

'Stand with Snowden': Campaign launched to protect whistleblowers

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The Courage organization had its launch in Berlin on Wednesday to mark the beginning of a campaign to support Edward Snowden as his temporary asylum in Russia comes to an end on July 31. Courage will also dedicate its activities to protecting whistleblowers as a whole from persecution.

"I think anyone that speaks truth to power whether it's a whistleblower, publisher or journalist that those are heroic acts and they should be supported," Sarah Harrison, acting director of Courage, told RT at the launch event.

Harrison traveled with Edward Snowden to Russia last year and spent four months in the country, helping to secure Snowden's bid for temporary asylum.

Washington effectively stranded Snowden in Russia last summer, canceling his passport and filing an extradition order against him. The spy-turned-whistleblower has been charged under the espionage act for revealing top secret information on the National Security Agency's (NSA) global spy programs.

Harrison argues Snowden's courage to stand up to the US government over its spy programs should be celebrated and not condemned.

"There are many whistleblowers that are examples of how the US treats truth tellers. They basically persecute them," she told RT.

Whistleblower advocate and security researcher Jacob Appelbaum, who also attended the launch, said the United States had fallen short in its protection of whistleblowers.

"Until we have the reforms in the US that allow people to come talk about real serious abuses of power we need organizations like Courage," said Appelbaum.

'Enough is enough'

During the launch event both Edward Snowden and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange appeared via video link to give statements on government surveillance.

Assange praised the founders of Courage for their work and said it was strange that WikiLeaks with all *"its difficulties"* was the only organization to come to Edward Snowden's rescue in Hong Kong.

Snowden said the creation of organizations like Courage was a turning point in the battle against mass surveillance.

"Enough is enough," said the whistleblower. *"If the government won't protect whistleblowers... we will protect them as a global society."*

#Standwithsnowden

To drum up support for Snowden's cause a year after he sought refuge in Russia, Courage's organizers have asked their followers to upload photos to social media under the hashtag #Standwithsnowden.

The social media campaign has already drawn significant support, with Intercept journalist Glen Greenwald posting a video message getting behind Snowden as well as many other privacy activists.

The classified data that Snowden released had a massive knock-on effect around the globe, with criticism that the US spy agencies' activities were "almost Orwellian in nature." In response to the international uproar caused by the leaks, President Barack Obama said the NSA had scaled back its spy programs, claiming it no longer monitors the personal communications of world leaders.