

Beat: Vips

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange says will leave embassy...

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USPA News - WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange said Monday that he will "soon" leave the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he has been holed up for more than two years now to avoid extradition to Sweden where he is wanted to face allegations of sexual assault. In a press conference alongside Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño, Assange told reporters that he would be leaving the Ecuadorian Embassy soon, but refused to elaborate any further.

It followed speculation in the media that Assange had decided to surrender himself to British police due to health reasons. "I am leaving the embassy soon, but perhaps not for the reasons the Murdoch press are saying," Assange said when asked by a reporter if he was leaving the embassy due to health reasons. However, he later mentioned that, in his current living conditions without an opportunity to go outside or exercise, any healthy person would start to develop "certain difficulties" after some time. Patiño told reporters that he believed recent reforms on extradition in the United Kingdom and the current legal framework would prevent the extradition of any person who has not been charged with a crime, as is the case with Assange. "I am thankful that the United Kingdom is standing up for its long-held values," there must be formal charges before rights are deprived from someone, Assange said. The WikiLeaks founder denied all allegations made against him, whether by the two women his case involves or by the international media. According to Assange, the case and the asylum stand-off have been misreported by the media. "The women in Sweden explicitly deny the allegations (of rape)," he claimed. Kristinn Hrafnsson, a spokesman for WikiLeaks, told the New York Times that Assange would leave the United Kingdom if he were promised safe passage out of the country, but said he has no plans to turn himself in. Assange's legal problems, which the WikiLeaks founder claims are politically-motivated, began in August 2010 after he met two women who both had unprotected sex with him over the course of several days. The women later spoke with each other and discovered that they had both slept with the whistle-blower while not using a condom. After this discovery, the women walked into a police station together to report the events because they feared they had received a sexually transmitted disease (STD) from Assange, according to police documents. One of the women also said that Assange had sex with her while she slept, meaning she was unable to give consent. According to the woman's statements, she attended lunch with Assange on August 14, 2010, and, after flirting over lunch, the pair went out and ended up in a movie theater where they kissed and fondled. Two days later, she contacted Assange and invited him to her house and later had sex on a couple of occasions with a condom. However, she later fell asleep. The woman was eventually woken up by Assange's penetration of her, according to court documents. She then asked if he was wearing anything, and after answering that he was not, the woman felt it was "too late" and, as he was already inside of her, she let him continue. The statement stated that she never had unprotected sex prior to that encounter. Assange was later arrested while in London before being released on conditional bail to await a decision on whether he should be extradited to Sweden to face the allegations. The court ruled in favor of extradition, which prompted an appeal by Assange because Swedish prosecutors had not - and have still not - formally charged him with a crime. But the British court ruled this was irrelevant, saying defendants in Sweden are charged in a late stage during the prosecution. "There can be no doubt that if what Mr. Assange had done had been done in England and Wales, he would have been charged and thus criminal proceedings would have commenced," British judge John Thomas said at the time. The rejection of the appeal prompted Assange to seek refuge at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, which later decided to give him political asylum over fears that, if extradited to Sweden, Assange could then be extradited to the United States to face charges over his work in relation to WikiLeaks. Assange fears he could face the death penalty if that should happen. The estimated cost of policing the Ecuadorian embassy since June 2012, to prevent Assange from escaping the compound, has so far cost the British government an estimated 6.4 million pounds (\$10.7 million), according to the most recent figures from the end of May. This has led some to criticize Britain's involvement in the controversial case. The accusations in Sweden are unrelated to Assange's work for the whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks which brought diplomatic earthquakes to the United States when it began releasing classified documents it had obtained. Assange has claimed the cases have been politically-linked, arguing that the sexual encounters with the two women in Sweden were consensual. Wikileaks' first big scoop was on April 5, 2010, when it released a classified video which showed a 2007 U.S. helicopter attack in Iraq which left several unarmed civilians killed, including two Reuters journalists. Assange previously said he had been told to expect "dirty tricks" from the Pentagon, including "sex traps" to ruin his reputation.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.

3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168

Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA

(702) 943.0321 Local

(702) 943.0233 Facsimile

info@unitedpressassociation.org

info@gna24.com

www.gna24.com