1. My name is Julian Assange and I am a Director of Sunshine Press Productions chf, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Wikileaks, and a free press campaigner.

2. Wikileaks is a non-profit media organisation which seeks to combine high-end security technologies with journalism and ethical principles to bring previously unpublished news and information of politicial, historical, social or ethical importance to the public. WikiLeaks has provided a new model of journalism. Because we are not motivated by making a profit, we work cooperatively with other publishing and media organisations around the globe, instead of following the traditional model of competing with other media. The broader principles on which our work is based are the defence of freedom of speech and media publishing and the improvement of our common historical record. We derive these principles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In particular, Article 19 inspires the work of our journalists and other volunteers. One of our most important activities is to publish original source material alongside our news stories in order to enable readers to analyse the story in the context of the original source material themselves.

3. I have provided the following submissions to the Inquiry as exhibits to this statement. I confirm that to the best of my knowledge and belief the facts contained in these submissions are true:

Online complaint submission form – sample text
Data spreadsheet – date of original publication, headline, disputed statement, date of submission to PCC, current state of play and/or outcome, plus link to the article itself
Email correspondence file – PCC and Independent Reviewer
PDFs (9) – newspaper editors' responses via PCC's mediation route
PCC adjudication/New Statesman article – adjudication released to press by PCC/ accompanying commentary

4. The above submissions give an account of my recent dealings with the Press Complaints Commission regarding my complaints about news articles that falsely stated that I have been charged, when I have not been charged with any offence, and some other libels. As a case study, it can bring focus to many of the key issues the Leveson Inquiry wishes to explore: for example, whether the Editors' Code is insufficiently rigorous to be meaningful, and the disparity between how newsrooms say they implement it and their subsequent attitudes towards it when challenged about breaches of its principles; does the PCC have enough independence within the current model of self-regulation; and what explains its inability to meet its Charter commitments (the majority of these complaints took roughly twice the advertised 'average of 35 working days'), among other things. Evidence given by witnesses during Module 1 of the Inquiry has already provided valuable insight into some of these issues but without the level of detail that a full 'start to finish' case study can provide, and in most instances, many years after the event.

5. This submission presents a unique opportunity to look at these issues in a contemporaneous context, and one that is both high profile and political,

involving a serious matter currently before the Supreme Court – a politicised extradition case. It makes an excellent case study because of its relatively short time window, consistency of issues – more than 60 of the complaints concern just one issue (there are other widespread libels against me which could equally form the basis of similar case studies) – and because nearly every sector of the UK news industry is represented in some way it permits an easy cross-analysis.

6. Press standards matter. Those who have been the subject of ongoing, widespread inaccurate and negative media coverage – as I have, possibly on a scale not seen since the abuse of the McCanns – know that the harms created for individuals and small organisations or groups by a failure to maintain high ethical journalistic standards can be severe, consequential and almost insurmountable.

7. The libels and inaccuracies featured in this case study and complained of to the Press Complaints Commission affect the political climate and community support in which a politicised extradition case is occurring; affect a simultaneous US Grand Jury investigation, also highly politicised; and affect other legal cases by association, such as Wikileaks' case against the banking blockade currently being considered by the EU Commission and various cases against our supporters. Likewise, they have an effect on the levels of support against attacks by Wikileaks' opponents, not merely in the UK, but globally; on our ability as a donor-funded organisation to raise money directly, including my ability to earn speaker fees; and on the willingness of lawyers to do pro bono work and other forms of 'in kind' assistance.

8. People who find themselves caught up in particularly newsworthy events or, as in my case, politically controversial circumstances face a stark choice: either to engage in prohibitively expensive litigation or to seek protection and redress through complaint to a press standards body or regulator. For members of the public and those lacking the resources to take the matter before the courts – or where the scale of inaccurate or unfair reportage dictates exponentially high cost to do so – the latter will be the only available option.

9. In its own evidence to the Leveson Inquiry the Press Complaints Commission has argued that, with no legislative powers and under its current structure, it is geared to perform only one function of press regulation effectively – that of providing a conduit for people either to prevent or to remedy the worst excesses of the UK press around high-profile news stories involving themselves. Anecdotal evidence already before the Inquiry from other victims of press misbehaviour and poor standards suggests the PCC falls well short of achieving this. The case study provided here gives the documentary detail needed to enable a contemporaneous analysis of how and why the PCC fails to provide individuals vulnerable to bad journalistic practices – whether through deliberate smear campaign, inadequate fact-checking or regurgitated press agency material – with effective protection or redress.

10. In my own case, the PCC's adjudication of 45 of my complaints – disseminated to virtually every UK mainstream newspaper and reprinted in the

New Statesman article attached – found that although I had not been formally charged it was, nonetheless, perfectly acceptable for newspapers to say that I had been charged with rape as being "charged" with an offence is seen as the same as a mere allegation; this, despite the clear imputation in these newspaper articles that I have been formally charged, and all the other imputations that flow from that about the reasonableness of the case against me. The PCC's clear failure to enforce proper standards of accuracy and fairness – indeed, its reluctance to act and to adhere to its own guidelines because of the active case against me – comes at a time when, due to the number of other of our legal cases already in play and my grave personal circumstances under house arrest awaiting a Supreme Court extradition decision, my ability to achieve justice through libel actions at the moment when they are needed is severely curtailed.

11. The Leveson Inquiry's conclusions regarding the structure of any future regulator and its role in driving higher ethical standards in the UK press will be one of its most crucial outcomes. Informed debate on this issue is therefore of great public importance and would benefit from as full an understanding as possible of what works, and what does not, in the current operation of the Press Complaints Commission – both for journalists and for the public they serve. With the evidence submitted here the Inquiry has available to it a good example of how self-regulation via the PCC actually operates in practice, and which will help better inform the debate on reforms needed for the new regulator.

12. I believe I have a unique perspective to offer the Inquiry. I have been a lifelong campaigner for press freedoms, including legislative reforms in multiple countries, but I have also suffered extensive press libels. My work, both as an activist and as a journalist, has been to help everyone spread the truth about the world we live in. The truth has positive social utility because it helps us to understand the world around us, and the right to speak that truth must be defended. However, the same reasons that give the truth positive social utility also mean that lies have negative social utility; they undermine our understanding of the world. For people to support those wonderful protections that help us tell the truth, we must develop a way to discourage opportunistic liars or negligent journalists from abusing such protections to spread falsehoods. Press falsehoods need to be disincentivised or they will flourish. Unfortunately, the Press Complaints Commission does not provide effective disincentives or corrective remedies for victims. Neither, in many cases, do the courts due to the expense of libel actions.

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed: [redacted] Date: 23 Feb 2012

JULIAN ASSANGE