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**NATIONAL PRESS CLUB ADDRESS
KRISTINN HRAFNSSON 03 DEC 2019**

SABRA LANE: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the National Press Club of Australia. My name is Sabra Lane. I am the president of the club and you'll forgive me, this is probably one of the only times I'm allowed to do this. [Speaks Icelandic].

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: [Speaks Icelandic].

[Applause]

SABRA LANE: Today's guest has come a very long way: Iceland. He is the WikiLeaks editor in chief Kristinn Hrafnsson and he's here to talk about Julian Assange who is lingering in a jail cell in London and there are calls for him to be released and not extradited to the United States. Kristinn, welcome to the club.

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: Thank you.

SABRA LANE: [Speaks Icelandic].

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: Thank you. Thanks a lot.

[Applause]

Well thank you for this warm welcome and introduction, Sabra. [Speaks Icelandic]. It's a great pleasure to be with you at Australia's National Press Club on Ngunnawal land. I pay my respect to Ngunnawal elders past, present and emerging. I've come a long way from Iceland's wintery darkness to be here in the homeland of Julian Assange, on the anniversary of the Eureka Stockade which was an important turning point in your

democratic history I believe, and had an implication for the history of the press in this country as well.

But today, Julian Assange is about as far from this ocean and beauty of this place as it is possible to be. I wish I didn't have to convey to you what it's like in Belmarsh Prison. It's a brick-and-wire hell of sensory deprivation. It is no place for a journalist or a publisher and it's no place for an Australian who comes from this bright and warm place.

After just a few hours of visiting Julian in that place, I find myself very angry and almost stripped of hope. Julian has been there for six months now, mostly alone in a cell for over 20 hours a day, virtually in solitary confinement. I don't know how much longer he can last. He is a resilient and strong man, and I should know, I have worked with him closely for ten years but he is no longer the man I met back then. He has sacrificed everything to publish what whistle-blowers have entrusted to WikiLeaks and every release comes from leaks. WikiLeaks does not hack. It publishes what whistle-blowers provide and we keep on doing so because whistle-blowers keep trusting WikiLeaks with material.

Recently, whistle-blowers entrusted WikiLeaks with documents about bribery, money laundering and corruption, the Fishrot Files. Two ministers in Namibia have just been forced to resign and earlier today they were charged because they were revealed to be corrupt and taking bribes. Another whistle-blower recently provided e-mailed communication from- to then chief of cabinet of the OPCW, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Bob Fairweather. The email was from someone who was in the inspection team that visited the site of an alleged chemical weapons attack in Duma in Syria in April 2018. And remember that this alleged chemical weapon attack saw Syria bombed by the US, France and the UK. The email outright accuses the leadership of OPCW of omitting information and misrepresenting the facts. The emails also show how much pressure the US was bringing to bear on an organisation that is supposed to be independent and impartial.

Julian has sacrificed everything so that whistle-blowers can shine light on these kinds of serious wrongdoing, so the public can understand truths about our world and for the principles of press freedom. He should not be tortured, as the UN torture expert states is occurring. He should not be extradited for publishing. He should not face 175 years in a US jail for publishing information about wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and activities in Guantanamo Bay which is what he- the charges related to. He should not face jail for informing Australians and the rest of the world about the true nature of the wars we are fighting in. It is time to bring this Australian citizen home.

What I want to discuss with you today is the fate of journalism and Julian, and I look forward to your questions and thoughts. But before I discuss who or what is a journalist, when government secrecy is legitimate or excessive, let me say some thank yous. I want to thank Kerry O'Brien, one of your finest journalists, for what you said that the Walkleys last week. He made an important speech about the fate of journalism. For those of you who weren't there, this is what he said: Julian Assange is mouldering in a British prison awaiting extradition to the United States where he may pay for their severe embarrassment with a life in prison. Again, this government could demonstrate its commitment to a free press by using its significant influence with its closest ally to gain his return to Australia. I want to thank everyone who applauded when he said that and it was almost all of the Australian journalists there.

I agree also with the leader of the MEAA, the journalists' union in this country, of which Julian has been a card-carrying member since 2007. Thank you, Paul Murphy, chief executive of the MEAA for saying at the Walkleys, quote: Julian Assange may be extradited to the United States to possibly face a lifetime in prison. Among the charges he is accused of publishing material that could harm the national security of the United States. The scope of these words should alarm every journalist. There was loud applause when this was said too. Because Australian journalists get what is at stake, particularly after the raids on the ABC and on the journalist's home in this town and some have understood this all along. And here I mean journalists and writers like Phillip Adams, Fran Kelly, Andrew Fowler, Bernard King and Guy Rundle. These journalists have made a consistent effort to wade through the complexities of Julian's case, to see the simple truths at stake: principally those about press freedom.

