

4 December 2019

To the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
CC: Home Secretary

RE: MEDICAL EMERGENCY – MR JULIAN ASSANGE

We, the undersigned medical doctors, wrote to the UK Home Secretary on Friday 22 November 2019 expressing our serious and unanimous concerns about the credible reports of the rapidly deteriorating health of Mr Julian Assange and the possibility that he could die in a UK prison. Our open letter received worldwide media coverage and countless letters of support from medical doctors and others around the world.

Amongst other credible sources, our letter quoted Professor Nils Melzer, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, who visited Mr Assange on 9 May 2019 at Belmarsh Prison with two medical experts specialised in the investigation and documentation of torture. Professor Melzer reported on 31 May 2019 that Mr Assange displayed all the symptoms typical for persons having been exposed to psychological torture over a prolonged period of time, due in large part to his judicial persecution and arbitrary confinement at the Ecuadorean Embassy as previously reported by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

We are informed that Professor Melzer's report of torture did not receive an adequate substantive reply from the British Government, let alone result in the prompt and impartial investigation required under Article 12 of the Convention against Torture. We are also advised that the British Government has not yet responded to a further urgent appeal by Professor Melzer dated 29 October 2019, in which he warned that the continued arbitrariness of Mr Assange's treatment and detention may soon end up costing his life.

The UK Government's apparent negligence and dereliction of responsibility are especially alarming given that Professor Melzer had issued a warning regarding Mr Assange's state of health already shortly before the Metropolitan Police arrested Mr Assange inside the Ecuadorean Embassy in London on 11 April 2019. In the light of Professor Melzer's consistent and repeated warnings, including on the basis of a specialised medical assessment in line with the "Istanbul Protocol", the UK Government's refusal to take the required measures to protect Mr Assange's rights, health and dignity appears be reckless at best and deliberate at worst and, in both cases, unlawfully and unnecessarily exposes Mr Assange to potentially irreversible medical risks.

As correctly predicted by Professor Melzer and his medical team, shortly after the team's visit to HMP Belmarsh in early May this year, Mr Assange's physical and mental health rapidly deteriorated to the point later in May where he had to be transferred to the health care unit of the prison and was no longer capable of participating in court hearings at that time. It should not be forgotten that over six months have passed since the publication of Professor Melzer's unequivocally damning report, that the UK Government has not ameliorated the conditions of Mr Assange's detention since then and that not surprisingly, according to credible reports, Mr Assange's medical condition has continued to deteriorate to the point that there are now real fears that his life is in danger. We submit that this serious medical deterioration was entirely foreseeable and avoidable.

When the UK, as a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council, repeatedly ignores not only the serious warnings of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, but also its unequivocal investigative and remedial obligations under international and human rights law, the credibility of the UK's commitment to human rights and the rule of law is fatally undermined.

In our open letter, we urged the UK Government to change course immediately and transfer Mr Assange from Belmarsh Prison to a university teaching hospital for appropriate expert medical assessment and care. So far, we have received no substantive reply from the UK Government, nor has receipt of our letter been acknowledged.

In our opinion, the UK Government's conduct in this matter is irresponsible, incompatible with medical ethics and unworthy of a democratic society bound by the rule of law. We reiterate our grave concern that Mr Assange could die of deliberate medical negligence in a British prison and demand an urgent response from the UK Government.

As the present matter is of inherent public interest, copies of this open letter will be distributed to media outlets worldwide.

Yours faithfully,

Open letter signatories as listed: <https://medium.com/@doctors4assange/concerns-of-medical-doctors-about-the-plight-of-mr-julian-assange-ffb09a5dd588>