

Assange says WikiLeaks work hampered

June 16 2011, By JILL LAWLESS , Associated Press



WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is seen with his ankle security tag at the house where he is required to stay, near Bungay, England, Wednesday, June 15, 2011. Assange says his house arrest over sex allegations is hampering the work of the secret-spilling site, and his supporters accuse Britain of spying on him. The 39-year-old Australian has spent six months at a supporter's rural estate as he fights extradition to Sweden, where he is accused of the rape and sexual assault of two women.(AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)

(AP) -- After six months under virtual house arrest, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange acknowledged Thursday that his detention is hampering the work of the secret-spilling site. His supporters accused Britain of subjecting him to "excessive and dehumanizing" treatment.

The 39-year-old Australian is living at a supporter's rural estate as he fights extradition to Sweden, where he is wanted for questioning over claims of rape and sexual molestation made by two women.

Assange's bail conditions require him to observe an overnight curfew, wear an [electronic tag](#) and report to police daily.

His supporters released a video to The Associated Press condemning the conditions. In it, [WikiLeaks](#) associate Sarah Harrison accuses authorities of treating Assange "like a caged animal."

British prosecutors, who initially opposed bail, say the strict conditions are necessary because the claims against Assange are serious and he is a flight risk.

Barrister and legal commentator Carl Gardner said that although Assange's freedom of movement is constrained, "he can move around, he can make public appearances. He is at liberty in the most basic sense of the phrase."

The video also claims police have set up [surveillance cameras](#) near the house to record license plates of visiting cars.

Vaughan Smith, who owns the 600-acre (240-hectare) property in eastern England, called it a "pretty intrusive regime" and said three cameras had appeared near the property since Assange came to stay.

Assange, who roamed the globe before his arrest in December, told the AP that he had become "a fixed [target](#)" for snoopers.

"It is easy to conduct surveillance against me and anyone I talk to," Assange said. "We take steps against this, but it is costly and time-consuming."

He said his house arrest had been "the single largest impediment to our work, with the possible exception of the illegal blockade being conducted by the major U.S. [financial institutions](#) against us."

Some U.S.-based banks and financial services have refused to handle payments to WikiLeaks.

U.S. authorities are investigating whether Assange and WikiLeaks violated American laws by releasing tens of thousands of secret government documents, including daily logs from the Iraq war and classified diplomatic cables from U.S. missions around the world.

Prosecutors have convened a grand jury near Washington to probe the WikiLeaks disclosures.

"A lot of our resources are tied up in dealing with the situation in the United States and the grand jury and this Swedish extradition case and the banking blockade placed on us by Visa, Mastercard, Bank of America and so on," Assange said. "So, while we are still producing publications every day, a lot of those resources have been taken away to deal with these events."

On July 12, the High Court in London will hear Assange's appeal against a judge's order that he be extradited to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual molestation against two women. Assange denies the charges, which he claims are politically motivated.

He said that if he lost the appeal, he could go to Britain's Supreme Court or the European Court of Human Rights. He said he was confident he would be cleared.

"I feel that the Swedish authorities will drop the case," Assange said. When asked why, he replied only that "there are many players in the Swedish situation."

Swedish prosecutors did not immediately return calls seeking comment.

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Citation: Assange says WikiLeaks work hampered (2011, June 16) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-assange-wikileaks-hampered.html>

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