Twitter Thread by Rebecca Vincent

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Back at Westminster Magistrates' Court this morning attempting to monitor a call over hearing in the case of @wikileaks publisher Julian Assange. This is the last such hearing scheduled before the extradition decision will be given on 4 January.

Thread. 1/

The goal posts for access constantly shift at this court, in a completely arbitrary manner. We are currently being told by a court official that no journalists will be allowed in (told they can access the Cloud Video Platform) and only two people can access the public gallery. 2/

At times, even under Covid measures, four journalists have been allowed into the well of this same courtroom, and five people into the public gallery. Two in total today is completely arbitrary. We're told the access restrictions are the judge's decision. 3/

We're hearing that two seats in court are being held for @AusHouseLondon, so we circle back to the same issue as the "VIP" seats held in the September proceedings at the Old Bailey, when these "VIP" diplomats never took their seats, but they were held back from the public. 4/

Again, the only way for professional NGO observers to access these hearings (and do our job) is in person, as the court will not give us remote access. This is not only a barrier to open justice, but the court is creating unnecessary Covid risks as London heads towards Tier 3. 5/

Six of us were finally allowed in (journalists + observers) only as defence counsel Fitzgerald intervened with the judge (District Judge Goldspring today). 6/

After all that, proecedings lasted under 2 minutes. Judge Baraitser had granted Assange leave not to appear, and he did not. He was remanded back into custody until the 4 January hearing at the Old Bailey. 7/

I am furious about these continued access issues, which are clearly intentional. At every step of the way, we face unprecedented barriers to observing any aspect of proceedings in Julian Assange's case. This is not open justice. 8/

I am also furious about the conditions Assange is being held in. He's been locked in his cell for over 3 weeks with Covid infections dangerously on the rise in his prison block. Unsafe for everyone, but he has respiratory issues - and shouldn't be detained in the first place. 9/

The #FreeAssange protesters are out as always: "US, UK, hands off Assange". No arrests this time as protests are once again allowed in London under Tier 2. 10/



We're hearing there will be no overflow courtroom on 4 Jan, meaning no journalists will be able to attend in person, and only Assange's family is likely to be granted public gallery access. A historic extradition decision will be given with hardly anyone able to bear witness. 11/

Headed home, still furious about all of it. It shouldn't be this way. Will share some more thoughts later. In the meantime, thank you as always to the community of activists who continue to support our never-ending battle for access - especially @greekemmy & @deepa_driver ■ /12