

Microsoft condemns use of anti-piracy laws to stifle dissent

September 13 2010



Attendees try an interactive display at the Microsoft booth at the 2010 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada, in January 2010. US software giant Microsoft expressed concern on Monday over a report that anti-software piracy laws were being used to stifle dissent in Russia and announced steps to try to halt the practice.

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The Microsoft statement followed a report in The New York Times that the Russian authorities had used piracy charges concerning Microsoft [software](#) to confiscate computers and harass non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

"As general counsel for Microsoft, it was not the type of story that felt good to read," Microsoft senior vice president and general counsel Brad Smith said in a blog post.

"Whatever the circumstances of the particular cases the New York Times described, we want to be clear that we unequivocally abhor any attempt to leverage [intellectual property rights](#) to stifle political advocacy or pursue improper personal gain," Smith said.

"We are moving swiftly to seek to remove any incentive or ability to engage in such behavior," he said.

Smith said Microsoft had internal teams around the world looking at the issues and was seeking advice from human rights advocates.

Microsoft also plans to retain an international law firm not involved in anti-piracy work to conduct an independent investigation and provide advice on new measures the Redmond, Washington-based company should take, he said.

In the meantime, "to prevent non-government organizations from falling victim to nefarious actions taken in the guise of anti-piracy enforcement, Microsoft will create a new unilateral software license for NGOs that will ensure they have free, legal copies of our products," Smith said.

"We're creating in Russia a new NGO Legal Assistance Program focused specifically on helping NGOs document to the authorities that this new software license proves that they have legal software," he said.

Microsoft already operates a donated software program for NGOs, providing software with a market value of more than 390 million dollars to over 42,000 NGOs around the world in the past year, according to the company.

Smith said [Microsoft](#) seeks to "reduce the piracy and counterfeiting of software" but wants to "do this in a manner that respects fundamental human rights."

"Piracy is a very real problem," he said. "But none of this should create a pretext for the inappropriate pursuit of NGOs, newspapers, or other participants in civil society."

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Citation: Microsoft condemns use of anti-piracy laws to stifle dissent (2010, September 13)
retrieved 13 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2010-09-microsoft-condemns-anti-piracy-laws-stifle.html>

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