I want to thank Scott Ludlam who is here today. For many years, one could have been forgiven for thinking only one Australian Parliamentarian understood the danger arising from so many national security laws and the significance of the persecution of a publisher for publishing. But now, I can also thank Andrew Wilkie MP and George Christensen MP, who co-chair the Bringing Julian Assange Home Parliamentary Group. This group is an eclectic mixture of people from across the spectrum of politics who can all agree that it is time to see Julian Assange arrive back in Australia a free man. So thank you for getting it Barnaby Joyce, Rebecca Sharkie, Rex Patrick, Julian Hill, Steve Georganas, Richard di Natale, Adam Bandt, Peter Whish-Wilson, and Zali Steggall.

I also want to thank someone here today who is in court tomorrow for a peaceful protest, climbing onto your Parliament with a banner that read free Julian Assange, no US extradition. I hope the judge you face is similar to the magistrate another protester faced in Melbourne last week for peacefully protesting at the UK consulate. That magistrate stated

that some would commend the person for occupying the UK consulate and did not impose a conviction or a good behaviour bond, but a \$400 fine instead.

I want to thank the doctors who signed a statement of concern about Julian's health, one of who is here today. Thank you Dr Sue Wareham. And how could I not acknowledge and thank Julian's parents whose agony, it is difficult to imagine. Christine, Julian's mother once said that as a mother, she wishes Julian had never started WikiLeaks. But as a citizen, she was proud of her son and supported WikiLeaks and its aims. That is the kind of person who raised Julian, a person of principle who thinks like a citizen. It becomes clear through knowing his parents how Julian came to be Julian. I am a parent myself and as a parent, I truly don't know how they have endured ten years of their son being mercilessly smeared while watching his deterioration, suffering and isolation. And for what? For publishing material that, as Kerry O'Brien said, embarrassed the United States.

But WikiLeaks wasn't alone and very often wasn't first in publishing documents on Guantanamo, Iraq and Cable-Gate back in 2010 and 2011. We partnered with some media organisation in this country and with *Der Spiegel* in Germany, *The Guardian* in the UK and *The New York Times* in the United States and many others. And that is also worth a thank you. The power of what we collectively made available to the public about wars and war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, about crimes against humanity at Guantanamo Bay. It was worthwhile and it changed things, not enough things, but some for the better.

At the time, many agreed and welcomed WikiLeaks, which was awarded the Walkley Award for Most Outstanding Contribution to Journalism in 2011. There are dozens of other awards Julian has received; three journalism prizes this year alone. I continue to believe that WikiLeaks and very many media outlets were right to expose what has happened in our names.

The United States is trying to prosecute an Australian citizen who is not even in the United States but in Europe. A gross overreach into the sovereign territory of other countries and a dangerous precedent. And what precedent does it set? It is a new form of forced rendition. Only this time, not with a sack over the heads in an orange jumpsuit, but with the enabling of the UK legal system with the apparent support of the Australian Government. If Russia and China were doing this to an Australian journalist, we'd be hearing a lot more about it and we will, if this precedent is set.

I strongly believe that resolving this issue has important international implications. Prolonging it creates an enabling environment for a deterioration of press freedom standards globally. All around the world, media organisations, prominent individuals and

grassroots campaign efforts are growing and expressing concern by lobbying and by taking protest action. *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Guardian* have expressed grave concern about the charges he faces.

UK Special Envoy on Media Freedom Amal Clooney stated at the June Global Conference for Media Freedom the charges criminalise common practices in journalism, which the American Civil Liberties Union has warned establish a dangerous precedent that can be used to target all news organisations that hold the government accountable by publishing its secrets. The bottom line is that the fate of Julian and journalism around the world are entwined.

Now, let me address the question of whether Julian Assange is a journalist. It's actually pretty insulting to be honest. I'm recognised as a journalist but I don't need awards to know what I was doing or what's journalism for 20 years before I joined WikiLeaks and for the 10 years since I did. And the High Court of the United Kingdom is not confused on this matter. It described Julian as, quote, a journalist well known through his operation of WikiLeaks, unquote, in the opening line of its 2 November 2011 ruling. And the US Army Counterintelligence Centre is similarly not confused. It described WikiLeaks as, quote, news organisation, unquote, and Assange as a writer, a journalist that had shown journalistic responsibility to the newsworthiness or fair use of the classified document. Two relevant professional bodies for journalists are not confused either. The MEAA made it clear in 2007 and the Walkley Award in 2011 when Julian got the prestigious award and the IFJ, the International Federation of Journalists, they gave him his international journalist card.

The US indictment documents against Julian describe routine journalistic practices. The first relates to taking measures to protect the identity of a source, and the remaining 17 charges relate to receiving and publishing information. The prosecution is being pursued under the Espionage Act, the first use against a publisher in US history. It is a prosecution in which there is no public interest defence.

