

Key points for Julian Assange's hearing 27 and 28 October 2021

By Sara Whyatt, PEN Norway's observer outside the Court of Justice in London

Observations from outside the Royal Court of Appeals in the Strand, Central London, as the appeal hearings against the US call for the extradition of Julian Assange were under way 27 and 28 October 2021.

Each morning around 150 people gathered outside the ornate gates of the Appeals court to show their solidarity for Julian Assange. Some had arrived as early as 5am to try to get a place inside to observe from the public gallery. Places were extremely limited, and besides from Amnesty International and Reporters Sans Frontières there were no other NGOs present.

Outside the crowd was good natured, with most staying on for the entire day, encouraged by the carnival atmosphere and live music, with a man dressed as the Grim Reaper, another as a judge keeping up as energetic and lively MCs of the two-day event. There was a carnival atmosphere familiar to the previous hearings with people dressed up in bright clothes, t-shirts bearing Assange's image and messages to free Assange. There were many homemade banners and placards, with slogans such as "Stop this political trial," "USA Bribe Thordarson to Lie," "Free Julian Assange Now: Truth is not Treason," "A Wikileaks a day keeps tyranny at bay."

Hundreds of fluttering yellow ribbons were tied to the Court railings bearing the message #freeassange and the names of supporters from around the world, a reference to the 70s hit song 'Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree' about welcoming the return of a prisoner by tying a yellow ribbon around a tree, and now used by democracy movements to mark a variety of causes.

The music played constantly – broken by speeches by supporters. I sadly missed the arrival of Ai Weiwei whose drawing of Assange was copied and carried by supporters.

People leafletting passers-by were welcomed and tourists on the open top double decker buses passed by taking photos. Cars honked horns, including London buses and in one very loud case, a cement mixer. The café opposite said they had not been so busy in months.

There was some press around, some stationed outside the whole time, then gathering to record the speeches made by the Assange team and Stella Moris when they came out briefly at the lunch breaks and end of day. BBC and other UK services are not apparent although BBC has a person in the court room who is tweeting regularly. Assange did not appear on the main news, the BBC and Guardian both did dutiful brief accounts, but otherwise was not highly profiled. There were quite a few comments from people I spoke to about the lack of engagement of the British media.

There were also present supporters of Craig Murray, former ambassador to Uzbekistan and now campaigner, also a supporter of Assange, now serving 8 months in prison in Scotland for reporting that revealed the identities of complainants of sexual abuse against the former Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond who was later found not guilty. There are similar concerns to those around Assange such as political interference in the case, as well as what is seen as an overly heavy [penalty](#).