

Megaupload founder Kim Dotcom to face extradition to US after 12 yr battle in NZ

Stefanie Schappert Senior journalist : 4-5 minutes : 8/15/2024

After a 12-year battle, New Zealand on Thursday signed extradition papers to send Kim Dotcom – founder and former CEO of the defunct file-sharing website Megaupload – to face criminal piracy charges in the US.

The 50 year-old Dotcom has been fighting extradition to the States in New Zealand, where he holds a permanent residency, for over a decade.

The former hacker and tech entrepreneur is facing criminal charges in the US related to copyright and piracy violations while acting CEO of the now-defunct file-sharing website Megaupload, which he co-founded in 2005.

New Zealand's Minister of Justice Paul Goldsmith announced he had signed the extradition on Thursday.

"I considered all of the information carefully, and have decided that Mr Dotcom should be surrendered to the US to face trial," Goldsmith said in a statement.

"As is common practice, I have allowed Mr Dotcom a short period of time to consider and take advice on my decision. I will not, therefore, be commenting further at this stage," Goldsmith said about his decision.

As the news of the extradition broke, Dotcom, a self-proclaimed "Innovator, Gamer, Artist, Internet Freedom Fighter & Father of 6," posted on X, "Oops. Don't worry, I have a plan," with a wink face emoji.

"I love New Zealand. I'm not leaving," Dotcom said in another X post to his 1.6 million followers.

Even tech billionaire Elon Musk, not surprisingly as of late, commented on the news, responding to Dotcom's post stating the extradition decision "was a blow to justice."

"You fought against unfair persecution for over a decade. The US wants to scapegoat you for issues they couldn't control. NZ should protect you, not serve as a proxy for US overreach," Musk said.

Dotcom is no stranger to legal woes

The German-born Dotcom, real last name Schmitz, has already been working with California high-powered tech attorney Ira Rothken – who also took to X on Thursday to post an update on the case.

"Our legal team is working on judicial review to the High Court for @KimDotcom in NZ," Rothken said.

Dotson's lawyer then laid out a litany of 'unjust behavior' suffered by his client over the past 12 years at the hands of both US and NZ government authorities, including:

- Illegal Gov raid on family home
- Illegal spying (PM apologized)
- Withholding of evidence
- Destruction of evidence
- US blocked legal funding
- US judge recused himself

- Fair trial in US impossible

Rothken ended the post declaring, "The fight for justice continues, The world is watching."

The FBI says Dotcom and the three other Megaupload executives cost film studios and record companies more than \$500 million for encouraging paying users to store and share copyrighted material on the site.

The so called piracy operation generated more than \$175 million in revenue for the website, Reuters reports.

In 2012, the US Justice Department arrested Dotcom, seized the Megaupload website, and raided his Auckland home, charging him with copyright infringement, money laundering, racketeering, and wire fraud.

At the time, three other Megaupload executives – chief technical officer and co-founder Mathias Ortmann, chief marketing officer Finn Batato, both from Germany, and Dutch national Bram van der Kolk – were also arrested.

Finally settled in 2023, Ortmann and van der Kolk were sentenced to jail time in New Zealand after entering plea deals to avoid extradition. Batato, who was also living in New Zealand, died of cancer in 2022.

Dotcom is no stranger to the law, having gained notoriety in the 1990's after he was arrested for hacking and trafficking stolen phone calling card numbers.

From 1998 through 2003, he was convicted on dozens of charges related to the hacks, including computer fraud, data espionage, and embezzlement, in which Dotson was given multiple suspended sentences and credit for time served in jail awaiting his trial.

"The obedient US colony in the South Pacific just decided to extradite me for what users uploaded to Megaupload," Dotcom had said on Tuesday in anticipation of the order being signed.