Alan Rusbridger, former editor of *The Guardian*, who acknowledges Julian as a journalist, and is surely qualified to do so described the journalistic activities in the charges as: the kind of activity that honourable journalists do all the time. *WikiLeaks* has experimented and challenged some journalistic practices, and as Hart Cohen and Antonio Castillo say in the *Global Media Journal*: it has also changed the way we think about the rules. And how? What *WikiLeaks* did when it was first established in 2006 was provide technological anonymity and untraceability to whistle-blowers and sources. This is a bit similar to what the ABC installed last week, SecureDrop, and what the Guardian and New York Times caught up with a few years ago by installing it too. *WikiLeaks* was out in front in

understanding the implications of the internet for journalism, its promise and potential for protecting sources, for realising new ways a networked fourth estate could provide information to the public, and other media outlets are now applying those learnings.

What *WikiLeaks* specialises in is the analysis and publication of large datasets, of censored or otherwise restricted official materials involving international relations, war, spying and corruption. When he could still speak for himself, Julian often referred to how an archive, rather than a few selected documents, can shine light on how human institutions actually behave, how they evolve, how power is exercised. It is the archive being made public, and not a few select documents, that has the scale to deal with the problems of corrupt institutions.

Now, is there a time and a place for secrecy? Well of course there is – *WikiLeaks* uses it extensively, and so do governments, and it is legitimate when there are delicate diplomatic engagements underway, when it's about dangerous materials, for all sorts of reasons. But what we have seen so much, and what we have revealed, is how rampant secrecy has become, and how corruption thrives and becomes epidemic under conditions of secrecy. We have also revealed the unreasonable over-classification of documents, when governments should not hide all their actions behind official secrecy while seeking to know more and more about every one of us. To speak about balance between government secrecy and the public's right to know is to not acknowledge how seriously out of balance these things have become.

It's a journalist's responsibility to publish and inform the public and undo unnecessary secrecy. Just like we journalists must keep our sources secret, we have a necessity to do that. It's not our responsibility to protect intelligence agencies or protect police if they act in an incompetent or unlawful way, or when a whistle-blower has risked everything because something is very wrong and only sunlight can halt the wrongdoing in its tracks.

As Andrew Fowler, another great Australian journalist has observed, *WikiLeaks* is an old-fashioned idea about journalism reborn in the age of the Internet.

Did Julian Assange himself seek to redact the war logs and cables? Yes, as Mark Davis recently attested at a Sydney Politics in the Pub event, he witnessed Julian stay up night after night to do just that.

The Harvard professor Yochai Benkler who testified in the Manning trial, wrote a fine paper about the importance of a free and irresponsible press. By irresponsible he meant not

responsible to one group or another. He meant that it is the responsibility of the press to remain free and to publish that which powerful interests would prefer to be kept secret.

When the ABC launched SecureDrop last week, this comment was made: It's a sad commentary on our times that SecureDrop is necessary: we hope one day it isn't. Similarly, it's a sad commentary on our times that *WikiLeaks* is necessary: we hope one day it isn't. For now, while whistle-blowers keep trusting our platform with information, it is. And we will keep publishing.

The UK-US Extradition Treaty stipulates that if an offence is political, extradition from the UK must not proceed. Well, the extradition of Julian to the US must not proceed. The charges against Julian are political and being used in a political way to deter journalism and publishing.

The US authorities have spied on him, including live webstreaming of his meetings with lawyers and colleagues, including from the Embassy's toilets, for years. An attempt was made to blackmail *WikiLeaks* – to extract 3 million Euros from me in fact – in exchange for these surveillance materials collected by Spanish firm Under Cover Global. This matter is now before the Spanish courts but gives a lot of insight into the lengths the superpower has been prepared to go. The German National Broadcaster has filed a criminal complaint about this firm spying on its journalists visiting the Embassy.

I've travelled 10 time zones to be here today because there are things you can do in defence of your colleague and your profession that we can't do from London or my home town, Reykjavik.

You are able to ensure that timely and accurate information about the importance of this case reaches a wide Australian audience. You are able to disarm and dismiss the ruthless misinformation campaign that this is somehow about Sweden, or the treatment of his cat, or corruption within the US democratic party. In keeping the focus on the indictments for publishing, you keep the focus on the truth.

You can ask him and you are in the position of facing the Prime Minister and his colleagues day after day, sometimes eye to eye and you can ask him: what has he done to get Julian home? How has he stood up for his fellow citizen? Your government did take steps to secure the freedom of James Ricketson, also of Melinda Taylor, also of Peter Greste. And please be direct. Please be insistent. Ask for details. Not platitudes. Please be unrelenting and prepared to back each other when the inevitable evasion occurs. You, above all people are people to distinguish between publishing and espionage; a distinction that the US

government and its allies seem intent on erasing. And you know as well as I that if they are successful in this, then Julian Assange will be the last of our colleagues to have his life destroyed in this line of work.

