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USA must not persecute whistleblower Edward Snowden

The US authorities' relentless campaign to hunt down and block whistleblower Edward Snowden's attempts to seek asylum is deplorable and amounts to a gross violation of his human rights Amnesty International said today.

"The US attempts to pressure governments to block Snowden's attempts to seek asylum are deplorable," said Michael Bochenek, Director of Law and Policy at Amnesty International. "It is his unassailable right, enshrined in international law, to claim asylum and this should not be impeded."

The organization also believes that the National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower could be at risk of ill-treatment if extradited to the USA.

"No country can return a person to another country where there is a serious risk of ill-treatment," said Bochenek.

"We know that others who have been prosecuted for similar acts have been held in conditions that not only Amnesty International but UN officials considered cruel inhuman and degrading treatment in violation of international law."

Senior US officials have already condemned Snowden without a trial, labelling him both guilty and a traitor, raising serious questions as to whether he'd receive a fair trial. Likewise the

US authorities move to charge Snowden under the Espionage Act could leave him with no provision to launch a public interest whistle-blowing defence under US law.

"It appears he is being charged by the US government primarily for revealing its - and other governments' - unlawful actions that violate human rights," said Bochenek.

"No one should be charged under any law for disclosing information of human rights violations. Such disclosures are protected under the rights to information and freedom of expression."

Besides filing charges against Snowden, the US authorities have revoked his passport – which interferes with his rights to freedom of movement and to seek asylum elsewhere.

"Snowden is a whistleblower. He has disclosed issues of enormous public interest in the US and around the world. And yet instead of addressing or even owning up to these actions, the US government is more intent on going after Edward Snowden."

"Any forced transfer to the USA would put him at risk of human rights violations and must be challenged," said Michael Bochenek.