

The following is a speech by Louise Bennet (Spokesperson for the Bring Assange Home Campaign) at the Rally for Peace 3 July 2021

It's an important day, not just for anti war, but today is Julian Assange's 50th birthday.

It's Julian Assange's 50th birthday today and his 10th birthday in arbitrary detention. That's ten years he's been locked away for exposing the war crimes of the United States of America.

Before I begin I would like to acknowledge the Wurunderi people, on whose land we are meeting today, and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. I would also like to thank the Independent and Peaceful Australian Network for inviting me here to speak.

Julian Assange faces unprecedented espionage charges for publishing not only evidence of US war crimes but of murder, torture and corruption - the most hideous crimes that any human being or group of human beings can commit against another, and on a massive scale.

It is an outrageous abuse of power that our justice systems would arbitrarily detain him for exposing these crimes. Outrageous doesn't cut it.

Julian Assange is an accredited member of the press. He won the Walkley Award for his work as well as countless international accolades. He has been nominated for the Nobel peace prize on several occasions.

In his earlier days he even helped Victoria Police catch an online paedophile ring. And if you have an iPhone on you today, you will be using technology designed by him as freeware. Free of patents so it can be accessed by anyone in the world with or without financial means.

Julian Assange has been arbitrarily detained for 10 years while the US government try to have him extradited to face a life sentence for exposing evidence of their crimes. Primarily war crimes, of which there are so, so many.

You may remember just one piece of footage that was released in 2011 labelled Collateral Murder. It showed US soldiers shooting at and murdering Iraqi civilians - including journalists and children - as if they were playing a video game. Once the dust had settled they then shot dead more brave men who came to rescue the wounded.

He is now being tortured, which the UN Special Rapporteur for Torture has explicitly confirmed. He is being tortured by Western governments for exposing Western war crimes while the US government fight to have him extradited from the UK.

Now, just think of the precedent that this sets. This means the US government could potentially extradite any journalist, publisher or whistleblower from

anywhere in the world for exposing their atrocities. Just let that sink in for a second. That retributive fear mongering; that's terrorism.

All major human rights and journalist organisations have condemned this. His treatment violates the convention against torture and threatens journalists and journalism worldwide.

The world's leading human rights and press freedom groups are unequivocally denouncing the charges against him.

One of the largest petitions in Australia's history (with over half a million signatures) has been tabled in parliament.

He has so far been denied extradition but remains in arbitrary detention in Great Britain's highest security prison, rife with COVID.

A place where the people who committed the crimes he exposed should be, but those people walk free.

Before he published this information, Julian Assange told his lawyer that the US government would chase him to the ends of the earth for informing the public of their crimes. He knew that, but he published anyway because he had an obligation to the brave people who had risked everything to expose the truth. The information was in the public interest and he did not turn a blind eye to the victims of such terrible crimes as so many mainstream news organisations do, while publishing government press releases word for word.

We need more people like this in our society if we are to ever refer to ourselves as "civilised". We need to reward actions of selflessness and bravery, we cannot allow our governments to lock up our heroes. Because make no mistake, that's what a hero is. From the person calling out workplace bullying to the one exposing war crimes.

We must do something. We cannot in good conscience do nothing. Our governments cannot warmonger and commit these shocking crimes if we don't allow them to.

I don't know why we still have to convince people that war is bad and that imprisoning people that tell the truth is wrong. But inform your friends, support independent media, ring and write to your local MPs. Tell them our politicians are elected to defend their citizen's rights. That they are accountable to punish those who commit wrongdoing, not those who expose them and that citizens expect them to protect journalists and publishers, not to imprison them for their work. And ask them what they are doing to ensure Julian Assange is brought home safely to Australia.

I started by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people but I would like finish by paying a special acknowledgement to all our Indigenous communities and the Indigenous Social Justice Association. They held a ceremony for Julian in 2012

and presented him with an Indigenous passport. This was done to recognise that Assange's Australian passport had been completely worthless to him and that our Federal Government had done nothing to assist it's citizen for, and I quote: "for informing the world's people of the absolute lies that all governments continue to tell their people."

Those who have stood by Julian Assange know what true suffering is, they know injustice and they certainly know how hideous and far reaching these abuses of power and gaslighting can be.

We must stand up for marginalised people, for the victims of our wars. And we must stand up for the whistleblowers, the journalists, and the publishers who have the courage to expose inconvenient truths. We cannot allow the people who have been brave enough to stand up to power, stand alone.

As one of these brave human being once said: If wars can be started by lies, peace can be started by truth.

Thank you