Look around this room today. You each have a role in the political ecosystem that helps keep things safe for everyone else. I know you are under a great deal of pressure but this is where we must draw the line. As our friends in the union movement say: an injury to one is an injury to all. Please help us get our colleague and our friend safely home.

Australia at the moment is engaged in a debate about secrecy, whistle-blowing and journalism, especially around national security. This is a very old debate, because journalism at its core will always be about power – about subjecting the powerful, and the way they use power, to scrutiny, and overcoming their resistance to that and supporting those who want to hold them accountable. What's changed is that the internet has given journalists and whistle-blowers more tools to undertake that process – but also given the powerful more tools to resist, and to attack those who try to subject them to scrutiny.

Thus we have an old conflict being fought on new battlefields, in new media, on new devices and platforms. But the stakes are perhaps greater than they have ever been before.

Thank you.

SABRA LANE: Could you- sorry. Could you- thank you very much for that speech. Could you give us an idea of just what Julian's health is like? You've said that you're concerned about his health, the doctors signed- 60 doctors signed a letter last week saying his health was at risk. And I think you last visited him in October, so I'm not sure that you- can you give us an idea of his health?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: I have been able to visit him about four times since he was arrested in this despicable manner in April. Of course, he came from a bad place after all these years inside the Ecuadorian embassy, so- being thrown into that prison designed to intimidate and- actually, in fact, his conditions are worse, and I've heard that from lawyers who have presented terrorists who are serving time in Belmarsh Prison. They have actually a better environment to cope with the situation than Julian has. He is mostly in isolation for 20 hours a day, or even more. To give an example of how he is treated there, he is always- when I go to visit him, he is always either the first or the last one to enter the visitation hall. And that is because they empty the hallways, when he goes from the cell into the visitation. And for what reason, one doesn't understand. And I've seen him grow thinner. He has lost probably 10, 15 kilos in these few months. He is pale and he's fraught. He has a

hard time to think, he is constantly wearing earplugs because of the noise. And I basically see life fading out of his eyes, and I'm- I am really concerned about his health. This is just no place for an individual of his stature, no place for a journalist and no place for an Australian citizen who has done nothing wrong but expose the truth.

SABRA LANE: And that letter did- how is that received by the officials?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: If you're referring to officials in the UK, I have not heard of any reaction but they are becoming masters of dismissing anything in support of Julian Assange. Unbelievably they dismissed the finding of a very important human rights tribunal, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention that found that when he was in the embassy he was being arbitrarily retained. And that panel in Geneva basically ordered the United Kingdom and Sweden to resolve the situation. It was dismissed as nonsense. The politicians, they are misunderstanding. They don't understand the laws here. And when this was presented as mitigating evidence to- in the court this Spring, in order for him to at least get the usual sentence of a fine for breaching bail, the judge said - and I was present there - the United Nations ruling to not have any bearings in my courtroom. And that was after she had snarled on Julian and called him a narcissist even though she was seeing him for the first time behind bullet proof glass and he had only said his name and date of birth.

So I don't think that unless organisations and individuals start pushing against the authorities in the United Kingdom, and I hope politicians on this side start picking up the phone and put pressure on the system in the United Kingdom that things will change because he must get out of there. I mean it's absolutely impossible to think that an individual who's preparing for a case, the most important case of his life, he is fighting for his life in February, that he has not a position to prepare the case. It's only two or three weeks ago that he actually got the papers to read on his own defence case. I mean that's totally unacceptable. How can this happen in a civilised country? So this has to change and I'm hoping that pressure will come from this side of the world for it to change.

SABRA LANE: When we spoke this morning about six hours ago you hadn't an appointment with the Foreign Minister Marise Payne, has that changed?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: No not yet.

SABRA LANE: Are you hopeful?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: I am always hopeful. You have to be hopeful. I have been heartened to- just in a few days, I know I sound gloomy here that I'm drawing a dark picture but since I

arrived here I've met a lot of journalists here and a lot of supporters and I've felt that there is a growing sense of knowledge of the importance of fighting this case, fighting for the freedom of Julian. And that gift gives you hope. And I think there is a momentum coming and people are more and more understanding the importance of this. Not just for Julian, for all journalists not just in this country but around the world and for the public because we're talking about the foundation of our democracy here. This is this is a dear thing. So let it be the pushback against the two decades of absurd deterioration of our human rights and I hope that the freedom of Julian will be the first step in the right direction because we have certainly been in the wrong direction for 20 years.

SABRA LANE: Catherine Murphy, hello.

