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## **Assange awarded courage medal**

**By London correspondent Rachael Brown and wire**

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2011/05/11/3213310.htm>

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been given a human rights medal for what has been described as "exceptional courage in pursuit of human rights".

The Sydney Peace Foundation has praised Mr Assange and WikiLeaks, saying they have brought about a watershed in journalism, freedom of information and potentially in politics.

In its 14-year history, only three other people have won the foundation's gold medal for courage in the pursuit of human rights - the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela and Japanese Buddhist leader Daisaku Ikeda.

Mr Assange, who is fighting extradition from Britain to Sweden over alleged sex crimes, was praised for "challenging centuries-old practices of government secrecy and by championing people's right to know".

Foundation director Stuart Rees says the award was also motivated by the cowardice of the Australian Government.

"We think the struggle for peace with justice inevitably involves conflict, inevitably involves controversy," he said.

"We think that you and WikiLeaks have brought about what we think is a watershed in journalism and in freedom of information and potentially in politics."

WikiLeaks caused a diplomatic uproar late last year when it began to publish its cache of more than 250,000 US diplomatic cables containing classified material.

Some American politicians said WikiLeaks should be defined as an international terrorist organisation.

Mr Assange himself claimed publication of the cables helped shape uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East and said WikiLeaks was on the side of justice.

The foundation says Mr Assange challenged the practices of government secrecy and championed what it called the "people's right to know".

The winner of the Sydney Peace Prize, Australia's only international prize for peace, will be announced in June.

- ABC/Reuters