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Time to focus on US government's unlawful behaviour

Russia's decision to grant Edward Snowden temporary asylum is a positive development and should allow governments and civil society to focus on the sweeping nature and unlawfulness of the US government's surveillance programmes.

“The drama of the five weeks since Snowden's arrival in Russia has distracted attention from the key issue: how the ever-burgeoning security apparatus in the US has used secret courts to undertake massive, sweeping and systematic invasions into the right to privacy of people living in the USA,” said Widney Brown, senior director of International Law and Policy at Amnesty International.

“Let's not lose sight of why Snowden was forced to seek asylum in Russia. Once he disclosed the full scope of the US government's actions, they cancelled his passport and called him a criminal.

“Freedom of expression – a fundamental human right – protects speech that reveals credible evidence of unlawful government action. Under both international law and the 4th Amendment to the US Constitution, the US government's actions are unlawful.”

With regard to Snowden's temporary asylum status, the organization is concerned that he has been told that he should not disclose any further information that could harm the USA.

“Everybody has the right to seek asylum. That right can't be contingent on a promise not to speak out or disclose information on a matter of public concern,” said Widney Brown.

“We urge the Russian authorities to ensure that his rights are respected. He should be allowed to travel freely, including outside of Russia, if he wishes.”

“The US government has been more intent on persecuting Edward Snowden than in addressing or even owning up to its flagrant breaches of international law. It is time that the USA desists from its deplorable attempts to pressure governments to block Snowden's efforts to seek asylum now or in the future.”