QUESTION: Hello. Thank you for coming all the way to Canberra for- and making this speech here today. I have two questions. The first sort of picks up from Sabra's question to you about ministers or meeting with the Foreign Minister and so forth. Obviously particularly over the last couple of months WikiLeaks has had more purchase in politics. This group has been formed, a cross-party group in order to raise awareness about Assange and the extradition. But then how do you deepen that into engagement at the government level? Because the Government's showing absolutely no sign of rallying to this cause. So that's the first question. The second to you is in your capacity as the editor of WikiLeaks and it relates to the US election. Julian Assange issued a statement in, I think it was- let me check the date sorry, November 2016 just about the disclosure of the Clinton material. He said that the intention was not to influence the result of the US election. Now journalists face these dilemmas all the time. What are the consequences of disclosures? But the fact of the matter is I'm sure that those disclosures about the Clinton material did impact the election result in the US. Has the WikiLeaks organisation had any cause post the election of Donald Trump to regret the fact that no material was published about the Trump campaign or any other candidates in that election, given his own behaviour, given what has been disclosed during the course of his bitterly contested presidency?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: Well if I start from the end do I have any regrets about not publishing anything about Donald Trump? Well the regrets would then be not receiving anything of importance that we could authenticate and publish. It is perceived as we were we do not pick targets in that sense. I mean we are given information and if we had information that were out the sorts, that it was in the public interest to publish it and if we could authenticate it, we would have. So maybe the regret is that no whistle-blower, no source did submit information of that sort to us.

But the question about influencing the outcome of elections and how journalists should somehow now in many people's minds, stay away from politics prior to election is mind boggling to say the least. I thought that the role of journalists in a democratic society was to unearth secrets and influence and educate the public so they could go to the voting booth as informed citizens. So exposing the politicians prior to election is part of what we are supposed to be doing. And I've been told, do you regret that WikiLeaks did publish this information prior to the 2016 election? And I said this to Julian as well. I said if that had been withheld, it had been a journalistic crime, I would have left the organisation if I've heard of that to happen. And that is my belief. We should of course, especially prior to election, educate the public about what the policies are about. I spoke about a revelation in Namibia about a bribe to officials there, two of them are in jail, the Minister of Fisheries and Minister of Justice. The revelation came out three weeks before the election. There was nobody saying in Namibia that this was an interference into the electoral process or an attempt to influence the outcome of the SWAPO party who actually went from getting 97 per cent of votes down to 57 in the presidential race, which is an outcome that partly may be a result of this revelation. But in my mind to have not published it until after the election would have been such a betrayal of that it was a journalistic crime not to do so. So that is my general sort of approach to this debate. And why should there be any different approach to things in Namibia or the United States? In many ways the United States thinks that they are above principles and a different set of rules should apply.

Now you also asked about the politicians here. I'm hoping to meet with parties and I rely of course on their support group in this city in this country will know the lay of the land better than I do. But I've been heartened to see that former politicians of prominence have been coming out even for a minister at the time that these uncomfortable truths were exposed. And speaking out on Julian Assange's behalf. And I think that there is a spill over, there's a growing concern in the community and there will be a cross-party unity on fighting for Julian Assange coming back to this country.

SABRA LANE: Sara Eisen.

QUESTION: Sara Eisen from the *West Australian*. Thank you so much for speaking. I wanted to know if you could articulate a little bit more your response to the action or rather inaction of the Australian Government and also from travelling so much internationally. If you can tell me what the perception of that inaction is on the international stage?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: Well I will say in the Bundestag in Germany just two days before boarding a plane down to this side and I got that question from German politicians and I didn't have the answers and they were puzzled why the Australian Government hadn't

done more throughout the years. I did not have the answer. I could point out the strategic alliance and historical alliance. But this is just something that everybody knows about. But it is puzzling to many on that side. And I do not have the answers but I guess I too have recognised that there is a question and disbelief that more has not been done.

SABRA LANE: Tim Shaw.

QUESTION: Tim Shaw, member of the National Press Club board. In June of 2012, I interviewed Julian live from London, and he said to me, quote: I was trying to play a very precarious game with the United States and I had 251,000 US diplomatic cables in my pocket. I asked him if he was a technology terrorist or a titan of transparency, and he referred to then-US Vice President Joe Biden – who is now a Democratic candidate in the 2020 elections – and Vice President Biden referred to him as a high tech terrorist. Today, if you had 251,000 cables delivered to you, you know your responsibilities and your methodologies, would you do anything different to what Julian and WikiLeaks did back then?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: Well, we of course learn from experience. But in essence, this was the right approach. And remember, this was not dumped on the Internet all at once, even though that is sometimes the feeling I get when I see the constant accusation of irresponsible data testing without any filtering or any sort of curating, which is nonsense. All these releases that are now the basis of these indictments, the Afghan war documents, the Iraq War documents, and the diplomatic cables. They were curated in some way. I mean, one third of the Afghan documents were withheld in the summer of 2010. All of the Iraq documents were redacted in a systematic manner. And the diplomatic cables were drip-fed out over 10 months, and we only stop that sort of process in coordination and cooperation with almost 100 news organisations all around the world who put their expertise in in analysing and producing a story on the basis of these documents. So it was all but an irresponsible throwing out of the- on the contrary, I mean it was- it- this [indistinct] method has become a model for others, international media alliances like the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism who used the Panama Papers, and other organisations on a more local level like in Eastern Europe, even now there's an African one. So this is a model for cross-border cooperation. But this method that we use over these 10 months- and it was only because of a rather irresponsible behaviour of *The Guardian* journalists who publish secret passwords to a file that was online, that the entire thing was released.

