

**To Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Marise Payne
CC: Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Penny Wong
Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Scott Morrison
Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Anthony Albanese**

16 December 2019

Dear Minister,

RE: MEDICAL EMERGENCY – MR JULIAN ASSANGE

We, the undersigned medical doctors, wrote to the UK Home Secretary on 22 November 2019, and to the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice on 4 December 2019, expressing our serious and unanimous concerns that an Australian citizen, Mr Julian Assange, is at risk of death due to the conditions of his detention in a UK prison.

Our open letter received worldwide media coverage and we received letters of support from doctors and others around the world. Now, having received no response from the UK Government, we call upon you to intervene as a matter of urgency. As Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, you have an undeniable legal obligation to protect your citizen against the abuse of his fundamental human rights, stemming from US efforts to extradite Mr Assange for journalism and publishing that exposed US war crimes.

The medical imperative to protect Australian citizen Julian Assange cannot be overstated. Our letters to the UK Government have warned of serious consequences if Mr Assange is not transferred immediately from Belmarsh Prison to an appropriate hospital setting, where he can be assessed and treated by a suitably constituted specialist medical team. Mr Assange requires assessment and treatment in an environment that, unlike Belmarsh prison, does not further destabilise his complex and precarious physical and mental state of health.

On 22 November 2019, we warned the UK Home Secretary that if such a transfer were not to take place immediately, there was a real possibility that Mr Assange would die in a UK prison. That assessment of risk was based on publicly available information dating from 2015, provided by medical experts and leading authorities in human rights and international law.

You will recall that the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded in December 2015 that Mr Assange was being arbitrarily detained by the governments of the UK and Sweden. Crucially, it was made clear at the time that any continued arbitrary detention of Mr Assange would constitute torture. Medical experts have repeatedly advised the UK Government of potentially catastrophic consequences should it fail to facilitate adequate medical care for Mr Assange. As our letters of 22 November 2019 and 4 December 2019 outline, such consequences,

including death, would be eminently foreseeable and attributable to the actions and inactions of the UK Government.

On 9 May 2019, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Professor Nils Melzer interviewed Mr Assange at Belmarsh Prison, accompanied by a medical team. On 31 May 2019, Mr Melzer published his report and condemned the “collective persecution” of Mr Assange by the UK, Swedish, Ecuadorian and US governments. “Mr. Assange’s health has been seriously affected by the extremely hostile and arbitrary environment he has been exposed to for many years,” the expert warned. “Most importantly, in addition to physical ailments, Mr. Assange showed all symptoms typical for prolonged exposure to psychological torture, including extreme stress, chronic anxiety and intense psychological trauma.

“The evidence is overwhelming and clear,” the UN Special Rapporteur stated. “Mr. Assange has been deliberately exposed, for a period of several years, to progressively severe forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the cumulative effects of which can only be described as psychological torture.”

On 1 November 2019, Professor Melzer was forced to intervene once more: “What we have seen from the UK Government is outright contempt for Mr Assange’s rights and integrity... Despite the medical urgency of my appeal, and the seriousness of the alleged violations, the UK has not undertaken any measures of investigation, prevention and redress required under international law.” He concluded: “Unless the UK urgently changes course and alleviates his inhumane situation, Mr Assange’s continued exposure to arbitrariness and abuse may soon end up costing his life.”

These are extraordinary and unprecedented statements by the world’s foremost authority on torture. The Australian government has shamefully been complicit by its refusal to act, over many years. Should Mr Assange die in a British prison, people will want to know what you, Minister, did to prevent his death.

Lest there be any misapprehension about the reality of the medical risks facing Mr Assange, important underlying medical facts are outlined in the Addendum to this letter. These facts render Mr Assange’s continued detention in Belmarsh Prison medically reckless at best and deliberately harmful at worst.

We therefore urge you to insist upon the immediate transfer of Mr Assange from Belmarsh Prison to an Australian university teaching hospital, on urgent medical grounds, so that he can receive the assessment and treatment that he requires. We are aware of statements by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison that Mr Assange is “not going to be given any special treatment” and that Australia “is unable to intervene in Mr Assange’s legal proceedings”. However, the most fundamental human rights of an Australian citizen are being denied by the British government.

