

Ecuador's new rules ban Assange from taking visitors and phone calls – WikiLeaks

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Julian Assange on the balcony of the Ecuadorian embassy in London in May last year © Peter Nicholls / Reuters

Julian Assange has been hit with new rules limiting his communications by officials at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. The new measures include bans on using the phone and having visitors, according to WikiLeaks.

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The founder of the whistleblowing website has reportedly found himself isolated within the embassy recently. In March, he had his internet access curtailed after taking to Twitter to criticize Britain's response to the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, as well as repeated comments about Spain's dispute with Catalonia. At the time, the Ecuadorian government said Assange had breached a written commitment "*not to issue messages that might interfere with other states.*"

Speaking with the foreign press Wednesday, Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa confirmed that Assange was still being denied internet access while talks between the UK and Ecuador to decide on his fate are still ongoing.

"*He still has no access to the Internet and communications. There is a dialogue, there is a will and an interest to move forward in the solution of that matter,*" she said, according to [El Tiempo](#).

WikiLeaks claims Assange has been silenced because of pressure from the US. The website also says the description of the measures as a "*social media ban*" undersells the extent to which he's being held "*incommunicado.*"

Assange has been a resident at the embassy in Knightsbridge, central London since June 2012. He fled to the embassy after allegedly skipping bail in the UK.

The WikiLeaks founder previously faced questions in Sweden over sexual assault allegations, but the issue was later dropped. Assange has always insisted that he was willing to go to Sweden to discuss the allegations, but feared that Sweden would extradite him to the US over WikiLeaks' release of classified US government cables and documents.

Sweden refused to provide a guarantee that they would not extradite him, despite Amnesty International stating that such a promise should be issued. *"First, it will break the current impasse and second it will mean the women who have leveled accusations of sexual assault are not denied justice,"* the organization's senior director of research, Nicola Duckworth, [said](#) back in 2012. Assange always denied the sexual assault allegations against him.

The WikiLeaks founder now faces arrest by UK authorities if he leaves the embassy, due to his alleged breaching of bail conditions when he fled there. As for his possible extradition to the US from the UK, British Prime Minister Theresa May has been vague. *"We look at extradition requests when we receive them on a case-by-case basis,"* she said last year.

In January, the UK also refused to grant Assange diplomatic status which could have potentially given him legal immunity, allowing him to leave the embassy and the UK without being arrested.

The US, for its part, has made clear that it has no intention to go light on Assange. In April 2017, US Attorney General Jeff Sessions said arresting Assange was a *"priority."* That same month, then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo, who now serves as US Secretary of State, referred to the WikiLeaks founder as a *"fraud"* and a *"coward hiding behind a screen."*

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