

26 October 2022

To all United Nations Member States:

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GLOBAL PETITION DEMANDING AN END TO THE UNLAWFUL TARGETED SURVEILLANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Your Excellency,

I am conveying a petition signed by 107,273 people from 180 countries and territories demanding an end to the unlawful targeted surveillance of human rights defenders.

We are experiencing a global spyware crisis with surveillance technology being used as a tool of repression to silence and intimidate human rights defenders. There is an urgent need for regulation and for a radical change in States' targeted digital surveillance practices and the participation of the private sector in those practices. Where surveillance is operated without adequate oversight, safeguards, and transparency, the harms of unlawful surveillance impact far beyond those who may have actually been targeted. In the face of opacity and inadequate safeguards, and especially in situations where surveillance is known or suspected to be carried out in unlawful ways, human rights defenders and civil society are forced to self-censor out of fear of being criminalized for their work, even where such surveillance may in fact not be taking place.

Numerous research reports by Amnesty International reveal how this chilling effect can have a serious and detrimental effect on global civil society, affecting not only the right to privacy but also those to free expression and association. Across the globe, human rights defenders have had to live in a constant state of fear, perpetually looking over their shoulders and feeling a sense of impending danger wherever they go as surveillance is often the prelude to other online and offline violence.

Until a robust human rights regulatory framework is in place a global moratorium on the sale, transfer and use of targeted surveillance technology is necessary. Several UN experts have already acknowledged this (most recently in the August 2022 OHCHR report on the Right to Privacy in the Digital Age). Amnesty International urges States to engage in key multilateral efforts at the UN, including at the UN Human Rights Council, UN General Assembly, and Universal Periodic Review cycles, to develop robust human rights standards that govern the development, sale, transfer, and use of surveillance equipment, and until that is in place to support the call for a moratorium.

The unregulated and untransparent sale and use of these products means that we may never know the full extent of similar abuses involving other actors. The world can no longer turn a blind eye to this enormous global threat to our rights. That is why I, and 107,273 Amnesty supporters around the world, call on Member States of the UN to urgently address this issue and uphold their obligation to protect citizens from unlawful targeted surveillance.

Yours sincerely,

Agnès Callamard

Secretary General