



Snowden Receives “Alternate Nobel” for Human Rights

Edward Snowden, who released a trove of NSA surveillance documents to journalists in 2013, was among those who received the Right Livelihood Award on Monday in Sweden’s parliament. Snowden’s award citation said he was being awarded “for his courage and skill in revealing the unprecedented extent of state surveillance violating basic democratic processes and constitutional rights.”



The Right Livelihood Award is considered the “Alternative Nobel” by many who believe that the Nobel has become a politically motivated award. The Right Livelihood Award is broader in its areas of recognition than the Nobel, including Snowden’s award for Human Rights.

Snowden was unable to attend the awards ceremony in person due to the outstanding warrants the United States has for his arrest and because his passport has been revoked. Instead, he delivered [his address to the ceremony](#) from Moscow via a Google Hangout that was shown on a large screen. Normally, when someone is unable to receive the award in person, it is accepted on that person’s behalf by someone who will give it to the recipient. In Snowden’s case, though his father and several friends and supporters were present, the award will be held in Stockholm in the hopes that he will soon be able to travel there to receive it in person. Snowden and his supporters are hopeful that he will be able to receive asylum in a Western European country. The support Sweden’s parliament showed in Snowden’s Right Livelihood Award is an encouraging sign that that may happen sooner, rather than later. [The Guardian](#) noted that Jakob von Uexküll, who is responsible for establishing the award, told Snowden during the award ceremony — with the parliament present — “So Mr. Snowden, your Right Livelihood Award is waiting for you. We trust that Sweden will make it possible for you to collect your award here in Stockholm in person in the very near future.”

In receiving the award, Snowden said that he was not alone — that the award was not singular but collective: “I can only accept this collectively. This award recognizes the work of so many, not just over recent years, but over decades, who recognize that human rights is a new name for an old concept, the concept of liberty.” He spoke of others who, like himself, have suffered persecution and threats from governments. Snowden is in exile in Russia and is unable to return to the United States due to pending charges that could result in him spending 30 years in prison. He said that though this is not likely to change anytime soon, he stands by what he did and would do it again, “All the prices we’ve paid, all the sacrifices we’ve made, I believe we would do again, I know I would do again. Because this was never about me.... This is about our rights, the kind of society we want to live in, the kind of government we want to have, the kind of world we want to make for the next generation.”

Addressing the nature of the information he provided to journalists, Snowden said that governments around the world are living in, and promoting, great fear. Because of new threats, these governments are sacrificing the liberty of their people in hopes of security. He reminded the audience that the concept of mass surveillance, done in secret and without the consent of the people, is wrong. “When it comes to governments ... these institutions are founded on the principle of the consent of the governed,



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and the consent of the people is not meaningful if it is not informed.”

Snowden was considered an “honorary recipient,” meaning there was no monetary prize associated with his award. He shared this distinction with Alan Rusbridger, editor at The Guardian, who spoke of Snowden in his own acceptance speech. “One of the challenges Snowden poses for us is the recognition that there is no such thing as the public interest. No such thing as one single, monolithic interest that overrides all others.”

At the end of his acceptance speech, Snowden spoke of his optimism for the future. He said that the public debate that has followed the revelations of mass surveillance by governments has already begun to produce reform, though, he added, “There is so much more to do.” He also called for the UN to get more involved in the issues of privacy and digital rights by creating a special board to “insure that no matter where the agency operates, no matter where the technology is placed, no matter what country is deciding that they face new and novel threats that require new narrowments of our rights, we stand for liberty.” This is the one dark spot in an otherwise thoughtful and thought-provoking address. Most who stand for liberty and have taken an objective view of the UN would not seek to allow them to expand their reach into the affairs of the governments of the world. Certainly, the rights of people to have privacy and exercise digital liberty are important. Governments need to held accountable. But the UN is not the body to do that. It falls to the people of the nations involved to preserve those rights.



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