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Al Jazeera

Ecuador offers refuge to Assange

WikiLeaks founder is welcome to find a home in the Latin American country with no conditions, minister says.

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An Ecuadorean minister has offered residence in his country to **Julian Assange**, the reclusive founder of WikiLeaks, without conditions.

"We are ready to give him residence in Ecuador, with no problems and no conditions," Kintto Lucas, the deputy foreign minister, told the website Ecuadorinmediato on Monday.

"We are going to invite him to come to Ecuador so he can freely present the information he possesses and all the documentation, not just over the internet but in a variety of public forums."

Assange has enraged the US, and many other countries, by releasing masses of classified US documents, including a dump of embarrassing **diplomatic cables** and documents related to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq earlier this year.

After the latest leak, **Australian police** said they had begun investigating whether any of the country's laws were broken by the release. Assange is an Australian national.

Kevin Rudd, the Australian foreign minister, said the unauthorised release of diplomatic communications had been a major problem for every nation state in the world.

"We, the Australian government, condemn it because it helps nobody," he told Al Jazeera on Tuesday.

"The reason we have diplomacy is that it remains private. This [leak] has fundamentally undermined that and I believe those responsible for it should be held accountable."

Arrest warrant

An **international arrest warrant** was issued in mid-November against Assange on suspicion of rape and sexual molestation of two women in Sweden. The 39-year-old claims the crime allegations are part of a smear campaign.

The US, for its part, has a criminal investigation under way into the release of about 250,000 diplomatic cables.

The White House branded those who released the documents "criminals, first and foremost," but so far US authorities have publicly filed no charges against Assange.

Assange's whereabouts are unclear, although he spoke to a conference in Jordan via videolink before the latest leaks on Sunday.

Ecuador's Lucas praised people like Assange "who are constantly investigating and trying to get light out of the dark corners of [state] information".

He said Ecuador's government was "very concerned" by revelations in the leaked documents that US diplomats have been involved in spying.

WikiLeaks says it has 1,621 cables that originated from the US embassy in the Ecuadorean capital, Quito. Their contents have not yet been disclosed.

Ecuador's leftist government is one of several in the region that have often been at odds with Washington. It expelled two US diplomats in early 2009, accusing one of directing CIA operations in Ecuador and another of interfering in police affairs.

The government continues close counternarcotics co-operation with the US, but a year ago Rafael Correa, the president, refused to renew the lease on what had been Washington's only base for counternarcotics flights in South America.