



Committee to Protect Journalists

United States Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20530

*Sent via email*

May 17, 2024

Dear Attorney General Garland,

We, the undersigned coalition of press freedom, civil liberties, and international human rights organizations, write to express acute concern about the Justice Department's ongoing criminal and extradition proceedings relating to Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, under the Espionage Act and Computer Fraud and Abuse Act.

Since we [last wrote](#) over a year ago, Assange's appeals process has continued to play out in a British court, which will decide on May 20 if he is allowed to appeal his case.

If his appeal is denied on May 20, he will either be extradited to the United States, or apply to the European Court of Human Rights. If his May 20 appeal is accepted, his case will continue to play out in British courts.

Furthermore, the recent [U.S. assurances](#) that Assange will be allowed to 'rely upon' the First Amendment do not adequately address the First Amendment concerns we have previously raised. It ignores the fact that the charges themselves directly challenge his First Amendment rights, and the right to freedom of expression under international human rights law. This would create an alarming legal precedent for the extradition of journalists to the U.S. for publishing classified material in the public interest.

However, this entire legal process could and should be swiftly ended if the Justice Department were to drop the charges, which we firmly believe undermine freedom of the press both domestically and internationally.

The prosecution of Assange in the United States would create legal pathways under the Espionage Act and the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act that would allow for the prosecution of journalists who are simply doing their jobs and covering matters of public interest.

President Biden has emphasized the importance of a free press in American democracy and around the world. In early April, the president stated that the U.S. is "[considering](#)" a request by the Australian government to return Assange, an Australian citizen, to his home country. We welcome the

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possibility that the Espionage Act and CFAA would not be used against Assange, thus avoiding the creation of a harmful legal precedent. However, a possibility is not enough. A decision is urgently needed.

As we have previously noted, the Obama administration declined to press charges against Assange, citing the “[New York Times problem](#),” meaning if they prosecuted Assange for his work, it would create a legal argument for prosecuting journalists.

The Trump administration, which made clear its feelings toward press freedom, reversed this decision and decided to indict Assange. It is now time for your Justice Department to reset the course of freedom of the press by dropping the charges against Assange.

Sincerely,

The Committee to Protect Journalists

American Civil Liberties Union

Amnesty International

The Coalition For Women In Journalism

Defending Rights & Dissent

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Fight for the Future

First Amendment Coalition

Freedom of the Press Foundation

Index on Censorship

Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University

Partnership for Civil Justice Fund

PEN America

RootsAction.org

Whistleblower and Source Protection Program (WHISPeR) at ExposeFacts