

Edward Snowden, Glenn Greenwald address Amnesty International event in Chicago

By Nick Barrickman
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Last Saturday, former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden and reporter Glenn Greenwald addressed an event hosted by Amnesty International in downtown Chicago. Both Greenwald and Snowden were invited to speak at the organization's annual human rights meeting on the pair's revelations of a massive government spying dragnet of the personal communications of populations across the world.

Snowden, who has been forced to take asylum in Russia by after being hounded by US authorities, was met by a standing ovation by the more than 1,000 people in attendance.

Greenwald, who has reported extensively on government spying programs and the documents released by Snowden, addressed the crowd from his home in Brazil. "My hope and my belief is that as we do more... reporting and as people see the scope of the abuse as opposed to just the scope of the surveillance they will start to care more," he said. "Mark my words. Put stars by it and in two months or so come back and tell me if I didn't make good on my word," he added.

Speaking on the significance of the government's collection of metadata, Snowden stated that this "is what allows an actual enumerated understanding, a precise record of all the private activities in all of our lives. It shows our associations, our political affiliations and our actual activities."

Also this week, it was announced that Snowden and filmmaker Laura Poitras would be the recipients of the Ronald Ridenhour Prize for truth telling due to their roles in the NSA spying revelations. The prize, which is named after the former US Army veteran who helped expose US atrocities in the Vietnam War, is awarded to a "citizen, corporate or government whistleblower, investigative journalist, or organization for bringing a

specific issue of social importance to the public's attention."

Of Poitras and Snowden, the awards committee stated, "Their act of courage was undertaken at great personal risk and has sparked a critical and transformative debate about mass surveillance in a country where privacy is considered a constitutionally-protected right." Poitras, who along with Greenwald was integral in bringing the documents of Snowden to light, has also produced numerous film documentaries exposing the cruelties of the US military in places such as Iraq and Guantanamo Bay.

The groundswell of appreciation for the contributions of both Snowden and Greenwald is a reflection of the immense support within the world's population, particularly the youth, for the pair's defense of basic democratic principles currently under assault by capitalist governments worldwide. In February, Snowden, Greenwald, and several others were honored with the Polk Awards in Journalism for 2013 for their roles in exposing the NSA spying programs. Also that month, the student body of Scotland's Glasgow University voted to elect Edward Snowden as Rector of the school, naming him a "courageous whistleblower."

The outpouring of support stands in stark contrast to the persecution of the whistleblower by capitalist governments across the world. The Obama Administration has brought charges against the former contractor under the 1917 Espionage Act, several of which carry the penalty of death if Snowden is found guilty.

The Democratic president in league with British authorities has also hounded Wikileaks founder Julian Assange for his role in exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, forcing the latter to seek asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. Bradley "Chelsea"

Manning, the Army private who exposed US war crimes, including the gunning down of children in Iraq, has been sentenced to 35 years in prison.

Last January, a news article surfaced on the *Buzzfeed* web site which exposed the real attitude of officials to the precepts of democracy which Snowden and others defend. Describing the feelings of many in the upper military brass, an unnamed officer said, “I think if we had the chance, we would end it very quickly... Just casually walking on the streets of Moscow... he is casually poked by a passerby... He goes home very innocently and next thing you know he dies in the shower.”

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