

U.K. judge OKs Assange extradition to Sweden

Written by bad_brain

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source: Reuters



A British judge ruled Thursday that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange should be extradited to Sweden to face sex-crimes allegations.

Judge Howard Riddle's decision means Assange, who has been free under strict conditions since he was released on bail in December, must be extradited within 10 days.

However, the 39-year-old Australian has seven days in which to launch an appeal to London's High Court.

Riddle said the allegations of rape and sexual molestation by two WikiLeaks volunteers are extraditable offenses. He added that "there is simply no reason to believe there has been a mistake" in issuing an arrest warrant.

Swedish prosecutors want to question Assange, who has angered the U.S. government by releasing thousands of secret U.S. diplomatic cables on his website, about accusations of sexual abuse relating to a brief visit there last summer. He has denied any wrongdoing and has not been charged.

In his ruling, the judge attacked the defense case against extradition point by point. Riddle

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rejected the claim that comments made against Assange by prosecutors and politicians in Sweden would pervert the course of justice.

Assange's lawyers have said that Sweden's custom of hearing rape cases behind closed doors meant he would not get a fair trial. But Riddle said the practice was common in Sweden.

During three days of legal arguments earlier this month, lawyers for Assange said if he is extradited from Britain, he may wind up being sent to the United States where he could face execution.

One woman alleges he sexually molested her by ignoring her request for him to use a condom during sex.

The second woman has said Assange had sex with her while she was asleep and that he was not wearing a condom.

'Toxic atmosphere'

Prosecutors say the second allegation falls into the least severe of three categories of rape in Sweden, carrying a maximum of four years in jail. Sweden sought his extradition from Britain under a fast-track European arrest warrant.

Assange's legal team offered a lengthy case in which they accused Sweden's Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt of creating a "toxic atmosphere" in Sweden and damaging his chances of a fair trial by portraying him as "public enemy number one."

Earlier, about a dozen WikiLeaks and Assange supporters in ski hats and parkas gathered outside the court, hanging banners and signs saying "Free Julian Assange and Bradley Manning," the young U.S. Army private suspected of leaking the documents.