We demand that you exercise your diplomatic and legal powers to defend the rights of Mr Assange, as you have done previously for other Australian citizens detained abroad, including Melinda Taylor, James Ricketson, David Hicks and Peter Grete.

Further, Mr Assange must not face extradition proceedings for which he may well be medically unfit. At the case management hearing on 21 October 2019, Mr Assange struggled to answer basic questions regarding his name and date of birth, a potentially ominous sign with respect to his cognitive functioning and his state of health.

That we, as doctors, feel ethically compelled to hold governments to account on medical grounds speaks volumes about the gravity of the medical, ethical and human rights travesties that are taking place. It is an extremely serious matter for an Australian citizen's survival to be endangered by a foreign government obstructing his human right to health. It is an even more serious matter for that citizen's own government to refuse to intervene, against historical precedent and numerous converging lines of medical advice.

We are reliably advised that it is a well-established principle of international law—and of Australian law recognised by its own courts—that if a country's citizens face improper treatment, persecution, and human rights violations, they may be the subject of diplomatic action, at that sovereign power's discretion, to protect its citizens abroad. The Australian government must exercise that discretion and request from Britain the safe passage of Mr Assange to Australia, to protect Mr Assange and the rights of all Australian citizens.

We hope that this letter has helped to clarify the reality and urgency of the medical crisis facing your citizen, Mr Assange. We urge you to negotiate Julian Assange's safe passage from Belmarsh Prison to an appropriate hospital setting in Australia, before it is too late.

As the present matter is of inherent public interest, copies of this open letter will be distributed to media outlets worldwide.

Yours faithfully,

Signed:

Dr Mariagiulia Agnoletto MD Specialist in Psychiatry ASST Monza San Gerardo Hospital, Monza (Italy)

Dr Vittorio Agnoletto MD Università degli Studi di Milano Statale, Milano (Italy)

Dr Sonia Allam MBChB FRCA Consultant in Anaesthesia and Pre-operative Assessment, Forth Valley Royal Hospital, Scotland (UK)

Dr Norbert Andersch MD MRCPsych Consultant Neurologist and Psychiatrist, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (retired); Lecturer in Psychopathology at Sigmund Freud Private University, Vienna-Berlin-Paris (Germany and UK)

Dr Marianne Beaucamp MD Fachärztin (Specialist) in Neurology & Psychiatry Psychoanalyst and Psychotherapist (retired), Munich (Germany)

Dr Thed Beaucamp MD Fachärztin (Specialist) in Neurology, Psychiatry & Psychosomatic Medicine Psychoanalyst and Psychotherapist (retired), Munich (Germany)

Dr Margaret Beavis MBBS FRACGP MPH General Medical Practitioner (Australia)

Dr David Bell Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychoanalyst, London (UK)

Mr Patrick John Ramsay Boyd (signed John Boyd) MRCS LRCP MBBS FRCS FEBU Consultant Urologist (retired) (UK)

Dr Hannah Caller MBBS DCH Paediatrician, Homerton University Hospital, London (UK)

Dr Franco Camandona MD Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynaecology E.O. Ospedali Galliera, Genova (Italy)

Dr Sylvia Chandler MBChB MRCGP BA MA General Medical Practitioner (retired) (UK)

Dr Marco Chiesa MD FRCPsych Consultant Psychiatrist and Visiting Professor, University College London (UK)

Dr Carla Eleonora Ciccone MD Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynaecology AORN MOSCATI, Avellino (Italy)

Dr Owen Dempsey MBBS BSc MSc PhD General Medical Practitioner (retired) (UK)

Dr H R Dhammika MBBS Medical Officer, Dehiattakandiya Base Hospital, Dehiattakandiya (Sri Lanka)

Dr Tim Dowson MBChB MRCGP MSc MPhil Specialised General Medical Practitioner in Substance Misuse, Leeds (UK)

Miss Kamilia El-Farra MBChB FRCOG MPhil (Medical Law and Ethics) Consultant Gynaecologist, Essex (UK)

Dr Beata Farmanbar MD General Medical Practitioner (Sweden)

