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Al Jazeera

Assange 'facing death threats'

WikiLeaks founder takes part in question and answer session for UK newspaper as pressure mounts over Swedish warrant.

The founder of whistleblowing website WikiLeaks has said that he is taking precautions against death threats following the publication of hundreds of leaked US diplomatic cables.

Julian Assange, who is also wanted for questioning by Swedish police over alleged sex offences, was answering readers' question on the website of the UK's *Guardian* newspaper on Friday, despite lying low since the documents began to appear on the group's website on Sunday.

"The threats against our lives are a matter of public record, however, we are taking the appropriate precautions to the degree that we are able when dealing with a superpower," he was quoted as saying on the newspaper's website.

His comments came after a Canadian professor called for Assange to be assassinated for leaking US diplomatic cables, while former Republican presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee said those responsible for the leaks should face execution.

Responding to the statement by Tom Flanagan, the political science professor, Assange said: "It is correct that Mr Flanagan and the others seriously making these statements should be charged with incitement to commit murder".

'Lionise the source'

Assange, whose whereabouts have been unclear since the US cables were made public on Sunday, answered reader questions on topics ranging from censorship and the ethics of releasing confidential files, to queries about extraterrestrial life in the question and answer session on the *Guardian* website.

He also paid tribute to those who have passed on information to WikiLeaks, which has come under increasing amounts of fire for releasing confidential and sensitive information on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and most recently the US diplomatic cables.

He referred to Bradley Manning, the US soldier allegedly behind a leaked video showing American forces firing on Iraqi civilians and journalists, saying that if he were indeed the whistleblower he was "a hero".

"For the past four years one of our goals has been to lionise the source who take the real risks in nearly every journalistic disclosure and without whose efforts, journalists would be nothing," he wrote.

"If indeed it is the case, as alleged by the Pentagon, that the young soldier - Bradley Manning - is behind some of our recent disclosures, then he is without doubt an unparalleled hero."

'Free speech deficit'

Assange said that WikiLeaks had deliberately placed some of its servers in countries that it suspects of suffering "a free speech deficit, in order to separate rhetoric from reality".

He said Amazon, which recently booted the site from its servers, "was one of these cases", suggesting that his organisation had exposed the US of hypocrisy over free speech.

WikiLeaks was **forced to change its online address** earlier on Friday after its original wikileaks.org domain was taken offline by system provider EveryDNS.net, which said WikiLeaks had breached its terms of service.

Hours later WikiLeaks said it had moved to Switzerland, using the new address <http://wikileaks.ch>, a site named owned by a Swiss academic network that campaigns for data privacy and internet freedoms.

A French web provider has also said it will ask a judge to rule on whether it can continue to host WikiLeaks, after the government called for the website to be kicked out of the country.

"We have decided to ask a judge to rule on the legality or not of this site being on French territory," Octave Klaba, the managing director of web provider OVH said on Friday.

"It's neither for the political world nor for OVH to call for or to decide on a site's closure, but for the justice system," Klabo said.

"That's how it should work under the rule of law."

The group has faced repeated cyber attacks since it began releasing more than 250,000 US diplomatic cables on Sunday, a move that has angered a number of nations.

In answering another question on his home country, Assange said it had been made clear that he would not be welcome in Australia if he wished to return.

"Julia Gillard [the prime minister] and the attorney general, Robert McClelland, have made it clear that not only is my return impossible but that they are actively working to assist the United States government in its attacks on myself and our people.

"This brings into question what does it mean to be an Australian citizen - does that mean anything at all?"

'Lightning rod'

Speaking about his role at WikiLeaks, Assange said that he does not see himself so much as a journalist, but more of a "publisher and editor-in-chief who organises and directs other journalists," and described himself as a "lightning rod" for the organisation.

"Someone must be responsible to the public and only a leadership that is willing to be publicly courageous can genuinely suggest that sources take risks for the greater good.

"In that process, I have become the lightening rod. I get undue attacks on every aspect of my life, but then I also get undue credit as some kind of balancing force," he wrote.

However he was not completely forthcoming in some answers.

When one reader queried whether releasing diplomatic cables could harm the important work of those relying on the confidential nature of their work to act against "brutal regimes ... ethnic cleansing" and help set up debt relief programmes, Assange merely wrote: "If you trim the vast editorial letter to the singular question actually asked, I would be happy to give it my attention."

Media reports have said that Assange is in southern England and that local police are aware of his whereabouts.

Swedish authorities said on Friday that information missing from a European arrest warrant they had issued against Assange had been handed to British authorities.

"We sent it. They asked for complementary information and now they have it," Karin Rosander, the Swedish Prosecution Authority spokeswoman, said.

