



## Internet Society Statement on the Importance of Open Global Dialogue Regarding Online Privacy

[Washington, D.C. and Geneva, Switzerland -- 12 June 2013] The Internet Society has noted recent revelations regarding the apparent scope of U.S. government efforts to gather large amounts of end user information from U.S. Internet and telecom service providers for intelligence purposes. We are deeply concerned that the unwarranted collection, storage and potential correlation of user data will undermine many of the key principles and relationships of trust upon which the global Internet has been built. The impact of this action is not limited to U.S. users or companies, but has implications for Internet users around the globe.

While government plays an important role in protecting its citizens and there is a need for better approaches to address online security, the Internet Society strongly believes that real security can only be realized within a broader context of trust and the respect of fundamental rights, such as privacy. The Internet Society, along with many other organizations and individuals around the world, expect governments to respect and protect the basic rights of their citizens – including the right to privacy both offline and online – as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The U.S. Government has previously taken an active role in championing these rights in the international sphere. For example, the U.S. played a leadership role in the adoption of the Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/20/8, which re-affirmed that fundamental rights are applicable to individuals' activities in the online environment as well, including privacy and freedom of expression. This means that restrictions of rights should be exceptional and conform to internationally accepted criteria such as: provision by law; pursuing a legitimate purpose; proven as necessary and the least restrictive means required to achieve the purported aim. Users naturally have higher expectations of governments who have adopted these international standards.

The Internet must be a channel for secure, reliable, private communication between entities and individuals. Consensus for internationally recognized data protection standards has been formed through agreements constituting key building blocks of online trust, including the *OECD Guidelines on the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data*, the Council of Europe *Convention for the Protection of Individuals with Regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data*, the EU Data Protection framework, and the *APEC Privacy Framework and Cross Border Privacy Rules system*.

Emerging revelations about alleged U.S. programs to gather information about Internet users raise clear questions about the extent to which individuals' expectations of privacy have been compromised. This kind of collection of user information is at odds with the commitments governments around the world have made with respect to protection of personal data and other human rights. We would expect any government signing onto these principles to fully engage with its citizens in an open dialogue when seeking to achieve both the protection of individual

rights and national security. We also need to challenge the view that there always has to be a trade-off between ensuring security and protecting users' rights.

The Internet Society is also deeply concerned that alleged programs and similar efforts by other governments will have a chilling effect on the deployment and adoption of technical solutions for establishing trusted connections online. This kind of trust-enabled infrastructure is needed to maintain global interoperability and openness. The Internet is global – the impact of programs like these is not limited to the specific country in question but rather reverberates across the globe to users everywhere.

The revelations of recent days underscore the importance of an open global dialogue regarding online privacy in the realm of national security and the need for all stakeholders to abide by the norms and principles outlined in international agreements on data protection and other fundamental rights. Trusted interactions in cyberspace are critical not only for the future of the Internet, but also for continued innovation, economic and political progress and a vibrant global community. Users need clear and realistic expectations of online privacy that are respected by governments and enterprises alike, so that they can continue to use the Internet in ways that enhance all of society.

### **About the Internet Society**

The Internet Society is the trusted independent source for Internet information and thought leadership from around the world. With its principled vision and substantial technological foundation, the Internet Society promotes open dialogue on Internet policy, technology, and future development among users, companies, governments, and other organizations. Working with its members and Chapters around the world, the Internet Society enables the continued evolution and growth of the Internet for everyone. For more information, visit [www.internetsociety.org](http://www.internetsociety.org)

Media Contact: Wende Cover, [cover@isoc.org](mailto:cover@isoc.org), +1-703-439-2773