Dr Tomasz Fortuna MD RCPsych (affiliated) Forensic Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Adult Psychotherapist and Psychoanalyst, British Psychoanalytical Society and Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, London (UK)

Dr C Stephen Frost BSc MBChB Specialist in Diagnostic Radiology (Stockholm, Sweden) (UK and Sweden)

Dr Peter Garrett MA MD FRCP Independent writer and humanitarian physician; Visiting Lecturer in Nephrology at the University of Ulster (UK)

Dr Rachel Gibbons MBBS BSc MRCPsych. M.Inst.Psychoanal. Mem.Inst.G.A
Consultant Psychiatrist (UK)

Dr Bob Gill MBChB MRCP General Medical Practitioner (UK)

Elizabeth Gordon MS FRCS Consultant Surgeon (retired); Co-founder of Freedom
from Torture (UK)

Professor Derek A. Gould MBChB MRCP DMRD FRCR Consultant Interventional
Radiologist (retired): BSIR Gold Medal, 2010; over 110 peer-reviewed publications in
journals and chapters (UK)

Dr Jenny Grounds MD General Medical Practitioner, Riddells Creek, Victoria;
Treasurer, Medical Association for Prevention of War, Australia (Australia)

Dr Paul Hobday MBBS FRCGP DRCOG DFSRH DPM General Medical Practitioner
(retired) (UK)

Mr David Jameson-Evans MBBS FRCS Consultant Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgeon
(retired) (UK)

Dr Bob Johnson MRCPsych MRCP Diploma in Psychotherapy Neurology &
Psychiatry (Psychiatric Institute New York) MA (Psychol) PhD (Med Computing)

MBCS DPM MRCS Consultant Psychiatrist (retired); Formerly Head of Therapy,
Ashworth Maximum Security Hospital, Liverpool; Formally Consultant Psychiatrist,
Special Unit, C-Wing, Parkhurst Prison, Isle of Wight (UK)

Dr Lissa Johnson BA BSc(Hons, Psych) MPsych(Clin) PhD Clinical Psychologist
(Australia)

Dr Anna Kacperek MRCPsych Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, London
(UK)

Dr Jessica Kirker MBChB DipPsychiat MRCPsych FRANZCP MemberBPAS
Psychoanalyst and Consultant Medical Psychotherapist (retired) (UK)

Dr Willi Mast MD Facharzt für Allgemeinmedizin, Gelsenkirchen (Germany)

Dr Janet Menage MA MBChB General Medical Practitioner (retired); qualified
Psychological Counsellor; author of published research into Post-Traumatic Stress
Disorder (UK)

Professor Alan Meyers MD MPH Emeritus Professor of Paediatrics, Boston University
School of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts (United States)

Dr Salique Miah BSc MBChB FRCEM DTM&H ARCS Consultant in Emergency Medicine, Manchester (UK)

Dr David Morgan DClinPsych MSc Fellow of British Psychoanalytic Society
Psychoanalyst, Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Consultant Psychotherapist (UK)

Dr Helen Murrell MBChB MRCGP General Medical Practitioner, Gateshead (UK)

Dr Alison Anne Noonan MBBS (Sydney) MD (Rome) MA (Sydney) ANZSJA IAAP AAGP
IAP Psychiatrist, Psychoanalyst, Specialist Outreach Northern Territory, Executive
Medical Association for Prevention of War (NSW) (Australia)

Dr Alison Payne BSc MBChB DRCOG MRCGP prev FRNZGP General Medical
Practitioner, Coventry; special interest in mental health/trauma and refugee health
(UK)

Dr Peter Pech MD Specialist in Diagnostic Radiology (sub-specialty Paediatric
Radiology), Akademiska Sjukhuset (Uppsala University Hospital), Uppsala (Sweden)

Dr Tomasz Pierscionek MRes MBBS MRCPsych PGDip (UK)

Professor Allyson M Pollock MBChB MSc FFPH FRCGP FRCP (Ed) Professor of Public
Health, Newcastle University (UK)

Dr Abdulsatar Ravalia FRCA Consultant Anaesthetist (UK)

Dr. med. Ullrich Raupp MD Specialist in Psychotherapy, Child Psychiatry and Child
Neurology; Psychodynamic Supervisor (DGSv) Wesel, Germany (Germany)

