# Julian Assange released after striking plea deal with U.S. Justice Department



Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, was released from Belmarsh Prison in London on June 24, 2024, after reaching a plea deal with the U.S. Justice Department. Assange, 52, pleaded guilty to a single charge under the Espionage Act for illegally obtaining and disseminating national security information. This deal closed a 12-year saga that included his self-exile at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, followed by his time in prison.

Assange boarded a chartered flight to the U.S. territory of Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands, where he formally entered his plea in a U.S. courtroom. The plea agreement allows him to go free immediately, with the U.S. Justice Department crediting the five years he served in Belmarsh. Assange will return to Australia, his birthplace, after the court proceedings.

During his imprisonment, Assange dealt with depression and health issues and was visited regularly by his wife, Stella. The plea deal concludes multiple espionage charges but raises concerns among press freedom advocates about the precedent it sets for future journalism involving classified information.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese played a significant role in negotiating Assange's release, reflecting a shift in diplomatic efforts to resolve the case. Assange's supporters have celebrated the outcome, launching crowdfunding efforts to cover the costs associated with his release and travel.