

UK Government Caught Spying on Human Rights Organisations

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Edward Snowden didn't just expose the possibility that state surveillance may have intruded into the lives of British citizens. He actually accused U.K. authorities of operating a system where "[anything goes](#)," and new details revealed this week confirm his suspicion.

The U.K. government is one of the main [culprits](#) for privacy infringement. Mass indiscriminate surveillance programmes include monitoring of emails, calls, internet searches, contact lists, and the gathering of vast amounts of other data that is not essential.

Just over a week ago, Amnesty International issued a [press release](#) on a ruling by the U.K. surveillance tribunal. The ruling asserted that the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) acted unlawfully by conducting surveillance on two human rights organisations. GCHQ is the government's security and intelligence organisation tasked with protecting the nation from threats.

The tribunal, which was brought against the U.K. government by ten NGOs and included Amnesty International, found the government in breach of its internal surveillance policies. It violated its own policies by accessing and retaining the communications of two NGOs, one in Egypt and one in South Africa.

At the time, Amnesty International's Legal Programme Director, Rachel Logan, said,

"Today's decision revealing GCHQ's unlawful activity raises the wider question as to why the UK intelligence services were intercepting the communications of these two highly regarded human rights NGOs at all. It is hard to imagine how they could legitimately be the target of criminal suspicion. Were they simply victims of mass surveillance – being swept up in indiscriminate trawling? And if so, do we only know about it because the spies failed to follow even their own weak procedures? Were the rest of us rounded up in the same net?"

Her final question, "*Were the rest of us rounded up in the same net?*" came back to haunt her. It was answered this week in the latest chilling episode of the story as Amnesty itself found out that it, too, has been spied on. Just a week after the tribunal, the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) informed Amnesty that GCHQ has also been unlawfully intercepting and storing its communications.

On the Amnesty staff [blog](#) earlier today, Allan Hogarth said the organisation will now press for the U.K. government to establish an independent inquiry into how and why the intelligence agency has been spying on human rights organisations.

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