But I remember in the first two weeks of the Cable Gate project, we were constantly being hammered by the fact that we were drip feeding this out to the world. Why are you holding

this back? You know- the opposite was true. We were harshly have criticised for not dumping everything, so of course the other journalists could all dive in and write stories on it. So it's hard to please. But this was all- but no it was not an irresponsible thing, and I think in essence, I would have done it in the same way, in the same way. And it had a great impact. At the time, Latin America was a bit my experience, it's probably because I'm the only person within WikiLeaks who does not speak Spanish, but that's the way things go. And you could see how much an effect it had. We were dealing with both big mainstream media organisations, but often with smaller grassroots media organisations, three or four people editorial, really fighting against different sorts of circumstances. And it was very rewarding to take that on that trip.

And maybe I can mention a little anecdote here about how people perceived WikiLeaks at the time. Because you're absolutely true. You had screaming individuals, politicians, and commentators in the United States at that time who were calling for the killing, the assassination, the droning of WikiLeaks. The daughter of Dick Cheney actually wanted the Pentagon to send a drone to Reykjavik, because she thought that my home city was the headquarters of WikiLeaks at the time. It was absurd. I mean, the madness that was going on. And you had the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs live from the Pentagon talking about the blood on their hands thing. They might already have blood on their hands, and I was watching him and I was thinking, my God, this man representing the US military talking about anybody having blood on their hands. What an absurd thing. You know, almost in tears. And ever since- so we just address this issue, because I know it's probably going to come up, has any harm become because of this millions of documents that WikiLeaks has released over the years, and especially these documents from 2010.

Well, in the Manning trial, Pentagon was forced to come before the military court and admits that no physical harm had occurred because of this release. And to this day, we have not heard of any such incidents. So it is astonishing, and Orwellian, and even Kafkaesque as well - if I start sort of throwing out the cliches - that the head of the U.S. military is accusing Julian Assange and also WikiLeaks to have blood on their hands after we exposed all of those things, the atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan. That's absurd.

SABRA LANE: Club's patron Ken Randall.

QUESTION: I'd like to ask you this: although the Julian Assange case is far from over - well it seems to be far from over - it has raised awareness and discussion of all the issues that you've raised today. Do you think it's advanced in any positive way any of those affecting journalists and journalism?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: Are you referring to the case of Julian Assange and how it has affected other journalists and journalism in general? Or their position, security wise or-? Well, if I understood your question correctly, I am certain that already the process that he is in - even though he hasn't been extradited or sentenced - I have a feeling, of course I can't say that for certain, that the raids here in Australia this summer in June would not have happened if he hadn't been dragged out of the embassy in April. And it seems that the incidence of these aggressive acts against journalists have escalated in the last few months. So it seems that the precedent that I talked about, and that specific question of territorial reach that the US seeks, has also- has had an effect on other actions that enables governments to take more bolder steps. So I think it's already had an effect today.

SABRA LANE: Mary Kostakidis.

QUESTION: Thank you. Kristinn, when you joined WikiLeaks in 2010, you were Iceland's most highly acclaimed journalist. You've been there a decade, as have indeed the other core- many of the core members of the WikiLeaks group. That doesn't happen unless you all believe in the objectives of the organisation, of course, but also that you all have respect for editor Julian Assange, who has been much maligned. I have two questions for you. Firstly, what concerns do you have for your own freedom and safety and that of your staff? And secondly, if you could reflect for us, please, your estimation of him as a human being?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: Addressing the first one first- the second one first, actually. We came from a totally different sides of- and our line of thought. He was from the early hacking days from Melbourne, from the time when hacking did not have a necessarily negative connotation. And I from this square mainstream media environment, mostly in broadcasting for 20 years, but probably considered somewhat radical in my approach and not an easy person to deal with, I guess, if one takes into account the time that I had to storm out of my working place. Which was- I think, as often as I was awarded. But we found a common ground, and we had long discussions, and they were always inspiring. We had disagreements about certain things but we found common grounds. And he listens well, and he doesn't dismiss anything you say. So he's a good man to talk to, a kind person with a good sense of humour. He is anything but the strange character that has been sort of portrayed in the mainstream media on some levels, which is the result of this slandering campaign that's been going on for 10 years. I don't know that person, that person doesn't exist in reality. This is what Nils Melzer was referring to when he said that media was complicit as well in this public mobbing, which is that after his 20 years as a special rapporteur for torture, he'd never seen anything like that before in a western country. So we got on well.

