



## US rejects 'diplomatic asylum' for Assange

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WASHINGTON — The United States said Friday that it did not believe in "diplomatic asylum" after Ecuador offered to let WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange stay indefinitely in its embassy in London.

Ecuador has turned to the Organization of American States, which met Thursday and Friday in Washington, after deciding to offer asylum to the Internet activist who is wanted in Sweden on sexual assault allegations.

Under a 1954 agreement, the Organization of American States agreed to allow asylum in diplomatic missions for "persons being sought for political reasons," although not individuals indicted for "common offenses."

"The United States is not a party to the 1954 OAS Convention on Diplomatic Asylum and does not recognize the concept of diplomatic asylum as a matter of international law," the State Department said in a statement.

"We believe this is a bilateral issue between Ecuador and the United Kingdom and that the OAS has no role to play in this matter," it said.

Supporters of Assange believe that the 41-year-old Australian is at risk of extradition to the United States after angering authorities by publishing a trove of sensitive diplomatic cables.

The United States has denied pressuring Britain to arrest Assange, who has been holed up in Ecuador's embassy since June. Washington has not commented on potential legal actions but said it has no intention of "persecuting" Assange.

While the United States did not sign or ratify the 1954 convention on diplomatic asylum, it has often used the safety of its embassies to protect activists in non-democratic nations.

In May, Chinese human rights campaigner Chen Guangcheng fled to the US embassy in Beijing after evading house arrest and beatings. China eventually allowed Chen to leave for the United States to study.

Fang Lizhi, a key figure in the pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989, lived in the US embassy in Beijing with his wife for more than one year before he was allowed to go into exile in the United States in a deal brokered with Japan.

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A police officer stands outside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London (AFP, Carl Court)

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