



Andrew Wilkie MP
Independent Member for Clark

George Christensen MP
Member for Dawson

CO-CHAIRS - BRING JULIAN ASSANGE HOME PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

The Hon Bob Neill MP
UK Commons Justice Committee Chair

Dear Sir,

As co-chairs of the Australian Bring Julian Assange Home Parliamentary Group, we write to ask that your committee make urgent enquiries of, and petition to, the Lord Chancellor & Secretary of State for Justice the Rt Hon Robert Buckland MP, on the question of whether Australian citizen Julian Assange should be released from Belmarsh Prison.

We believe Mr Assange should be released and put into monitored home detention as he fits all of the grounds noted for such early release by leading organisations such as the World Health Organisation, the United Nations and the UK Prison Officers Association. These organisations have been unanimous in calling for the release of all non-violent COVID-19 prisoners, and I ask that your committee give compassionate consideration to the following:

- Mr Assange is a non-violent remand prisoner with no history of harm to the community. He is not convicted and is thus entitled to the presumption of innocence
- Doctors of Mr Assange warn he is at high risk from dying if he contracts COVID-19 as he has a pre-existing chronic lung condition.
- We are advised that COVID-19 is rapidly spreading throughout UK prisons and there are infections at Belmarsh Prison.
- We understand that the prison is short-staffed and normal activity regimes are suspended.
- Mr Assange is in poor mental health due to spending much time in solitary confinement over recent years, and prison COVID-19 lockdown measures are further exacerbating his mental health.

We ask that you put the very reasonable request by Mr Assange's lawyers, that this non-violent Australian prisoner be released into home detention with a 24-hour ankle monitor, to the Secretary of State for Justice the Rt Hon Robert Buckland.

Yours Sincerely,

Justice Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Andrew Wilkie MP, Independent Member for Clark

George Christensen MP, Member for Dawson

BY email only

10 April 2020

Thank you for your letter, which we received on 6 April, concerning the situation of Julian Assange. The standing order that regulates our Committee charges us with scrutinising the policy, administration and spending of the Ministry of Justice. It does not permit us to consider individual cases as they proceed through judicial processes, and nor would we wish to do so, that properly being a matter for the criminal law and the independent judiciary.

As you note, however, the present Covid-19 virus outbreak is placing pressure on UK prisons. The Justice Committee is conducting weekly hearings on the effects of the outbreak and the position of the near 83,000 prisoners, both convicted and remand, in England and Wales is high on our agenda.

You may be interested to know that the Ministry of Justice has introduced measures to enable early release from custody on licence and under strict conditions of up to 70 pregnant prisoners and mothers with babies, and of up to 4,000 prisoners close to the end of their sentences who are assessed as low-risk and who have accommodation to go to. We have also been scrutinising the situation in courts, including mechanisms to continue hearings by electronic means, which includes hearings concerning prisoners on remand, such as Mr Assange.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Robert Neill MP

Chair

Justice Committee