

Sweden Drops Julian Assange Rape Inquiry



Summary: On Friday, the Swedish government announced that it was no longer going to pursue a rape investigation against bail-jumper Julian Assange.

On Friday, prosecutors in Sweden said that they were quitting their attempt to extradite Julian Assange. Almost five years ago, the WikiLeaks founder fled the country for Ecuador to avoid a rape investigation.

"Today was an important victory," Assange, 45, said.

However, despite his happiness with the abandonment of the rape inquiry, Assange acknowledged that he had other international legal problems. According to the *New York Times*, he could be arrested in London for jumping bail or he could be extradited to the United States if he were to leave the Ecuador embassy.

Before the 2016 Presidential Election, Assange was known as a hero of transparency because his website published classified information from sources ranging from the government to entertainment studios. However, his reputation took a hit with the most recent election because many saw him as biased towards Republican candidate Donald Trump. The reason for this perception is that his site seemed to focus on leaking information that was damning only towards Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton.

Because of Wikileaks' election help, Trump has said that he liked the website, but others in his administration want to pursue Assange. Last month, the Department of Justice stated that it was reconsidering whether or not to charge the fugitive for his assistance in helping Chelsea Manning, a transgender Army soldier who had released classified government information. Manning served years in prison for the crime and she was released this week.

Manning has said that she acted alone.

Before Assange had escaped to Ecuador, he was accused of rape in Sweden by an unidentified minor, who said through her lawyer that she was "shocked" by the country's decision.

"It is a scandal that a suspected rapist can escape justice and thereby avoid the courts," attorney Elisabeth Fritz, said in a statement. "My client is shocked."

Sweden's chief prosecutor Marianne Ny said that the inquiry was dropped because there was no way for the government to move forward. She said that the abandonment of Assange's pursuit was not a statement of whether or not he was guilty.

Ny added that if Assange entered Sweden before August 2020 then the investigation would be reopened. According to *The New York Times*, it is "unlikely" that Assange would risk leaving the Ecuadorean Embassy because of the U.S. government's desire to chase him.

U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has said he wanted to crack down on leaks and thus go after Assange, but Kenneth Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch, told *The New York Times* that Assange did nothing wrong.

"The U.S. government has never shown that Assange did anything but publish leaked information," Roth said. "It may not like what he leaked but, judging from the public evidence, he stands in the same position as countless journalists and should now not be threatened with arrest and extradition to the United States."

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Source: *The New York Times*

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