

To the Right Hon Philip Hammond MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Government of the United Kingdom

Re: Surveillance of human rights organisations

Dear Foreign Secretary,

We realise this is a difficult time when you will inevitably be preoccupied with the tragic murders in Tunisia. We express our deep regret at these killings and our sympathy for the families of all concerned.

Nevertheless we write to you to express our deep concern at the recent ruling by the Investigatory Powers Tribunal on June 22 2015, which reveals that the GCHQ carried out surveillance on two important and respected independent international human rights groups illegally.

These two organisations, the *Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights* and the *Legal Resource Centre in South Africa* are well-known and widely-respected in the international human rights movement.

Though the Tribunal found technical violations in the surveillance process, our concern lies with the act of the surveillance in itself. If the role of surveillance is to protect the public from serious crime and threats to their security, a specific explanation surely needs to be provided for the surveillance of human rights groups – a practice, if carried out by other states, which would attract the criticism of the UK government. Indeed in the FCO Human Rights and Democracy Annual Report of 2014 you, as Foreign Secretary, were quoted as saying “We call on governments around the world to do more to foster the role of civil society in promoting and defending human rights” – a role which the report warns is under threat by governments around the world squeezing the global “civil society space”. Spying on civil society groups seems at odds with fostering the government’s role “in protecting and promoting human rights” as is later stated in the annual report, and further undermines the security of this space.

Two immediate questions arise from this judgement: What is the rationale for placing human rights organisations under surveillance? At whose request was the surveillance authorised and to what effect?

We would appreciate an early answer to these questions.

We, the undersigned, endorse the above letter to the UK Foreign Secretary on GCHQ surveillance of human rights groups.



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