

Assange takes extradition battle to Britain's top court

February 1 2012, by Danny Kemp



Wikileaks founder Julian Assange arrives at the Supreme Court in central London in the latest stage of his lengthy battle against extradition to Sweden to face rape allegations.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange took his fight against extradition to Britain's Supreme Court Wednesday, arguing that sending him to Sweden over rape allegations would breach legal principles dating back 1,500 years.

In his final roll of the dice within the UK legal system, the 40-year-old Australian is claiming that the Swedish prosecutor who issued the European Arrest Warrant in December 2010 was not a proper judicial authority.

"This appeal involves a single issue of law which can be very simply stated. The question is whether a Swedish prosecutor has judicial authority for the purposes of the [extradition](#) act," his lawyer Dinah Rose told the court.

Seven judges are hearing Assange's appeal over two days at the court in London, which only deals with cases where there is a wider public interest. They are not expected to return their judgement for several weeks.

Rose said it was not a "parochial" legal issue but a "pillar of natural justice" about the role of a judge, dating from the legal code set down by the Byzantine emperor Justinian 1,500 years ago.

There was no guarantee that a prosecutor would be as "independent and impartial" as a judge, Rose said, adding that allowing a prosecutor to issue warrants was a "a serious interference with individual liberty".

Dozens of supporters gathered in bright winter sunshine outside the court and a peace activist sang "he shall be released" as Assange arrived.

In court, he sat flanked by his lawyers, including high-profile defence attorney Gareth Peirce.



The face of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange is seen on the website through a magnifying glass in 2010. Assange took his 13-month fight against extradition to Sweden to England's highest court on Wednesday.

Behind him was supporter Vaughan Smith, at whose mansion in eastern England Assange has spent most of the last year under virtual house arrest.

If the court rejects his appeal, the former [computer hacker](#) will have exhausted all his options in Britain but he could still make a last-ditch appeal to the [European Court of Human Rights](#) (ECHR), prosecutors have said.

But if Assange wins his case it could have serious implications for the European Arrest Warrant system, a fast-track extradition scheme for the continent.

Assange denies the rape and sexual assault allegations made by two women in Sweden, and insists the sex was consensual. He has also claimed that the allegations against him are politically motivated.

WikiLeaks has enraged Washington by leaking thousands of classified US documents about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and Assange has said he fears he will eventually be handed over to the United States.

While the legal battle has dragged on, Assange's celebrity status has grown -- he is to host his own TV show and will make an appearance as himself later this month on the 500th episode of the US cartoon show Simpsons.

Announcing the chat show, WikiLeaks described its founder as "one of

the world's most recognisable revolutionary figures" and promised interviews with "key political players and thinkers".

So far Russia's state-run RT is the only channel to confirm it will broadcast the show.

Assange's extradition to Sweden was initially approved by a lower court in February 2011. An appeal to the High Court was rejected in November, but he subsequently won permission to appeal to the Supreme Court.

If this appeal fails, the WikiLeaks founder will have only one other option to stop his extradition -- an appeal to the ECHR in Strasbourg, France.

England's Crown Prosecution Service said in December that if the European [court](#) takes on the case then Assange would remain in Britain under the same bail conditions until the case is resolved.

If the ECHR refuses then he would be extradited to Sweden "as soon as arrangements can be made," England's state prosecutor said.

Julian Knowles, an extradition law specialist with the Matrix Chambers law firm, said the question of whether a public prosecutor was a valid judicial authority had been comprehensively tested by British law.

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Citation: Assange takes extradition battle to Britain's top court (2012, February 1) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-02-assange-extradition-britain-court.html>

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