



Amman Center for Human Rights Studies statement on NSO Groups Pegasus Spyware and Its Impact on Human Rights

IN A NUTSHELL

NSO Group has sold Pegasus spyware to authoritarian governments that have used it to target political dissidents, journalists, lawyers, politicians, and individuals working on human rights issues. ACHRS denounces spying on individuals and calls upon the international community to restrict the surveillance abilities of governments.

NSO Group, an Israeli surveillance firm, has been accused of selling spyware called Pegasus to authoritarian governments in their efforts to crack down on rights activists, journalists, and lawyers. The Israeli firm is linked to a list of tens of thousands of phone numbers including politicians and has given its clients the ability to switch on phone cameras/audio, extract messages, photos, emails, and record calls. NSO Group and the Pegasus spyware were also covered in 2016 when researchers discovered it was being used to spy on a dissident in the United Arab Emirates.

NSO Group claims that its software is sold to government intelligence and law enforcement agencies to target terrorists and criminals, but in most cases, we are seeing it used to target news organizations such as Al Jazeera, and political dissidents such as Jamal Khashoggi. Pegasus spyware has no limitations and can hijack the most secure devices such as those from Apple, and encrypted messaging services such as WhatsApp. Key political figures such as Emmanuel Macron and Imran Khan are falling victim to Pegasus spyware, displaying the overwhelming power the software gives to governments. It has also been used to target political dissidents such as Jamal Khashoggi whose close contacts were being monitored before and after his death, an accusation which NSO Group continues to deny despite evidence from the Guardian and other media groups.

The Amman Center for Human Rights denounces the actions of NSO Group and the governments using the Pegasus software to target individuals. While UN High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet argued that surveillance companies are responsible for avoiding human rights abuses, there is no real action being taken against such violations of privacy that result in abuses. The center calls for international law to be introduced that restricts the power of governments to surveil journalists, political dissidents, and those working on human rights issues. The center calls for the end of technologies being used to assist authoritarian governments, suppress free speech, opposition, and human rights advocacy, and looks to the international community and the general secretary of the UN to properly address this ongoing issue.