# Julian Assange reaches plea deal with U.S. Justice Department, ending legal saga



Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, has reached a plea deal with the U.S. Justice Department, effectively concluding a protracted legal and diplomatic saga. Assange, an Australian editor and publisher, gained international attention in 2010 for releasing nearly half a million classified U.S. military documents related to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Assange’s activities have been contentious, with press freedom advocates labeling him a pioneer for transparency, while U.S. prosecutors argue he jeopardized national security. In 2019, Assange was indicted for conspiring with former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to obtain and publish sensitive government records. Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison in 2013 for her role, though her sentence was commuted in 2017 by President Barack Obama.

Assange has spent the last five years in Belmarsh Prison in the UK, battling extradition to the United States. He initially sought refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in 2012 amid a Swedish investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct, a case later dropped. His asylum was revoked in 2019, leading to his arrest by British authorities.

A UK judge initially blocked Assange's extradition on mental health grounds in 2021, but higher courts overturned that decision after receiving assurances about his treatment from U.S. officials. Julian Assange subsequently won the right to appeal based on potential impacts on his free speech rights.

The plea deal requires Assange to admit to a felony charge under the Espionage Act, involving conspiring to unlawfully obtain and disseminate classified information. Following his plea and sentencing in Saipan, he is expected to return to Australia, avoiding U.S. prison time.

This development concludes a significant and polarizing chapter in Assange's legal battles, emphasizing ongoing debates about press freedom and national security.