Now, you talk about our security and our staff. We have been under threat. This is the reason why we try to limit the exposure that they are under. We try not to advertise their names. They are- they had to be- we have to try to secure their interests in any way we can. The three people that I've have been on the surface working for WikiLeaks throughout this time, me and Sarah Harrison and Joseph Farrell. We have all been a subject of the same investigation that had been since 2013. We learned that social media organisation had all been in the US, it had all been demanded to hand over all the information about us. We only knew because one of that- one of that organisation – Google, actually – took to the courts and demanded the right to tell their customers – us – that they had been forced by a court order to hand over all the information they had on us. Of course it was rather- it was Gmails, for example. The content of very little interest, at least in my case, but the metadata would- they were forced to hand over as well, which basically is a tracking information, which has- is now used a lot in court cases against individuals. And it seems to be going on. We don't know about everything that is going on, but unfortunately only this morning I heard that [indistinct] had been an artist that has worked with WikiLeaks or for WikiLeaks or assisted WikiLeaks with campaign poster and graphic design, et cetera, that he had learned of a similar court order to Google to hand over information about him. So not even artists that are associated with organisation are safe, which is astonishing.

SABRA LANE: Tony Melville.

QUESTION: Tony Melville, Kristian Stratton, director of the National Press Club. But there's a lot of serious stuff, obviously, in WikiLeaks, but one of my favourite cables was the William Burns' cable, US Ambassador from the Chechnya wedding - I don't know if you know that one, you can find it on the Guardian website, where the president came in with a gold-plated revolver in his jeans and showering dancers with hundred dollar bills. So it just revealed some of this classic stuff that was quite interesting to look at, that you don't really see anymore, and none of us see. My question's about the whistle-blower word that you've used many times. There are many whistle-blower protection laws around the world, including in Australia and no doubt the US; what would you like to see about those laws that could be changed perhaps to protect publishers like yourself?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: It has been my impression travelling around and seeing the variations of Whistleblower Protection Act in several countries that they are deeply flawed. They are deeply flawed in many ways primarily, because they demand a certain procedure you have to comply with before you can get any protection as a whistle-blower. And the most absurd demand is actually to expose yourself to your superior, to the head of the organisation before you can actually go to the media. So what my main concern - and these are usually, you know, of course acts written by government officials and passed by

politicians who were- somehow put the media and journalists outside the framework. So, we know many examples where a whistle-blower have actually had- including the NSA, have gone to their superior and raised concern about certain issues. This happened in the NSA way before Edward Snowden. And the individuals, they suffer as a result of it and are demoted, set aside, because they're troublemakers just for raising concerns. And that if something is surfaced in the media, they are the first person that they go to. So they are exposing themselves to trouble. This is just one example.

So I worry that in many cases the whistle-blower protection laws are basically- have an opposite effect. They're actually stifling the whistle-blowers. And there's an attempt to actually stop them from blowing the whistle and get the information out. I don't necessarily know how to amend it, but [indistinct] this is just a word of caution because originally I was much for it, but I don't know how to get around this, strengthen this protection. But this is one of the flaws that are in the existing notes in many countries - in Holland, in Germany, and my own country, where a bill of such nature is now before parliament. So it's of concern.

SABRA LANE: Okay, our next question. Could you please give us your name and where you're from?

QUESTION: Yes. Lisa Vinavic (*) and I'm representing myself as a concerned citizen. Noting those who refer to Julian Assange as a technology terrorist generally have corrupt and nefarious acts they wish to cover up, how do the truth media platforms get the message out when all the major Mockingbird media platforms are owned by the deep state satanic bloodlines and nefarious elements of the intelligence agencies, especially when the body count of suicided whistle-blowers are staggering, especially around the Clinton and Bush dynasties.

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: How do we deal with this environment that you were describing? Well, I may have- together a little translation on the fact that how do we deal with this reality? We are talking about, of course, a very sad situation in the mainstream media world too. I mean, journalism is under attack, and it's very hard to see this happening in country after country. Of course, there are economic concerns. We have giants, I mentioned Google before, two online giants are sucking 70, 80 per cent of all advertising revenue, and sucking the life out of the mainstream media. And I've talked, of course- taking a huge toll.

