Internet Society Urges President Obama to Effect 'Immediate and Meaningful' Changes to U.S. Government Surveillance Practices

Warns that Internet fragmentation is 'very real risk'

[Washington, D.C. and Geneva, Switzerland – 15 January 2014] – U.S. President Obama is expected to make a speech on 17 January 2014 regarding the recommendations in the report from the President's Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies: Liberty and Security in a Changing World. The world will be watching for substantive action from the President to effect immediate and meaningful changes to U.S. government surveillance practices that have shaken the confidence and trust of Internet users worldwide. The President has a unique opportunity to open a global dialogue to find ways to protect, as the Advisory Board's report puts it, two different forms of security: national security and personal privacy.

"We appreciate the tone of the report and the willingness of the U.S. Government to seriously examine all aspects of this issue," said Bob Hinden, Chair of the Internet Society Board of Trustees. "However, we have serious reservations that the report and the President's response to it will address the damage already done to the global Internet. The pervasive surveillance revelations we have all heard about have seriously damaged trust in the Internet ranging from the services and applications, equipment vendors, Internet service providers, technical standards, and the Internet governance mechanisms."

The Internet Society continues to urge all stakeholders, including governmental actors around the world, to consider the effects of local solutions in what has become a global system. Fragmentation of the Internet is a very real risk. Actions have consequences and we are already seeing breaks in the chain of trust that underpins the global Internet.

The damage to the Internet has been deep and, thus, the response must urgently and forthrightly address the consequences including:

• Trust in international privacy and data protection frameworks has been called into question, and this directly threatens the trans-border economic and social power of the Internet. Examples of such frameworks are the Safe Harbor provisions, and agreements on the safe exchange of airline passenger, financial transaction, and law enforcement data.
• Proponents of the open multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance such as the U.S. are now reasonably open to criticism for having subverted the current global model, for single-country self-interest. This poses a real threat to Internet governance, as it gives ammunition to those who are inclined to challenge that model.
• The disclosures reveal an attack on the Internet at a core technical level, with security-related standards, products, and services being contaminated in the course of reaching the market. The serious nature of this attack cannot be overstated.

The Internet Society's view is that the open, inclusive standardization and governance approach remains the model least susceptible to abuse. As we await the President's response, we assert that all stakeholders need to contribute to the development and implementation of internationally-recognized data ethics practices.

Kathy Brown, President and CEO of the Internet Society, commented, "The chain of trust has been broken and the decisions we all make in response will be critical to the Internet's continued development. The Internet Society is committed to continuing its leadership across the Internet community to ensure the Internet is a trusted, global and open platform for all participants."

About the Internet Society
The Internet Society is the trusted independent source for Internet information and thought leadership from around the world. With its principled vision and substantial technological foundation, the Internet Society promotes open dialogue on Internet policy, technology, and future development among users, companies, governments, and other organizations. Working with its members and Chapters around the world, the Internet Society enables the continued evolution and growth of the Internet for everyone. For more information, visit www.internetsociety.org

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