

Edward Snowden Whistleblower Award 2013

By [Global Research News](#)

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Address, delivered by Edward Snowden on the occasion of the presentation of the Whistleblower Award 2013, donated by Transparency International, the International Association Of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms (Ialana) and the Association of German Scientists, Aug. 30, 2013

It is a great honor to be recognized for the public good created by this act of whistleblowing. However the greater reward and recognition belongs to the individuals and organizations in countless countries around the world who shattered boundaries of language and geography to stand together in defense of the public right to know and the value of our privacy.

It is not I, but the public who has affected this powerful change to abrogation of basic constitutional rights by secret agencies. It is not I, but newspapers around the world who have risen to hold our governments to the issues when powerful officials sought to distract from these very issues with rumor and insult. And it is not I, but certain brave representatives in governments around the world who are proposing new protections, limits and safeguards to prevent future assault on our private rights and private lives.

My gratitude belongs to all of those who have reached out to their friends and family to explain why suspicionless surveillance matters. It belongs to the man in a mask on the street on a hot day and the women with a sign and an umbrella in the rain, it belongs to the young people in college with a civil liberty sticker on their laptop, and the kid in the back of a class in high school making memes. All of these people accept that change begins with a single voice and spoke one message to the world: governments must be accountable to us for the decisions that they make. Decisions regarding the kind of world we will live in. What kind of rights and freedoms individuals will enjoy are the domain of the public, not the government in the dark.

Yet the happiness of this occasion is for me tempered by an awareness of the road traveled to bring us here today. In contemporary America the combination of weak legal protections for whistleblowers, bad laws that provide no public interest defense and a doctrine of immunity for officials who have strayed beyond the boundaries of law has perverted the system of incentives that regulates secrecy in government. This results in a situation that associates an unreasonably high price with maintaining the necessary foundation of our liberal democracy – our informed citizenry. Speaking truth to power has caused whistleblowers their freedom, family, or country.

This situation befits neither America nor the world. It does not require sophistication to understand that policy equating necessary acts of warning with threats to national security inevitably lead to ignorance and insecurity. The society that falls into the deterrent trap

known in cultural wisdom as “shooting the messenger” will quickly find that not only is it without messengers but it no longer enjoys messages at all. It is right to question the wisdom of such policies and the unintended incentives that result from them. If the penalty providing secret information to a foreign government in bad faith is less than the penalty for providing that information to the public in good faith, are we not incentivizing spies rather than whistleblowers?

What does it mean for the public when we apply laws targeting terrorism against those engaged in acts of journalism? Can we enjoy openness in our society if we prioritize intimidation and revenge over fact-finding and investigation? Where do we draw the lines between national security and public interest, and how can we have confidence in the balance when the only advocates allowed at the table of review come from the halls of government itself?

Questions such as these can only be answered through the kind of vigorous public discussion we are enjoying today. We must never forget the lessons of history regarding the dangers of surveillance gone too far, nor our human power to amend such systems to the public benefit. The road we travel has been difficult, but it leads us to better times. Together we can guarantee both the safety and the rights of the generations that follow.

To all of those who have participated in this debate, from the highest official to the smallest citizen, I say thank you.

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