

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**“An unprecedented response to a unique issue”**

*200 year-old Cambridge Union announces referendum of entire membership on decision to platform  
Julian Assange*

The Union has today announced that it intends to hold a vote on the platforming of Julian Assange, founder and Editor-in-Chief of Wikileaks, in an unprecedented move against the backdrop of the no platforming of speakers by student Unions across the country.

Following several days of deliberation, the Voting Members of the Cambridge Union have elected to hold a referendum on the hosting of Assange via video link. Assange has agreed to speak via videolink and has not set restrictions on what questions he can be asked, but as a student society, the Union at its most fundamental level is beholden to its members (students and alumni), and thus intends to call an online vote of its entire membership on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> October to decide this issue. Julian Assange is scheduled to appear on November 11<sup>th</sup> should the referendum return a ‘Yes’ vote. A full Union debate will be held on the subject on October 21<sup>st</sup> and will be conducted with sensitivity and decorum with respect for both sides. The Union is releasing a form to members to allow them to apply to speak in the debate. The Cambridge University Student Union (CUSU) will be offered the chance to send representatives to speak (regardless of membership status).

The Union is also announcing that, in order to protect the interests of its officers, the Union’s student volunteers will not be allowed to campaign for either side of the eventual debate. This has been unanimously agreed by Voting Members. The Union will instead issue a paper in coming days outlining the past reasoning for its platforming of controversial speakers, and its reasons for holding this referendum. Beyond this – the Union will not be making any further comment at this time, and will instead allow the debate to continue amongst its members.

The yes/no referendum question will be as follows:

*Do you agree that the Cambridge Union should host Julian Assange via videolink on November 11<sup>th</sup> at 7pm?*

The President of the Union, Oliver Mosley (who will act as a Returning Officer for the Referendum alongside the Treasurer, Charlotte Ivers), today commented:

*“In our 200 year history, the Union has gone through many periods of social change. Considering the unique nature of Mr Assange’s position, in that the UK Supreme Court has approved his extradition to Sweden to face charges of lesser degree rape but he has refused to come to trial or indeed be questioned; the decision has been taken to consult the entire membership of the Union around the world on the platforming of him as a speaker during Michaelmas term.*

*The Union is a neutral forum that has in the past given a platform to all speakers that operate within the confines of regular society, without endorsing or condemning their views. This referendum is called because the case of Julian Assange is a unique one; the Union must obey the rules of the society in which it operates, but in this case we are faced with a decision regarding a man who exists outside that same society – and we cannot make a decision about whether or not to host him without the support of our membership. This is an unprecedented response to a unique issue and I encourage all Union members to vote on October 22<sup>nd</sup>.”*

We are also sad to report that Helen Dallas, Women’s Officer for Michaelmas 2015, has resigned. We accept that her position at the Union became incredibly difficult following this decision, and we would like to commend her and thank her for all the work she has put into this term’s forums and workshops. In recognition of this, our upcoming Consent Forum on Monday at 7pm will be branded as organised and hosted by Helen Dallas in collaboration with the Cambridge Union.

**Notes to Editors:**

- Members who wish to vote in this referendum but who became members before the days of online accounts will need to fill out our Stay in Touch form at this link: <https://cus.org/stay-in-touch/form>
- Julian Assange fled to the Ecuadorian Embassy to prevent his arrest by Swedish authorities, and remains wanted on charges of ‘Lesser Degree Rape’ (*mindre grov våldtäkt*). The statute of limitations on two counts of sexual molestation and one count of unlawful coercion expired in August 2015. He maintains that he will not hand himself over until the Swedish Authorities waive their extradition arrangements with the United States; where Assange believes he is still being investigated for multiple counts of espionage.