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25 November 2019

Senator the Hon Marise Payne  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Subject: Request for further government action on behalf of Mr Julian Assange**

The International PEN Sydney and Melbourne centres are affiliated with a network of 150 PEN International Centres worldwide who are dedicated to supporting persecuted writers, freedom of expression and the freedom to read.

We are deeply concerned for the current well-being – physical and psychological - of Mr Assange, an awarded and respected international journalist, and the outcome of his impending court case for extradition to the United States that begins on 25 February 2020. The US authorities are calling for the extradition of Julian Assange under the Espionage Act where he could face 175 years in jail, a life sentence.

We respectfully ask for your further consideration in this matter and urge you to oppose Mr Assange's extradition to the United States, and as Mr Assange is an Australian citizen, that you strongly request that your British counterparts do likewise.

Mr Assange is currently in Belmarsh prison, where he served a 50-week sentence for skipping bail by going into hiding in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in 2012. He is being held under extremely harsh conditions and visiting barrister Jennifer Robinson holds grave fears for his health. In addition she says that he is unable to properly prepare for his impending court case as he does not have adequate access to information required.

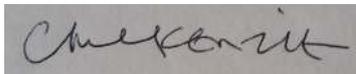
As you would know, the Swedish authorities have recently dropped their charges against Mr Assange, which now leaves the US charges. He has been indicted by the US Justice Department with 18 charges under the Espionage Act for his role in receiving and publishing classified defence documents both on the WikiLeaks website and in collaboration with major publishers including *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*.(1)

The US charges against Mr Assange relate to the secret military and diplomatic files provided by whistleblower Chelsea Manning. These files exposing appalling abuses by the US were covered by the Guardian, the New York Times among other media outlets, and provided the public with important and necessary information.

The US charges against Julian Assange stand in opposition to everything that our democracy, and those of Britain and the United States stand for – the freedom of the press and the public's legitimate right to know about what is carried out in their name by their governments.

Again, with respect, we ask you to take this message to your parliamentary colleagues and urge the Australian government to reconsider its position on Mr Assange and to speak against his extradition to the United States.

Yours truly



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Sydney PEN

(1) <https://www.mea.org/news/jennifer-robinson/>