This is happening at the same time as there's an attack on the state broadcaster. and I was just made aware of that a couple of days ago. There's- the same thing is happening here in

this country against the ABC as I was seeing in other European countries; they are under attack. It's done by cutting the blood flow, cutting the budget. Same things are happening and in other countries with the state broadcasters. And it creates an environment that is unhealthy. And on top of that, of course, it's all the legal changes that are made and have been made post 9/11 which are of great concern. Basically eating away our press freedom and our liberties. Somebody told me that we're over 70 [indistinct] legislation in this country over two decades. It's alarming. What can be done? Well, to keep WikiLeaks alive, at least. And as a part of that - get Julian Assange out of prison and get him on a platform and start a worldwide campaign for the reversal of this situation.

SABRA LANE: Wendy Bacon.

QUESTION: Yes, I'm from the Pacific Media Centre. Kristinn, you have already spoken about how Wikileaks is providing the contribution to journalism innovated in journalism. You come from a mainstream background, as you said. I'm wondering if you could just add a little bit more- talk a little bit more about how the basic principles of journalism are applied in WikiLeaks. In particular, maybe around context, verification of documents, and considering what is in the public interest. How does your being as a journalist been applied in WikiLeaks?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: Well, in essence it's not very much different from any editorial process. That, of course, is our discussion. Do you seek out expertise, expert opinions on material because it's often complicated. I can mention, for example, when we got material on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement negotiations, that we were actually stopped after we released the draft of that agreement. We sought out and got assistance and contextualisation from labour unions, from experts on various fields who wrote excellent pieces about the context of the entire thing because it was a very broad scope there, it was about copyright, it was about so many issues that are- and about internet freedom that are pertaining to individuals. Well, it's no different from a normal editorial. And of course, the verification process can often be difficult, but we've been extremely- we use the same experts and we have access to a large group of experts who know these documents and know how to verify. And I consider us real lucky. I think WikiLeaks has been extremely lucky in that throughout all these years, there's not a single document that has been called out as a fabricated one or inauthentic. Everything is authentic- millions of documents. So there's not been a mistake so far. I'm not saying that it cannot happen at one time, there is- but as a track record, I think that's pretty good. So I mean there is, in essence no huge difference. I mean of course we're working in a different environment. We could use encrypted computation in our communication. I think of- have need to think about security, but you don't have the loud editorial newsrooms, you know, as I was a bit used to before- not that I

say that I miss it, you know, after 20 years we've pretty much had enough of that. But it's in essence, the same thing. Although the technology and the platforms are a bit different, it's the same principles.

SABRA LANE: Andrew Fowler.

QUESTION: Thanks very much for your excellent talk, Kristinn. That's really illuminating, even for those of us that have spent a lot of time investigating and looking at WikiLeaks. You rightly point out that there has been a shift in sentiment among journalists, they now increasingly support Julian Assange. To what extent has that support grown as a result of journalists realising that they could be next, that they could suffer the long reach of the American Department of Justice and administration of that country? To what extent, is it that or is it that they really have cottoned on to the fact that WikiLeaks is a fantastically positive force for journalism?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: It's a trick question, Andrew. [Laughter] You're basically asking me whether journalists are acting out of self-interest or high moral values. And I'm not going to be tricked into that one. But it's probably a mixture of both. And I mean, I think we both know that. Of course, there is self-interest there, and let's hope that it's also concern for the acknowledgement that this is an attack on their livelihood and their platform and their security. And so it's not just self-interest because part of that self-interest is acknowledging that- well, let's hope and I think that the platform they stand on and the duties that they have, have a sacred value, and above all, are extremely important in our society. So a mix.

SABRA LANE: Cheryl Cartwright.

QUESTION: Thanks very much, Sabra. It's a long time since I've been a journalist. But as a journalist, I've been taking notes, and one of the challenges as a journalist is to question why you're being given information, and I used to get lots of leaks, but I would ask why was I being given that information. With regard to the Clinton emails, did you ever consider that you might been played by the Trump campaign?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON: Well let me answer this way. I mean the ABC is opening up a drop box, which basically means that they are doing the same thing as we do and have been doing for a decade or more, more than a decade. Is that not knowing where the information comes from is the best sort of security you can give to a source. So how will the ABC deal with the fact that they have no idea where the information is coming from? Will it affect the evaluation of the documents that come there? I doubt it, because, I mean, if this was of a concern constantly, it would be no need to put up this kind of- you would

have to know where it comes from; what is the source; what is the motivation, and is the motivation- should it come into play when you decide what is to be published or what not? In my opinion, it basically is a question of evaluating the information you have in front of you individually and deciding on the basis of what is there, whether it's in the public interest to publish it or not. Because you all know in and throughout – I mean even when I was working in mainstream media – we all knew that when somebody was passing you a brown envelope underneath a door before the Internet came, I mean of course there's some motivation behind it. But in essence, it doesn't really matter. In essence, the material you are seeing – if it's authentic – you just have to decide whether it's in the public interest to publish it or not.

SABRA LANE: Everybody, please join me in thanking Kristinn Hrafnsson.

[Applause]

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