



4<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Open Letter to Kumi Naidoo,  
Secretary General of Amnesty International

Dear Mr. Naidoo,

We are writing to urge Amnesty International to issue a statement on the organization's position regarding Julian Assange's situation.

As you might recall, in February 2013 the World Economic Forum posted a video with the promising title "NGOs as New Models for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."<sup>i</sup>

At the forum several representatives of various organizations discussed the accountabilities and responsibilities of NGOs. You were also amongst the invitees, then, in your role as Executive Director of Greenpeace.

When 30 minutes into the discussion<sup>ii</sup> the moderator made some dismissive comment about Julian Assange and his organization WikiLeaks, the only person who seemed to have the guts or alertness to intervene, was you.

Saying it would be inappropriate not to respond, you continued : **"the purpose of WikiLeaks is a purpose that we must defend, ...the fact that our governments operate with a level of lack of transparency and get away with torture, murder and terrorism around the world, is not acceptable"**

and you added :

***“look at the way that the young soldier that leaked the information is being treated. I mean it is abominable, it is absolutely abominable.”***

Thank you for that Mr. Naidoo.

You clearly saw the danger in letting a seemingly trivial remark go by unnoticed, obviously understanding what is really going on here : the character - and possibly literal - assassination of a human being risking his life in order to inform all of us on crimes committed by some of the most powerful people on the planet.

Unfortunately, your brief intervention shows how even amongst a panel of supposed experts on the responsibilities of NGOs, taking the responsibility of simply speaking up is already exceptional. And it is precisely this silence of others which brings us back to Assange's predicament and your role as a human rights organization within it.

Because to be honest Mr. Naidoo, while Amnesty has been doing some truly fantastic work around the globe, we are confused regarding Amnesty's exact position on Julian Assange. After all, in June 2009 Amnesty UK awarded Assange the ***Amnesty UK Media Award*** and in September 2012 ended a press release with :

***“Amnesty International believes that the forced transfer of Julian Assange to the USA in the present circumstances would expose him to a real risk of serious human rights violations possibly including violations of his right to freedom of expression and the risk that he may be held in detention in conditions which violate the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.”***

After this , we can find no more articles or press releases on Assange on the AI UK website. This means, unless we are mistaken, that for the past 6 years, Amnesty UK has taken no clear public position on what the UN ruled to be a case of illegal, arbitrary detention amounting to torture.<sup>iii</sup>

Amnesty's lack of engagement becomes even more alarming when one takes into account that Julian Assange, in fear of extradition to the U.S by the UK for having published truthful information in the public's interest, has been locked up in the Ecuadorian Embassy for over 3000 days, **just a few miles away from your own head office**. The fact that other AI branches have been remarkably silent as well, raises speculation that Amnesty's position is no coincidence. This is confirmed by the following response to a mail someone recently sent to AI raising the same issue :

***“Julian Assange's case is a case we're monitoring closely but not actively working on. The dropping of the Swedish investigation into the rape allegations against Julian Assange doesn't significantly alter our position on the other aspects of Julian Assange's case, which is that Amnesty International (AI) does not consider Julian Assange to be a Prisoner of Conscience. AI does however, continue to believe that he should not be extradited to the USA, where he faces a real risk of serious human rights violations, including in relation to the likely conditions of his detention, due to his work with WikiLeaks (although as far as we know at this point there is no formal extradition request).”***

One phrase in particular is worth repeating : *“AI does not consider Julian Assange to be a Prisoner of Conscience (POC).”*

Quite a presumptuous statement. If not Mr. Assange's conscience, then what does AI suggest has led him into this situation. The lack of conscience of others, perhaps ?

And we are not alone. Our sentiment that Amnesty fails to adequately stand up for people like Assange or Manning is also voiced, amongst others, by renowned journalist John Pilger in a recent interview on KPFA<sup>iv</sup>.

We hope you understand, Mr. Naidoo, especially in view of the recent developments in the Manning case<sup>v</sup> (jailed once more, this time for refusing to comply with a grand jury - read *secret jury* - who presumably is trying to make Manning testify against Assange so they can take further 'legal' action against Assange)<sup>vi</sup>, that we are extremely worried about the culture we, by our silence, are inevitably supporting.

**A culture where not those who *commit* the crimes, but those who *reveal* the crimes are prosecuted.**

Amnesty is a world renowned and very well respected human-rights organization, so for us it is unfathomable that it would *not* be actively working on these extremely important cases. Especially since Amnesty's work is inextricably linked to that of journalists, publishers and whistle-blowers.

Manning and Assange are after all, just like you, prolific human rights advocates, whose revelations continue to be crucial to the success of organizations like Amnesty. Their courage makes it often possible to get to the bottom of certain human rights violations or submit crucial evidence in court. The Guantanamo files are an obvious example of this.<sup>vii</sup>

There's no doubt AI is overloaded with deserving causes, but considering the global and historical impact WikiLeaks, Assange and Manning (amongst others) continue to have on our most fundamental freedoms, we must insist that not openly and resolutely taking a stand, creates not just the impression that AI is consciously dodging a highly politically charged situation on its own turf, but, by its silence contributes to endangering the lives and work of every serious journalist, publisher and whistle-blower to come.

### **Urgent**

Not only has Chelsea Manning been locked up in solitary confinement since March 8<sup>th</sup>, according to WikiLeaks, **Julian Assange is about to be expelled within hours or days from the Ecuadorian Embassy, most likely facing extradition to the U.S.**

We therefore ask you Mr. Naidoo, with the utmost urgency, as head of Amnesty International, to dig even deeper into your own conscience and bravely speak out, just like you did back at the Davos meeting in 2013, and continue your commitment to freedom of the press and freedom to information, by bringing Manning's and Julian's case and those related to it, to the public's attention in the most urgent and committed way possible.

It would signal to your supporters and the world, that what is happening right now, is indeed - to use your own words again- *not acceptable*.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Concerned Citizens

P.S. On March 13, 2019, we dropped by your London (see photo) and handed you a flyer and postcard with more information about the Assange case. Thank you for spontaneously meeting us.

i <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-hWdiAm4LQ>

ii <https://youtu.be/O-hWdiAm4LQ?t=1800>

iii <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17012>

iv <https://kpfa.org/episode/flashpoints-march-11-2019/>

v Hedges, Chris. "Chelsea Manning and the New Inquisition.", <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/chelsea-manning-and-the-silencing-of-the-press/>

vi Cromwell, David. "The Destruction of Freedom, Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange and the Corporate Media.", <http://www.medialens.org/index.php/alerts/alert-archive/2019/898-the-destruction-of-freedom-chelsea-manning-julian-assange-and-the-corporate-media.html>

vii <https://www.amnestyusa.org/doubling-down-on-failure-at-guantanamo/>