

Human rights agency rejects Assange complaint against Ecuador

Reuters, March 15, 2019

WASHINGTON/QUITO (Reuters) - An international human rights organization has turned down a request by WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange that Ecuador, which has sheltered him for more than six years at its embassy in London, ease the conditions it has imposed on his residence there.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange speaks on the balcony of the Embassy of Ecuador in London, Britain, May 19, 2017. REUTERS/Neil Hall

A spokeswoman for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which is linked to the Organization of American States, said the group rejected Assange's complaint.

Assange's lawyer Jennifer Robinson had no immediate comment.

Assange took refuge in Ecuador's London embassy in 2012 to avoid being extradited to Sweden, where authorities wanted to question him as part of a sexual assault investigation. That probe was later dropped, but Assange fears he could be extradited to face charges in the United States, where federal prosecutors are investigating WikiLeaks.

He says Ecuador is seeking to end his asylum and is putting pressure on him by isolating him from visitors and spying on him.

He had sought the support of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in his case against Ecuador. He also demanded that he be protected from extradition to the United States and that U.S. prosecutors unseal secret criminal charges that have been filed against him.

While the commission did not back Assange in his complaint against Ecuador, it said it reminded Ecuador of international law that no state should deport, return or extradite someone to another country where that person might face human rights abuses.

Ecuador said in a statement that the commission confirmed the country's treatment of Assange was in line with international law. It added that Assange's situation "cannot be extended indefinitely and (Ecuador) expects it to be resolved as soon as possible."

A friend who regularly visits Assange says he privately complains that Ecuador's government recently replaced Embassy diplomats sympathetic to Assange with officials who are much less friendly.

Last year, U.S. federal prosecutors in the state of Virginia mistakenly made public a document saying that Assange had been secretly indicted. Officials have since declined to confirm or deny he has been charged.

Mueller signals deeper role for Manafort ex-aide

U.S. federal prosecutors in Alexandria, Virginia, have maintained a long-running grand jury investigation into WikiLeaks. One source said it includes a probe into leaks of Central Intelligence Agency documents to the WikiLeaks website.

Earlier this month, a federal judge in Alexandria ordered former U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to be jailed for contempt after she refused to testify about WikiLeaks before the grand jury.

Reporting by Mark Hosenball in Washington and Alexandra Valencia in Quito;
Editing by Leslie Adler and Rosalba O'Brien