

Open Letter to the World's Governments in the Wake of Attack on Charlie Hebdo

In the wake of the Charlie Hebdo tragedy, the undersigned call on our political world leaders to uphold international human rights. It is more important than ever that our governments work to protect journalists, activists and members of the public, without increasing the scope and scale of government intrusions into our private lives.

On January 11, 2015, millions of citizens and world leaders gathered in Paris to march in solidarity and show their support for free expression under the banner “je suis Charlie”. Now is the time for these world leaders to stand by their commitment to protect human rights. The rights to free expression and privacy are intimately linked, and one cannot thrive where the other is threatened. We urge governments around the world to avoid increasing government surveillance measures or violating human rights in the wake of this tragedy.

Moments like this need effective and considered responses and not unwise and restrictive increases in government and law enforcement powers. Already, governments from Canberra to Brussels to Washington have made moves to expand surveillance powers or enact new limitations on speech in the wake of this tragedy.

But more surveillance is not necessarily better surveillance, and increasing the scope and scale of government spying or interfering with freedom of expression is not the answer to all our security or societal problems. French officials have admitted they had prior intelligence, which suggests that neither did inadequate surveillance contribute to these horrific attacks, nor would heightened surveillance have prevented them.

As security failures have happened in spite of extensive surveillance expansion, this is not the time to enact new law enforcement measures. Instead, it is time to stand up for the importance of security that also protects, and does not undermine, human rights. We therefore call on you to:

- Invite the French government to conduct a thorough evaluation of relevant policies, before enacting new laws and policies that can harm fundamental rights;
- Ensure the protection and defence of national level human rights protections, particularly free expression and privacy online and offline;
- Engage citizens and institutions in a public dialogue on targeted solutions that can help protect society while upholding human rights;
- Defend a free and open society where human rights are not only protected, but celebrated, and where diverse viewpoints, including the satirical perspectives embraced by Charlie Hebdo, can be expressed online and offline.

There are no easy or quick solutions. In difficult moments like these, we must hold strong to the values of the society that we want to live in, or we risk undermining those values in the name of saving them. Join us in working toward a better world where free expression, privacy, and other human rights can thrive.

Sincerely,

Access

Constitutional Alliance

Advocacy for Principled Action in Government

PEN International

IT-Political Association of Denmark

Digitalcourage

Vrijschrift

Article 19

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Asociatia pentru Tehnologie si Internet - ApTI

La Quadrature du Net

Panoptykon Foundation

PEN American Center

Initiative für Netzfreiheit

FITUG e.V.

European Digital Rights

Fundacion Karisma

Fundacion Via Libre

Alternative Informatics Association

Hiperderecho

Open Rights Group