

Hacker's appeal to go to new UK court

Karla Adam
in London

SUPPORTERS of the autistic British computer hacker Gary McKinnon are rallying support for the man who is fighting extradition to the US to face federal charges for penetrating dozens of government computers.

His family and supporters are taking the case to the newly formed Supreme Court, which replaces the House of Lords as the highest appeal court in Britain. If that fails, they will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, a supporter said.

Sitting in his bedroom in north London shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks, Mr McKinnon exploited security problems in a variety of computer programs to tap into dozens of US government computers, including at NASA, the Pentagon and more than a dozen military installations in 14 states.

Paul McNulty, the then-US Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, called it the "the biggest hack of military computers ever detected".

Mr McKinnon was indicted in Virginia and New Jersey in November 2002 on eight counts of computer fraud. He explained his actions by saying he was looking for UFOs. But he has yet to be brought to the US.

In February, British authorities refused to charge him or have the US charges heard



Gary McKinnon ... fighting extradition. Photo: Getty Images

in Britain. The Crown Prosecution Service said it would be best to prosecute Mr McKinnon in the US and that his actions were not "random experiments" but "a deliberate effort to breach US defence systems at a critical time which caused well documented damage."

Mr McKinnon has admitted to hacking into 97 US government computers between February 2001 and March 2002.

His supporters argue that he should not be extradited to face the US charges because he has Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism that he was diagnosed with last year. They say the diagnosis explains his obsession with hacking.

Rather than being America's worst cyber-terrorist, his family says, he is a vulnerable eccentric who could become suicidal if removed from his family.

The Washington Post

+ CMK Sydney Morning Herald
29-30 August 2009 John Palazzi
Sydney Australia