

Rome, September 28, 2021

Dear President von der Leyen,

As you know, today, September 28th, is the UNESCO *Day for the Right of Access to Information* (hashtag: #RightToKnow).¹

We, *U.S. Citizens for Peace & Justice*², *Italiani per Assange*³ and DiEM25 in Italy⁴, together with other activists⁵ and supported by eminent personalities such as Noam Chomsky, are writing to you on this important occasion to ask you to take action in favor of a journalist who is being unjustly persecuted, a true champion of our **Right to Access Information** and a true defender of our **Right to Know** – specifically, our right to know the war crimes and the other illegalities committed by our governments and which our governments seek to hide from public scrutiny by abusively classifying as secret any document attesting the wrongdoing.

We are referring to Julian Assange, the Australian creator of the web site Wikileaks. This is a site which offers a safe haven for whistleblowers everywhere to reveal the government wrongdoing they come across in their activities. They do so by “leaking” abusively classified documents to Assange’s site for publication.

Thus, through his site, Julian Assange actively guarantees our Right of Access to Information – precisely the value that we are celebrating today.

You recognized this value in your Sept. 15th State of the European Union address, when you spoke of the great public service that investigative journalists render. And you went on to say that this implies that “**we must curb those who threaten media freedom** [in persecuting and criminalizing investigative journalists] because, by defending the freedom of our media, we also defend our democracy.”

In the case of Julian Assange and the web site Wikileaks, we therefore ask you to **curb those who are currently threatening media freedom**:

- by detaining Assange arbitrarily – for 7 years, Assange was de facto deprived of his liberty in the Ecuadorian embassy in London and for the past two years has been jailed in Belmarsh Prison, London, in spite of the fact that a U.N. Working Group has declared both detentions to be arbitrary⁶;
- by inflicting on Assange continual abuses, the cumulative effect of which constitutes psychological torture, according to the testimony of Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture⁷
- and by actively conspiring, over the past eleven years, to silence him and to keep him from continuing to reveal government misdeeds, a clear infringement on his Liberty of Expression as guaranteed by article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights⁸.

Who has committed these violations? There can be no doubt: the culprits are the United States of America and the United Kingdom who, together, for the past ten years, have planned and executed the systematic persecution of Julian Assange – as well as of

investigative journalism itself. We therefore feel that these two countries qualify for sanctions as per EU Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/1999 of 7 December 2020⁹, designed to punish precisely the violations of human rights just listed: arbitrary detention, torture, infringement on Liberty of Expression.

It should not, we believe, be necessary for you to actually enforce sanctions against the United States and the United Kingdom. It should be enough that you demand the immediate liberation of Julian Assange, the rejection of the request for extradition, and the withdrawal of all charges by the U.S. Department of Justice, threatening sanctions in case of non compliance.

Will you start taking steps to do so, President von der Leyen, and thereby honor the spirit and the meaning of this day designated by UNESCO as the *Day of Universal Access to Information* and of our *Right to Know*?

Signed:

U.S. Citizens for Peace & Justice – Rome, mail@peaceandjustice.it
Italiani per Assange, italianiperassange@gmail.com
DiEM25 in Italy, info@italia.diem25.org
Rete NoWar–Roma, nowar@gmx.com
Peacelink, info@peacelink.it

Also signed by these eminent jurists, academics, journalists, activists and public figures:

Daniel Ellsberg, Noam Chomsky, Deepa Govindarajan Driver, Paul Jay (theanalysis.news), Michael Albert (Znet), Dr Derek Summerfield (former chief psychiatrist at Freedom from Torture), Andrew Feinstein (ANC MP in Nelson Mandela's cabinet), Margaret Kunstler (New York civil rights attorney), David McBride (ADF whistleblower), Peter Cronau (journalist, ABC Australia), Andrew Fowler (investigative journalist) The list of Italian endorsers appears [here](#).

- (1.) <https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/accesstoinformationday>
- (2.) Website: www.peaceandjustice.it email: mail@peaceandjustice.it
- (3.) <https://www.facebook.com/groups/306819506870113/> email: italianiperassange@gmail.com
- (4.) <https://internal.diem25.org/en/groups/120>
- (5.) of which NoWar–Roma, PeaceLink and other activist groups in Italy.
- (6.) <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24552> The UN WGAD also cited violations of Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Art 9/10) and International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights (Art. 7, 9.1, 9.3, 9.4, 10, 14). European Court of Human Rights [recognizes WGAD](#).
- (7.) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25249>
- (8.) https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf
- (9.) EU sanctions regulation: "This Regulation shall apply to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, arbitrary arrest or detention, violations or abuses of freedom of opinion and expression." For specific cases, see <https://eeas.europa.eu> For the norm see: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32020D1999&from=EN#d1e32-19-1>