

Free Press Groups Condemn Julian Assange's Indictment

PEN International

The new charges brought by the US Department of Justice against Assange represent a real threat to investigative journalism and mark a major escalation of the Trump administration's attempts to deflect media scrutiny. Invoking the Espionage Act for practices that include receiving and publishing classified information sends a dangerous signal to journalists and publishers. Merely because a government decides that a specific document is secret or confidential does not make it so, and on many occasions the public's right to know overrides the state's desire to keep matters secret, such as evidence of human rights violations or corruption. This latest move effectively seeks to criminalize investigative journalism. PEN International urges the British authorities once again not to extradite Assange to the US, where he would be at risk of serious human rights violations.

Reporters Without Borders

The latest charges against Assange could be truly disastrous for the future of national security reporting in the United States. We have seen the Espionage Act used far too many times against journalistic sources already. RSF worries that this extraordinary measure by the Trump administration could set a dangerous precedent that could be used to prosecute journalists and publishers in the future for engaging in activities that investigative reporting relies on.

Free Press, Timothy Karr, Senior Director of Strategy and Communications

Regardless of your opinions about Assange, these charges are an assault on press freedom. Prosecuting journalists — any journalists — for publishing leaked material from government whistleblowers is wrong, dangerous and unconstitutional. It moves us closer to prosecuting any national-security journalist trying to expose the inner workings of the government, military or intelligence community. If this case goes forward, any reporter attempting to cover the most important stories of government wrongdoing, from corruption to war crimes, would fear a knock at their door. It's not enough to abandon this prosecution of Assange. Congress must repeal the Espionage Act and safeguard the First Amendment rights of whistleblowers and reporters.

ARTICLE 19, Executive Director Thomas Hughes

If Julian Assange is extradited, it would be the first time that the Espionage Act has been used in the United States to prosecute a journalist for publishing information that is both truthful and in the public interest, redefining protection of journalism in the US. This would set a dangerous precedent for media freedom and put editors and journalists in the US and beyond at risk, by an Administration that has been openly hostile to a free press.

While publishers must always balance the safety of individuals against the public interest, the Espionage Act is a vaguely worded blunt instrument that should not be used to prosecute journalists, publishers and whistleblowers who disclose information that is in the public interest. This goes against the First Amendment and international human rights treaties that protect freedom of expression.

The US Justice Department has a duty to protect freedom of expression. We urge them to drop the charges and end their efforts to extradite Assange. Given the uncertain constitutional grounds for this indictment, we urge the UK to not facilitate extradition.

[The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom](#), Managing Director Lutz Kinkel

You can think what you want about Assange but this is a disaster and may have implications for investigative journalism and press freedom everywhere. Regardless of whether one considers Assange a journalist or not, it bears the risk that it can be applied to journalists as well in a consequence.

Publishing information in the public interest that others would like to keep secret is a common task of investigative journalists. Assange's indictment could [open the door](#) to prosecuting reporters and whistleblowers for doing the same.

The President of the US wants to see Assange behind bars because he published classified material. Whistleblowers and publishers of leaked material are no foreign agents.

This indictment affects investigative journalism in general.

[Freedom of the Press Foundation](#)

Put simply, these unprecedented charges against Julian Assange and WikiLeaks are the most significant and terrifying threat to the First Amendment in the 21st century. The Trump administration is moving to explicitly criminalize national security journalism, and if this prosecution proceeds, dozens of reporters at the New York Times, Washington Post and elsewhere would also be in danger. The ability of the press to publish facts the government would prefer remain secret is both critical to an informed public and a fundamental right. This decision by the Justice Department is a massive and unprecedented escalation in Trump's war on journalism, and it's no exaggeration to say the First Amendment itself is at risk. Anyone who cares about press freedom should immediately and wholeheartedly condemn these charges.

[Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#)

Any government use of the Espionage Act to criminalize the receipt and publication of classified information poses a dire threat to journalists seeking to publish such information in the public interest, irrespective of the Justice Department's assertion that Assange is not a journalist.

[ACLU](#)

For the first time in the history of our country, the government has brought criminal charges against a publisher for the publication of truthful information. This is an extraordinary escalation of the Trump administration's attacks on journalism, and a direct assault on the First Amendment. It establishes a dangerous precedent that can be used to target all news organizations that hold the government accountable by publishing its secrets. And it is equally dangerous for U.S. journalists who uncover the secrets of other nations. If the US can prosecute a foreign publisher for violating our secrecy laws, there's nothing preventing China, or Russia, from doing the same.

[Committee to Protect Journalists](#), Assange indictment marks alarming new stage in US war on leaks

The Trump administration has bullied reporters, denied press credentials, and covered up for foreign dictators who attack journalists. This indictment, however, may end up being the administration's greatest legal threat to reporters," said CPJ North America Coordinator Alexandra Ellerbeck. "It is a reckless assault on the First Amendment that crosses a line no previous administration has been willing to cross, and threatens to criminalize the most basic practices of reporting.