



Committee to Protect Journalists

United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C., 20530

December 8, 2022

Sent via email

Dear Attorney General Garland,

We, the undersigned coalition of press freedom, civil liberties, and international human rights organizations, write to express grave 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.

It is more than a year since our coalition sent a joint [letter](#) calling for the charges against Assange to be dropped. In June, then U.K. Home Secretary [Priti Patel approved](#) Assange's extradition to the United States, a decision that Assange's legal team is in the process of appealing. Today, we repeat those concerns, and urge you to heed our request. We believe that the prosecution of Assange in the U.S. would set a harmful legal precedent and deliver a damaging blow to press freedom by opening the way for journalists to be tried under the Espionage Act if they receive classified material from whistleblowers.

Since President Biden took office, his administration has emphasized the important role that a free press plays in American democracy and around the world. In October, the Justice Department made [changes](#) to news media policy guidelines that generally prevent federal prosecutors from using subpoenas or other investigative tools against journalists who possess and publish classified information used in news gathering. We are grateful for these revisions, and urge you to further affirm the importance of press freedom by dropping the Justice Department's indictment against Assange and halting all efforts to extradite him to the U.S.

It merits noting that the Obama administration [refrained](#) from indicting Assange, recognizing the serious blow that this would bring to media freedom and the First Amendment more broadly. Furthermore, the U.S. prosecution of Assange undermines the country's ability to defend journalists against repression by authoritarian and other rights-abusing regimes abroad.

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It is time for the Biden administration to break from the Trump administration's decision to indict Assange – a move that was hostile to the media and democracy itself. Correcting the course is essential to protect journalists' ability to report freely on the United States without fear of retribution.

We again urge you to protect democratic values and human rights norms, including freedom of the press, by abandoning this relentless pursuit of Assange.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union
Amnesty International
Center for Constitutional Rights
Committee to Protect Journalists
Defending Rights & Dissent
Demand Progress Education Fund
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Fight for the Future
First Amendment Coalition
Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression
Free Press
Freedom of the Press Foundation
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Index on Censorship
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National Coalition Against Censorship
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