

Embargoed until 1am Thursday 23 December 2010

Julian Assange receives Alliance Media Pass: unions offer support for WikiLeaks

WikiLeaks' editor-in-chief Julian Assange will today (Thursday) be given his Media Alliance union card, confirming that he is a member in good standing with the Australian journalists' union, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

Assange's Melbourne lawyer Rob Stary QC will accept Assange's new media card from ACTU President Ged Kearney at a ceremony in Melbourne outside the office of Fairfax Media newspaper *The Age*.

Media Alliance Victorian branch secretary Louise Connor said that Assange had contacted the Alliance in November, just as the 'cablegate' story began to break, wryly noting that his credit card had been cancelled and that he may not be able to pay his union dues.

"Julian Assange has been a member of the Media Alliance for several years. Clearly, with banking corporations freezing his accounts, his situation is quite extraordinary," Connor says.

Earlier, on the occasion of the Media Section of the Alliance celebrating its 100th birthday, the federal Media Section committee meeting in Melbourne, voted to show its support for Assange, she says. The Media Section had been created as the Australian Journalists Association on December 10, 1910.

Connor says it was decided that his union fees should be waived. "We've drawn up a new union card for him and offer him the full support of his union and professional association."

Connor adds that attacks on WikiLeaks over the revelations in the cablegate saga are a clear attempt to intimidate journalists like Assange and undermine the public's right to know. "WikiLeaks is not the leaker of these cables, nor is it the whistleblower. It is an online publisher representing the new media which is working with at least six other media groups to bring these cables to light so that the public can be kept informed.

"Attempts to muzzle the media, whether it is new media like WikiLeaks or old media like the *New York Times* or the *Guardian* or Australia's Fairfax newspapers, cannot be tolerated if we are to lay claim to having a strong, functioning and enduring democracy," said Ms Connor.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said Julian Assange and WikiLeaks deserve our support.

"WikiLeaks is simply performing the same function as media organisations have for centuries in facilitating the release of information in the public interest. Mr Assange's rights should be respected just the same as other journalists.

"WikiLeaks has broken no Australian law, and as an Australian citizen, Julian Assange should be supported by the Australian government, not prematurely convicted," said Ms Kearney.

ALERT – Media conference

9.30am Thursday 23 December

Steps of Media House, cnr Spencer & Collins St, Melbourne

Ged Kearney – President, Australian Council of Trade Unions

Robert Stary – Julian Assange's Australian lawyer

Louise Connor – Victorian Secretary, Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance

Media Contacts:

Louise Connor ph 0438 241 211

Amanda Nguyen ph 0418 479 455