**Campaign Launched to Pardon Edward Snowden**

Supporters of Edward Snowden have appealed to U.S. President Barack Obama to give him a pardon.

The American Civil Liberties Union, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch launched a campaign in support of Snowden this week. Several business leaders and personalities have joined the cause.

Snowden once worked as a contractor for the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA). The agency collects and studies information for the federal government.

While at the NSA, Snowden provided details to the media of secret government programs for gathering intelligence. He showed for the first time that the NSA was secretly collecting information on the telephone calls of millions of U.S. citizens.

The NSA has claimed the program was legal under the USA Patriot Act. Both houses of Congress passed the measure after the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Snowden’s actions resulted in the government bringing charges against him in June 2013. He was accused of stealing government property, illegally communicating national defense information, and illegally communicating secret intelligence information.

If found guilty, he could spend up to 30 years in prison.

The government’s case is based on the belief that Snowden gave away national security secrets that could put the public in danger.

Some of his supporters see him as an American activist who put his life at risk to bring attention to the secret NSA programs.

Snowden currently lives in exile in Russia, which has offered him asylum. The Russian government has rejected U.S. requests to **extradite** him to the United States to face trial.

The Obama administration has repeatedly stated that Snowden’s actions were serious crimes. Administration spokesman Josh Earnest said the information “harmed U.S. national security and put the American people at greater risk.”

Earnest also said that Snowden made a mistake by deciding to release the information to the media. Instead, the government believes, he could have made his concerns known in a “more responsible” way.

Congress issues new report on Snowden's case

On Thursday, a U.S. congressional committee said that the material made public by Snowden “caused tremendous damage” to national security. The committee said its investigation “makes clear that he handed over secrets that protect American troops overseas and secrets that provide vital defenses against terrorists and nation-states.”

But others disagree. Dinah PoKempner is General Counsel with Human Rights Watch. She told VOA that Snowden should not be considered a criminal.

“It’s a real problem the way the U.S. handles people who **expose** wrongdoing, and it needs to be corrected. One of the best ways to start that process would be symbolic, but highly meaningful, and that would be to pardon Snowden.”

Snowden lawyer cites lack of government evidence

Ben Wizner is with the American Civil Liberties Union. He is also a lawyer for Edward Snowden. He says the government has yet to provide any real evidence to support the charges.

“There’s been three-and-a-half years since the revelations began, and the government has had every opportunity and every **incentive** to come forward with specific and **concrete** evidence that there has been harm. And instead, we hear the same **vague**, **speculative** language about how these things damaged national security.”

President Obama can only approve a pardon before his term in office ends in January of next year. Wizner says he remains hopeful about the president acting, although the government has repeatedly said that Snowden should face the charges.

“Something that may seem quite unlikely in September, might seem just a bit more likely in December, if millions of people around the world respond to this call and join our campaign.”

Hollywood film 'Snowden' renews interest in case

There has been new interest in the case with the release of a film about Snowden. The film, “Snowden,” is directed by Oliver Stone, who recently called for a pardon. He spoke while making an appearance in support of the movie at the Toronto International Film Festival.

“Mr. Obama could pardon him, and we hope so,” Stone said. “We hope Mr. Obama has a stroke of lightning, and he sees the way.”

But he admitted a pardon is not likely to come from Obama, whom he said has kept expanding U.S. surveillance efforts.

“Obama has managed to put together the most intensive surveillance state in the history of the world,” Stone told The Hollywood Reporter. “In the hands of the wrong president, it’s very dangerous what we’re doing.”

Tanya O’Carroll is an advisor on technology and human rights for Amnesty International. She said a pardon for Snowden would be an important step in the movement to limit secret government **surveillance** all over the world.

Pardon could have far reaching effects

“Snowden himself has said this very clearly – this is not just a debate about now. It is a debate about the future. And I think if we see him walk free, that’s going to be an incredibly important message – a huge, symbolic win for the fight back against mass surveillance.”

I’m Bryan Lynn.

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**Words in This Story**

**extradite** – v. to send someone to another country where they are charged with a crime for trial

**expose** – v. make something public, especially wrongdoing

**incentive** – n. something that encourages someone to act in a certain way

**concrete** – adj. relating to something real, rather than general ideas or qualities

**vague** – adj. not clear in meaning

**speculative** – adj. assumption based on guesses rather than facts

**surveillance** – adj. intelligence-gathering