [considering](#) pardons for both Assange and Snowden.

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