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**Prime Minister Gillard Continues to Get It Wrong on Julian Assange**

“The latest statements by Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, as to her government’s lack of responsibility concerning WikiLeaks co-founder, Julian Assange, continue to reflect a misunderstanding of key issues concerning Mr. Assange, the Australian citizen facing extradition proceedings from the United Kingdom to Sweden, and the actions of the WikiLeaks organisation”, President of Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, Stephen Keim SC, said today.

“Ms. Gillard is quoted as saying that she has no responsibility and [can do nothing](http://www.afr.com.au/p/world/our_hands_tied_gillard_tells_assange_GfEb7RzSsdN6xKtSczbg8M) about the legal situation faced by Mr. Assange”, Mr. Keim said. “There are a number of things that the government can and should do for Mr. Assange. For example, the Australian government should seek very clear diplomatic assurances from the Swedish government that Mr. Assange will be free to return to a country of his choice if the investigation concerning alleged sexual misconduct by Mr. Assange in Sweden is determined in Mr. Assange’s favour. The Australian government should do everything in its power, diplomatically and legally, to ensure that there is no risk that the Swedish extradition request cannot be used as an excuse to have Mr. Assange extradited from Sweden to the United States to face charges that have all the hallmarks of being politically inspired.”

“Ms. Gillard could also desist from disseminating information that misrepresents the basis of the extradition request as ‘charges’ against Mr. Assange. The only charge against Mr. Assange was issued in mid-August 2010 and [cancelled by a more senior prosecutor the following day](http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/12/07/us-wikileaks-assange-charges-idUSTRE6B669H20101207). The request for extradition is only for the purpose of requiring Mr. Assange [to answer questions by prosecutors](http://www.theoneclickgroup.co.uk/documents/ME-CFS_docs/Julian%20Assange%20-%20Case%20Developments%20%26%20Provisional%20Skeleton%20Argument.pdf).”

“Ms. Gillard should also state very clearly that she and her government fully accept the [findings of the Australian Federal Police](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/wikileaks/law-not-broken-by-wikileaks-publication-of-us-cables-afp/story-fn775xjq-1225972735066) that indicate that there is no evidence that the release of diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks breaks any Australian law. This would go some way to countering [her previous statements](http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/police-close-in-on-assange-20101202-18iav.html) that Mr. Assange and WikiLeaks had acted in some way illegally in releasing the cables”.

“Ms. Gillard’s recent statement also suggests that she has little understanding of the broader global effects of the release of diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks in association with other media organisations including Australian media outlets. The strategic impact of the publication of honest appraisals by United States diplomats of the political situation in a number of countries around the world has been very significant. The cables have shown that governments’ unwillingness to tell the truth to the people they represent is more pervasive than even the greatest cynics among us might have predicted.”

“As the events in [Tunisia](http://www.allvoices.com/contributed-news/7898604-wikileaks-tunisia-and-foreign-investor-friendly-police-states), [Egypt](http://wikileaks-egypt.blogspot.com/) and other countries in the Middle East have shown, in the last fortnight with remarkable clarity, the publication of the truth about the actions of governments can have dramatic effects including that of bringing down dictatorships and creating a surge for democracy. Ms. Gillard could also, therefore, acknowledge the importance of publishing the truth about the actions of governments.”

“Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are cornerstones of liberal democracies. The exercise of these rights by Mr. Assange, a citizen of this country, should be championed not compromised by the Australian government,” said Mr. Keim.

“Evidence to date suggests that there are many questionable aspects to the way in which the Swedish extradition request has evolved. By continuing to criticize Mr. Assange rather than by critically appraising the process to which Mr. Assange has been subjected, Ms. Gillard is choosing political expediency over principle. This sends a message to foreign governments that Australia will pay lip service to the rule of law when it suits but that Australian citizens who have made themselves unpopular with powerful governments at home and/or abroad can no longer expect Australia to uphold their rights as citizens. That is a very dangerous message to send out both to the Australian citizenry and to the international community.”

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