



MEDIA RELEASE

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Plea deal ends personal ordeal for Julian Assange, but media freedom concerns remain

The reported plea bargain between Julian Assange and the United States government brings to a close one of the darkest periods in the history of media freedom, says the union for Australian journalists.

While the details of the deal are still to be confirmed, MEAA welcomes the release of Assange, a Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance member, after five years of relentless campaigning by journalists, unions, and press freedom advocates around the world.

MEAA remains concerned what the deal will mean for media freedom around the world.

The work of Wikileaks at the centre of this case – which exposed war crimes and other wrongdoing by the US in Iraq and Afghanistan – was strong, public interest journalism.

MEAA fears the deal will embolden the US and other governments around the world to continue to pursue and prosecute journalists who disclose to the public information they would rather keep suppressed.

MEAA Media Federal President Karen Percy welcomed the news that Julian Assange has already been released from Belmarsh Prison, where he has been held as his case has wound its way through UK courts.

“We wish Julian all the best as he is reunited with his wife, young sons and other relatives who have fought tirelessly for his freedom.

“We commend Julian for his courage over this long period, and his legal team and supporters for their relentless battle against this injustice.

“We’ve been extremely concerned about the impact on his physical and mental wellbeing during Julian’s long period of imprisonment and respect the decision to bring an end to the ordeal for all involved.

“The deal reported today does not in any way mean that the struggle for media freedom has been futile; quite the opposite, it places governments on notice that a global movement will be mobilised whenever they blatantly threaten journalism in a similar way.

“The espionage charges laid against Assange were a grotesque overreach by the US government and an attack on journalism and media freedom.

“The pursuit of Julian Assange has set a dangerous precedent that will have a potential chilling effect on investigative journalism.

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“The stories published by WikiLeaks and other outlets more than a decade ago were clearly in the public interest. The charges by the US sought to curtail free speech, criminalise journalism and send a clear message to future whistleblowers and publishers that they too will be punished.

“This was clearly in the public interest and it has always been an outrage that the US government sought to prosecute him for espionage for reporting that was published in collaboration with some of the world’s leading media organisations.”

Julian Assange has been a member since 2007 and in 2011 WikiLeaks won the Outstanding Contribution to Journalism Walkley award, one of Australia’s most prestigious journalism awards.

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