

Over one million petition for Brazil to grant asylum to Snowden

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Supporters of Edward Snowden have handed in to Brazil's Foreign Ministry a petition signed by more than 1.1 million people calling upon the government of President Dilma Rousseff to grant the US National Security Agency whistle-blower asylum in the country.

The petition, begun last November on the Avaaz web site, gathered support from throughout Brazil and around the world, providing a powerful expression of the immense popular support for Snowden and hostility to the global spying operations of the NSA.

Revelations from the NSA documents made public by Snowden have had a particularly strong impact in Brazil, where they have established the US spy agency's systematic hacking of the official and personal phone calls, text messages, emails and Internet searches of President Rousseff and her aides. They also uncovered economic espionage directed against Petrobras, Brazil's state-owned oil company, which is the fourth-largest energy conglomerate in the world, and the government's ministry of mining and energy.

Initiating the petition was David Miranda, the Brazilian partner of Rio de Janeiro-based journalist Glenn Greenwald, who has broken many of the stories stemming from the documents leaked by Snowden. Miranda was himself held incommunicado for nine hours and had his computer and other belongings seized at London's Heathrow Airport last August under Britain's anti-terrorism law.

The discussion on Snowden's fate heated up in Brazil last December after the ex-NSA contractor issued an "Open letter to the people of Brazil" in response to requests from both a Brazilian legislative committee and the country's federal police for aid in investigating the NSA spying.

In response, he made it clear that he was not in a position to offer such assistance without being granted

political asylum in a country where he could speak freely. The Russian government of President Vladimir Putin has granted temporary asylum on the condition that Snowden do nothing there to harm "American interests."

"Today, if you carry a cell phone in Sao Paulo, the NSA can and does keep track of your location: they do this 5 billion times a day to people around the world," Snowden wrote in the letter. "When someone in Florianopolis visits a website, the NSA keeps a record of when it happened and what you did there. If a mother in Porto Alegre calls her son to wish him luck on his university exam, NSA can keep that call log for five years or more. They even keep track of who is having an affair or looking at pornography, in case they need to damage their target's reputation."

While officials at the Brazilian Foreign Ministry last Thursday accepted the petition signed by over 1.1 million people, there is no indication that the Rousseff government is inclined to comply with its demand.

As with other Latin American countries, it has hidden behind the formality that Snowden has yet to submit the necessary paperwork to be considered for asylum. Last December, Rousseff said that she would not respond to someone who "does not make clear" what he is seeking.

While Rousseff has issued public condemnations of the NSA spying and called off a state visit to Washington scheduled last September, her government has shown no stomach for a more forceful confrontation with Washington. Her ruling Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores—PT), despite its name and "left" pretensions, is the foremost representative of Brazilian corporate and banking interests, which, while disturbed by the industrial spying of the NSA, do not want to see a clash that could curtail trade and cut into

profits.

The petition states, “As the leader of a global movement for internet freedom and privacy, Brazil is the perfect home for a man who sacrificed his life to disclose invasive and illegal US spying.”

In reality, the refusal of the Rousseff government to offer Snowden asylum is bound up with the growth of repression within Brazil itself, particularly in the context of the mass protests that shook the country last June. At the time, it was revealed that the federal police had established a special unit to spy on social media in an attempt to learn who was involved in the mass demonstrations.

More recently, there have been denunciations of espionage on the part of two major Brazilian corporations: Vale, the multinational mining corporation, and Norte Energia, the corporation in charge of the giant and controversial Belo Monte dam project in Amazonas. The companies are accused of organizing spying on Brazilian social movements with the apparent collaboration of Brazil’s intelligence agency.

Meanwhile, the Brazilian Senate is expected to vote as early as this week on so-called terrorism legislation that defines terrorism as any act that “provokes or spreads generalized terror or panic through an offense or attempted offense against life, physical integrity or health or the deprivation of the liberty of a person.”

The legislation has been placed on a fast track in the wake of the February 10 death of television cameraman Santiago Andrade, who was hit in the head by a flare apparently fired by protesters during a demonstration in Rio against a bus fare hike days earlier.

The real purpose of the legislation was spelled out by Workers Party Senator Jorge Viana who argued that the legislation was needed to combat protests that could erupt around the holding of this year’s World Cup tournament in the country beginning next June. “There will be people here from all parts of the world,” he argued in the Senate debate. “If we are a peaceful people, we should not be afraid of making a strong law against those who want to turn Brazil into a violent country.”

With the 50th anniversary of the CIA-backed coup that imposed decades of military dictatorship in Brazil just months away, efforts are being made under the PT government to once again erect the legal framework for

police state repression.



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