

Snowden Criticizes Russia for Crackdown on Internet Freedom

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A chair is pictured on stage as former U.S. National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden is awarded the Bjornson prize in Molde, Norway, Sept. 5.

Edward Snowden, the U.S. intelligence leaker granted asylum in Russia in August 2013, has criticized his country of residence for its crackdown on Internet freedom and gay rights in a speech after receiving a Norwegian prize, British daily *The Guardian* reported Saturday.

Snowden, 32, was awarded the Norwegian Academy of Literature and Freedom of Expression's Bjornson prize for his work on the right to privacy, the report said. The former NSA contractor, who is wanted in the U.S. on charges of theft and espionage and therefore cannot leave Russia for fear of arrest, participated in the awards ceremony via videophone from Russia. In his acceptance speech, he condemned the country's tightening grip over online activities and treatment of gay people as "fundamentally wrong."

"This drive that we see in the Russian government to control more and more the Internet, to control more and more what people are seeing, even parts of personal lives, deciding what is the appropriate or inappropriate way for people to express their love for one another ... [is]

fundamentally wrong," Snowden was cited by The Guardian as saying.

He described the restrictive use of intelligence monitoring by governments as useless and said January's deadly attack at the editorial offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris proved that surveillance does not necessarily keep citizens safe.

"In the Charlie Hebdo attacks, for example, the intelligence services say: 'Oh yes, we knew who these people were.' But it didn't stop the attack," Snowden was cited by The Guardian as saying.

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