

Internet has become 'surveillance machine': Assange

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Julian Assange, founder and editor-in-chief of Wikileaks, laughs as he speaks to an audience via Skype at the News World Summit in Hong Kong. Assange blasted the mainstream media, Washington, banks and the Internet itself as he addressed journalists in Hong Kong on Monday via videolink from house arrest in England.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange blasted the mainstream media, Washington, banks and the Internet itself as he addressed journalists in Hong Kong on Monday via videolink from house arrest in England.

Fresh from accepting a top award for journalism from the prestigious Walkley Foundation in his native Australia on Sunday, Assange spoke to the News World Summit in Hong Kong before keeping a regular appointment with the police.

He defended his right to call himself a journalist and said WikiLeaks' next "battle" would be to ensure that the Internet does not turn into a vast surveillance tool for governments and corporations.

"Of course I'm a goddamn journalist," he responded with affected frustration when a moderator of the conference asked if he was a member of the profession.

He said his written record spoke for itself and argued that the only reason people kept asking him if he was a journalist was because the United States' government wanted to silence him.

"The United States government does not want legal protection for us," he said, referring to a [US Justice Department](#) investigation into his whistleblower website for releasing secret diplomatic and [military documents](#).

The former hacker criticised [journalists](#) and the [mainstream media](#) for becoming too cosy with the powerful and secretive organisations they were supposed to be holding to account.

In a 40-minute address, he also accused credit card companies such as Visa and Mastercard of illegally cutting WikiLeaks off from funding under a secret deal with the White House.

"Issues that should be decided in open court are being decided in back rooms in Washington," he said.

The Internet itself had become "the most significant surveillance machine that we have ever seen," Assange said in reference to the amount of information people give about themselves online.

"It's not an age of transparency at all ... the amount of secret information is more than ever before," he said, adding that information flows in but

is not flowing out of governments and other powerful organisations.

"I see that really is our big battle. The technology gives and the technology takes away," he added.

The anti-secrecy activist then held up a handwritten sign from an aide telling him to "stop" talking or he would be late for a mandatory appointment with police.

Assange, 40, is under house arrest in England pending the outcome of a Swedish extradition request over claims of rape and sexual assault made by two women. He says he is the victim of a smear campaign.

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