

UN resolution aims to protect right to privacy

November 1 2013, by Edith M. Lederer

Brazil and Germany, whose leaders have allegedly been targeted by U.S. eavesdropping, are asking the U.N. General Assembly to adopt a resolution calling on all countries to protect the right to privacy guaranteed under international law.

Their draft resolution sent to the assembly's human rights committee Friday notes that rapid technological developments are improving information and communications for people around the globe—but they are also enhancing the capacity "for surveillance, interception and data collection, which may violate human rights."

The draft emphasizes that illegal surveillance and interception of communications as well as the illegal collection of personal data "constitute a highly intrusive act that violates the right to privacy and freedom of expression and may threaten the foundations of a democratic society."

The proposed resolution follows a series of reports of U.S. eavesdropping on foreign leaders, including Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, that have surprised and angered allies.

Rousseff canceled a state visit to Washington after classified documents leaked by former National Security Agency analyst Edward Snowden showed that the NSA hacked the computer network of Brazil's state-run oil company Petrobras and scooped up data on emails and telephone calls flowing through the country.

Merkel and other European leaders expressed anger recently after reports that the NSA allegedly monitored Merkel's cell phone and swept up millions of French telephone records.

General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding but they do reflect world opinion and carry moral and political weight.

The human rights committee is expected to discuss the draft resolution next week and vote on it in late November. If approved by the committee, it is virtually certain to be adopted by the 193-member General Assembly in December.

The draft resolution "affirms that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular the right to privacy," and calls on members to uphold those rights.

While concerns about public security "may justify the gathering and protection of certain sensitive information," the draft stresses that states must ensure they are not violating international human rights law.

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