



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

President Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

11 June 2021

Dear President Biden,

We write to congratulate you on your election and to welcome you to the United Kingdom for the G7 summit.

We hope that your administration will become a staunch ally of all those working to roll back the shadow of criminalisation against journalists and others who exercise the rights enshrined in the United States by the Constitution's First Amendment.

Your administration, in partnership with the government of this country, has launched the campaign in defence of media freedom. It is in this context that we wish to raise with you the case of Julian Assange.

As President Obama's Vice President you played an important role in the decision not to prosecute Julian Assange over publications relating to the Afghan and Iraq wars and conditions in Guantanamo Bay. You, like us, must have been disappointed when your predecessor launched a prosecution carrying a 175-year sentence against a globally renowned publisher and free press campaigner for his 2010 award-winning publishing work, which was carried out in the United Kingdom.

Civil liberties groups and top newsrooms alike view the government's prosecution against this publisher with alarm. The Washington Post's Executive Editor writes that the indictment is "criminalizing common practices in journalism that have long served the public interest". The New York Times Editorial Board considers it to be "aimed straight at the heart of the First Amendment", and for Amnesty International, "the charges against him should never have been brought in the first place" because it is "putting media freedom and freedom of expression on trial".

The chilling effect of this prosecution is keenly felt on our shores, too. The National Union of Journalists and Reporters Without Borders have warned that "Our government

must ensure the UK is a safe place for journalists and publishers to work. Whilst Julian Assange remains in prison facing extradition, it is not."

Earlier this year Westminster Magistrates Court refused the US application to extradite Julian Assange to the US. The Guardian Editorial Board noted that your incoming administration "can, and should, let Mr. Assange walk free".

We had hoped that this might be the occasion to draw a line under this prosecution. Unfortunately, the US Department of Justice is still pursuing this case, leaving Julian Assange facing a third year of incarceration in Belmarsh High-Security prison.

Mr. Assange, an Australian member of the press who had been invited to this country by The Guardian in 2010 to work on these publications on the basis of our robust free press traditions, is the subject of a US criminal case. The effect of your predecessor's decision to take a criminal case against a member of the press working in our country is to restrict the scope of permissible press activities here, and set a precedent that others will no doubt exploit.

The case against Mr. Assange weakens the right to publish important information that the government finds uncomfortable. Indeed, this value is central to a free and open society. The case against Mr. Assange also undermines public confidence in our legal systems. Our countries are also increasingly confronted with the contradiction of advocating for press freedom abroad while holding Mr. Assange for years in the UK's most notorious prison at the request of the US government.

We appeal to you to drop this prosecution, an act that would be a clarion call for freedom that would echo around the globe.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Burgon MP  
Diane Abbott MP  
Tahir Ali MP  
Apsana Begum MP  
Baroness Christine Blower  
Ian Byrne MP  
Joanna Cherry MP  
Jeremy Corbyn MP  
David Davis MP  
Neale Hanvey MP  
Lord John Hendy  
Ian Lavery MP

Caroline Lucas MP  
Kenny MacAskill MP  
John McDonnell MP  
Grahame Morris MP  
Kate Osborne MP  
Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP  
Tommy Sheppard MP  
Lord Prem Sikka  
Zarah Sultana MP  
Jon Trickett MP  
Claudia Webbe MP  
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