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ORAL STATEMENT

Item 3: ID with the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Reinforcing media freedom and the safety of journalists in the digital age

UN Human Rights Council
50th session
13 June-8 July 2022

Mr President,

Amnesty International welcomes the report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of expression and Opinion on the opportunities, challenges and threats to media in the digital age. The report is critical as the safety of journalists around the world is being increasingly threatened. One such threat is that of targeted surveillance.

Madam Rapporteur,

States' unlawful use of targeted surveillance technologies against journalists has caused a digital surveillance crisis. States use unlawful surveillance alongside a range of other tactics to silence journalists and impose a chilling effect on civil society. The consequences for media freedoms and security of journalists are dire. States have not only failed in their obligations to protect journalists from these violations but have also failed by clearly letting these invasive weapons loose on people worldwide for no other reason than exercising their human rights.

This global trend of using spyware to clamp down on the rights to freedom of opinion and expression is facilitated by the private surveillance industry. This is best exemplified by the mountain of abuse that has been facilitated by just one spyware vendor and its product- cyber surveillance company NSO Group's Pegasus.

As you note in your report, targeted digital surveillance "serves as a means of intimidation, increasing the risks faced by journalists and their sources and undercutting critical reporting."

A culture of impunity around the use of these tools has developed that must be urgently countered. States' use of these tools is utterly out of control and must not continue in its current forms. We need all states to urgently impose a global moratorium on spyware until human rights regulatory safeguards that govern its use are in place.

Thank you.