

January 22, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We are writing to you in advance of the State of the Union address on January 28. That day is also International Privacy Day, widely celebrated as the date when the Privacy Convention of the Council of Europe was first open for signature. We hope you will take the opportunity of your speech to recognize this important day.

These are important times for privacy and data protection in the United States. It is not only the scope of NSA surveillance that concerns the American public. Major data breaches at US retailers have compromised the personal information of over 110 million consumers. Few issues are of greater concern to users of Internet-based services than the protection of privacy.

Now, almost thirty years after the adoption of the Council of Europe Convention, forty-six countries around the world have signed the Convention.¹ However, the United States has not yet signed the Convention.

This should change. The protection of privacy is a fundamental human right. In the 21st century, it may become one of the most critical human rights of all. Civil society organizations from around the world have urged countries that have not yet ratified the international Privacy Convention to do so as soon as possible.²

The members of your Review Group recently stated that the United States should be “a leader in championing the protection by all nations of fundamental human rights, including the right of privacy, which is central to human dignity.”³

Mr. President, we urge you to take the opportunity of January 28 to affirm that privacy is a fundamental human right, and to begin the process of ratification of the international Privacy Convention.

¹ See Council of Europe, Status as of: 13/1/2014,

<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=108&CL=ENG>

² The Public Voice, “The Madrid Privacy Declaration,” available at <http://thepublicvoice.org/madrid-declaration/>

³ PRESIDENT’S REVIEW GROUP ON INTELLIGENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES, LIBERTY AND SECURITY IN A CHANGING WORLD 156 (2013), available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2013-12-12_rg_final_report.pdf.

Respectfully,

Marc Rotenberg
President, Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC)

Deborah Hurley,
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Salil Shetty
Secretary General, Amnesty International

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