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UK must account for its actions to repress Guardian reporting on surveillance

Pressure placed on the Guardian newspaper by UK authorities to destroy documents represent a threat to freedom of expression, the right to information and protecting the independence of the media in the UK, Amnesty International said today.

The Guardian has reported that the UK authorities repeatedly threatened the newspaper's management with legal action and led to it being forced to destroy information it had received from the US whistleblower Edward Snowden. This information is about unlawful surveillance by the US and the UK governments which violates their citizens' and other people's right to privacy.

"Insisting that the Guardian destroy information received from a whistleblower is a sinister turn of events," said Tawanda Hondora, Deputy Director of Law and Policy at Amnesty International.

"This is an example of the government trying to undermine press freedoms. It also seriously undermines the right of the public to know what governments do with their personal and private information. If confirmed, these actions expose the UK's hypocrisy as it pushes for freedom of expression overseas.

"The UK government must explain its actions and publicly affirm its commitment to the rule of law, freedom of expression and the independence of the media. They should initiate an inquiry into who ordered this action against the Guardian."

"Using strong-arm tactics to try to silence media outlets and reports that divulge information relating to Prism and other surveillance efforts, is clearly against the public interest."

The Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger on Monday published allegations about the UK authorities' actions over the past several months to pressure the newspaper to hand over or destroy evidence related to the government surveillance.