Professor Andrew Samuels Professor of Analytical Psychology, University of Essex
(recently retired); Honorary/Visiting Professor at Goldsmiths and Roehampton (both
London), New York and Macau City Universities; Former Chair, UK Council for
Psychotherapy (2009–2012); Founder Board Member of the International
Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy; Founder of
Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility (UK)

Mr John H Scurr BSc MBBS FRCS Consultant General and Vascular Surgeon,
University College Hospital, London (UK)

Dr Peter Shannon MBBS (UWA) DPM (Melb) FRANZCP Adult Psychiatrist (retired)
(Australia)

Dr Gustaw Sikora MD PhD F Inst Psychoanalysis Fellow of British Psychoanalytic
Society Specialist Psychiatrist (diploids obtained in Poland and registered in the UK);
Psychoanalyst; currently in private practice (UK and Poland)

Dr Wilhelm Skogstad MRCPsych BPAS IPA Psychiatrist & Psychoanalyst, London, United Kingdom (UK and Germany)

Dr John Stace MBBS (UNSW) FRACGP FACRRM FRACMA MHA (UNSW) Country Doctor (retired), Perth (Australia)

Dr Derek Summerfield BSc (Hons) MBBS MRCPsych Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London (UK)

Dr Rob Tandy MBBS MRCPsych Consultant Psychiatrist in Psychotherapy & Psychoanalyst; Unit Head, Psychoanalytic Treatment Unit, Tavistock and Portman, London; City & Hackney Primary Care Psychotherapy Consultation Service, St Leonard's Hospital, London (UK)

Dr Noel Thomas MA MBChB DCH DobsRCOG DTM&H MFHom General Medical Practitioner; homeopath; has assisted on health/education projects in six developing countries Maesteg, Wales (UK)

Dr Philip Thomas MBChB DPM MPhil MD Formerly Professor of Philosophy Diversity & Mental Health, University of Central Lancashire; Formally Consultant Psychiatrist (UK)

Dr Gianni Tognoni MD Istituto Mario Negri, Milano (Italy)

Dr Sebastião Viola Lic Med MRCPsych Consultant Psychiatrist, Cardiff (UK)

Dr Peter Walger MD Consultant, Infectious Disease Specialist, Bonn-Duesseldorf-Berlin (Germany)

Dr Sue Wareham OAM MBBS General Medical Practitioner (retired) (Australia)

Dr Elizabeth Waterston MD General Medical Practitioner (retired), Newcastle upon Tyne (UK)

Dr Eric Windgassen MRCPsych PGDipMBA Consultant Psychiatrist (retired) (UK)

Dr Pam Wortley MBBS MRCP General Medical Practitioner (retired), Sunderland (UK)

Dr Matthew Yakimoff BOralH (DSc) GDipDent General Dental Practitioner (Australia)

Dr Rosemary Yuille BSc (Hons Anatomy) MBBS (Hons) General Medical Practitioner (retired), Canberra (Australia)

Dr Felicity de Zulueta Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist in Psychotherapy, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust; Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer in Traumatic Studies, King's College London (UK)

Dr Paquita de Zulueta MBBChir MA (Cantab) MA (Medical Law & Ethics) MRCP FRCGP PGDipCBT CBT Therapist and Coach; Senior Tutor Medical Ethics; Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer, Dept of Primary Care & Population Health, Imperial College London (UK)

New signatories added:

Dr Victoria Abdelnur MD Specialist in Integrative Trauma Therapy (Germany and Argentina)

Dr Talal Alrubaie Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist MBChB MSc MD (Austria)

Dr Ernst Berger MD Univ. Prof., Specialist for psychiatry and neurology, Specialist for child psychiatry, Psychotherapist, Former head of Human Right Commission of Austrian Ombudsman Board MUW Klinik f. Kinder- u. Jugendpsychiatrie (Austria)

Dr Brenda Bonnici, B Pharm (Hons), M Pharm (Regulatory Affairs), PhD (Neuropharmacology); Consultant Patient Information (Switzerland)

Dr Stephen Caswell Clinical Psychologist BSc (Hons) MSc PGDip DClinPsych (UK)

Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans M.B., B.S., F.R.C.S.(Eng.), M.Appl.Sci.(OHS), M.Pol.Econ., Former CEO of the Sydney Peace Foundation (Australia)

Dr C Dassos General Practitioner M.B., B.S. (Australia)

Dr Richard Davies MPsych (Clinical)/PhD, Clinical Psychologist (Australia)

Dr Chrissa Deligianni MD Pediatrician (Greece)

Dr Flavia Donati MD Specialist in Psychiatry and Psychoanalyst (Rome, Italy)

Dr Donal Duffin MB MRCP (London) MRCGP Consultant Physician NHS (retired) (UK)

Dr Iris Eggeling, Specialist in Diagnostics (Radiology and Nuclear Medicine) (Germany)

Dr Leif Elinder, Medical Doctor, Specialist in Paediatric Medicine (Sweden and New Zealand)

Dr William Hogan, MD, Internal Medicine (United States)

Dr Richard House, Psychotherapist (retired), Chartered Psychologist, AFBPsS Cert.Couns (UK)

Dr Vivek Jain, Primary Care Physician, Clinical Instructor, (Psychiatry residency training graduate) (United States)

Dr Kerstin Käll, MD, PhD, specialist in psychiatry, working mainly in addiction medicine at the Psychiatric Clinic, University Hospital, Linköping (Sweden)

Dr Sujeewa Indrajith Karunananda, MBBS, MD (Psychiatry) Acting Psychiatrist, District Base Hospital, Medirigiriya (Sri Lanka)

Dr Ove Johansson, Chief Medical Doctor (Överläkare), formerly at the Karolinska University Hospital (Sweden)

Dr Cath Keaney BSc MBBS DCH FRACGP (Australia)

Dr Anne Lemaire General Medical Practitioner (Belgium and Portugal)

Dr Alberto Gutiérrez Mardones, PhD, Chief Medical Doctor (Överläkare), Karolinska University Hospital (Sweden)

Dr Daniel McQueen, MRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist, Child and Family Department, The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust Tavistock Centre (UK)

Dr Carine Minne FRCPsych Consultant Psychiatrist in Forensic Psychotherapy; Psychoanalyst, London (UK)

Dr Maria Ntasiou, MD, Pulmonologist, director in primary health (Greece)

Professor Marcello Ferrada de Noli, Med Dr (Psychiatry, PhD), Professor Emeritus. Former head of Research group on International and Cross-Cultural Injury Epidemiology, Karolinska Institute, Sweden. Formerly Research Fellow, Harvard Medical School. Chair, Swedish Doctors for Human Rights -SWEDHR (Sweden)

Dr Lena Oske, Medical Doctor, Specialist in General Medicine, Skåne Health Services (Sweden)

Dr Efstratios Prousalis General Dental Practitioner, DDS 2008, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki (Greece)

Dr Joseph M. Pullara MD Hospitalist Physician Olympic Medical Center and Emergency Medicine Physician Forks Community Hospital Washington (United States)

Professor Anders Romelsjö, Med Dr (PhD), Professor Emeritus. Formerly at the Department of Social Medicine, Karolinska Institute, Sweden. Vice-Chair, Swedish Doctors for Human Rights -SWEDHR (Sweden)

Dr Maria Rossi MD Specialist in Nephrology San Gerardo Hospital Monza (retired) (Italy)

Dr Lars Sjöstrand, Consultant Psychiatrist, Addiction Center Stockholm (Beroendecentrum Stockholm) (Sweden)

Dr Jean-Pierre Unger MD DTM&H MPH PhD, Associate Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Visiting Professor at the University of Newcastle (Belgium and UK)

Dr Victor John Webster, Surgeon (Upper GI laparoscopic) MB BS (Adel) FRCS(Eng) FRACS (gen surg) Cert HST (RACS Eng) (retired) (Australia)

Dr Steinar Westin MD PhD, Professor of Social Medicine and former General Practitioner (Norway)

Dr Jelena Zagorcic MD, General Medical Practitioner (retired) (Serbia)

Open letter signatories as listed: <https://medium.com/@doctors4assange/concerns-of-medical-doctors-about-the-plight-of-mr-julian-assange-ffb09a5dd588>