

Beat: Miscellaneous

Hundreds rally in Hong Kong to demand protection for Snowden

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USPA News - Hundreds of people marched through Hong Kong on Saturday to demand protection for American whistleblower Edward Snowden and denounce allegations which have revealed previously unknown details about the U.S. government's secret surveillance programs. Protesters began their march in Charter Garden, located in the region's Central District, and went to the U.S. Consulate before proceeding to the Hong Kong government's headquarters.

Authorities estimated at least 300 people participated in the march, but organizers put the number at around 900. Some protesters were carrying Snowden masks while others carried signs such as "Betray Snowden, Betray Freedom," "Let Snowden Stay," and "No big brother state." Petitions and letters were handed over to representatives of the U.S. Consulate and the Hong Kong government, while rights advocates and political activists held speeches. Hours after the protests, Hong Kong leader CY Leung broke his silence on the matter by releasing a brief statement. "When the relevant mechanism is activated, the Hong Kong SAR Government will handle the case of Mr Snowden in accordance with the laws and established procedures of Hong Kong," he said. He also addressed allegations that U.S. intelligence agencies have been hacking into computers in Hong Kong and mainland China for years. "The Government will follow up on any incidents related to the privacy or other rights of the institutions or people in Hong Kong being violated," Leung added in his statement, giving no other details. Snowden, a 29-year-old American who worked for defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton as an infrastructure analyst for the National Security Agency (NSA), identified himself last week as the source behind recent newspaper articles that revealed previously unknown details about the U.S. government's secret surveillance programs. According to recent disclosures by The Guardian and the Washington Post, U.S. intelligence agencies have direct access to the servers of nine Internet companies for a wide range of digital data. A slideshow, marked "TOP SECRET", identifies current data providers as Microsoft, Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, PalTalk, YouTube, Skype, AOL and Apple. The slideshow explains that much of the world's communications flow through the United States, and that the communications of foreign targets could easily flow through the U.S. It says the nine current providers supply information on a massive scale, including e-mails, chats, videos, photos, stored data, voice communications (VoIP), file transfers, video conferences, online social networking details and details about when accounts are accessed. Snowden, speaking from a hotel room in Hong Kong during an interview last week, said he came forward publicly to authenticate his recent disclosures and because his concerns about 'abuses' in the intelligence community agencies had not been taken seriously. "The more you talk about the (wrongdoing), the more you're ignored," he said. The contract employee said he is not against the U.S. government but wants the public to be able to decide whether the intelligence agencies should have the authority to carry out controversial and secretive surveillance programs. "This is something that's not our place to decide, the public needs to decide whether these programs and policies are right or wrong," he said. Snowden said the intelligence community originally focused on foreign targets but is now increasingly targeting all communications in the U.S. "It ingests them by default. It collects them in its system and it filters them and it analyses them and it measures them and it stores them for periods of time simply because that's the easiest, most efficient, and most valuable way to achieve these ends," he said. The contractor said analysts with proper clearance could target anyone at will, ranging from ordinary citizens to federal judges and up to President Barack Obama if they have his personal contact details. He said the public should be concerned because citizens are being "watched and recorded," whether they did something wrong or not. "You simply have to eventually fall under suspicion from somebody even by a wrong call. And then they can use this system to go back in time and scrutinize every decision you've ever made, every friend you've ever discussed something with," he said. "And [they'll] attack you on that basis to sort of derive suspicion from an innocent life and paint anyone in the context of a wrongdoer." Snowden, who lived with his girlfriend in Hawaii, flew to Hong Kong last month after telling his NSA supervisor that he needed several weeks off to receive treatment for epilepsy. His whereabouts are currently unknown after he checked out of the Mira hotel in Tsimshatsui on Monday morning, but he is believed to remain in Hong Kong. Snowden said he came to Hong Kong because it has a strong tradition of free speech and because he believes the Hong Kong government is more likely to resist the dictates of the U.S. government, which has launched a criminal investigation. But under an extradition treaty that came into force in 1998, the U.S. government is able to request Hong Kong to detain a U.S. citizen for up to two months while it prepares an extradition request.

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