Statement to Internet Ungovernance Forum by Edward Snowden
Istanbul, Turkey
September 5, 2014

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. I apologize for not being able to speak to you by video conference. Last-minute technical problems have made that method of communication impossible.

I'd like to take this opportunity, before an audience of activists, academics and journalists in Istanbul to discuss the relationship between censorship and surveillance, which are in many ways two sides of the same coin. The Turkish people are subject to both of these technically assisted forms of state manipulation, although the former has received far more attention than the latter.

When governments censor their citizens' access the Internet, they not only trample on basic human rights, but they also make it much easier for foreign governments to gain access to those domestic communications. For censorship equipment to be able to function, domestic traffic must flow through it. This equipment is a natural target for nation-state intelligence agencies. If they can hack into and compromise the censorship equipment, they get access to all of the communications that flow through it. It only takes one security flaw or an intentionally placed backdoor in a censorship device to transform it from a tool of domestic oppression to a trojan horse for foreign government surveillance.

In the past few years, several governments have started to openly question their reliance on foreign-made communications technology, whether 4G telephone network equipment made by Huawei, or Internet switches made by Cisco. The national security arguments against foreign-made networking technology apply equally to foreign-made censorship technology. When governments install censorship equipment at the core of their national communications networks, how can they be sure that they're not also inviting in a foreign intelligence service?

In an ideal world, governments would respect the free speech rights of their citizens enough to not filter their Internet communications. Sadly, we do not yet live in that world. Perhaps in time, governments will realize that the serious cybersecurity and foreign-surveillance threats posed by censorship equipment outweigh whatever supposed benefits of national stability and control that they bring.

To all of those present who struggled in Gezi Park, to those who struggle at the Ungovernance Forum today, thank you for your support and your solidarity. You have my support and solidarity.