

# *Rights group calls for moratorium on the use of spyware in Mexico*

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**Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador speaks about being targeted by the previous administration of President Enrique Pena Nieto after an announcement that it allegedly purchased Pegasus spying software from the Israeli firm NSO Group [Mexico's Presidency/Handout via Reuters]**

Mexico City, July 30 (RHC)-- A human rights group on has called on the Mexican government to suspend all use of surveillance spyware until robust and transparent regulations are put in place that respect human rights.

Of the more than 50,000 phone numbers that a collaboration of 17 media organisations and a rights organisation found were selected for surveillance by clients of the Israeli tech firm NSO Group, 15,000 were in Mexico.

Politicians from across the political spectrum, journalists, human rights activists, judges and doctors were allegedly targeted for spying between 2016 and 2017, according to the investigation. In Mexico, 27 journalists and activists were possibly targeted.

And at least 50 people linked to the leftist President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, back when he was a candidate for president – including his wife, children, drivers and even his cardiologist – were on the list.

“We are calling on governments to suspend the purchase and use of instruments of surveillance until adequate regulations that respect human rights are put in place,” Edith Olivares Ferreto, executive director of Amnesty International Mexico, said during a virtual news conference on Thursday.

“We hope that the revelation of the magnitude of illegitimate surveillance and impunity that operates in the NSO Group and its clients will lead to a revision of the accounts and to the regulation of an opaque sector,” she said.

Amnesty International, a United Kingdom-based rights group, provided technical assistance to the “Project Pegasus” investigation. Researchers say their analysis found that “mass and selective surveillance” has been taking place in Mexico that unjustly targeted activists and journalists.

The group launched a petition on Wednesday entitled Pegasus in Mexico: No to Surveillance. “Mass surveillance like this violates the rights to freedom of privacy and expression, to personal security, to the presumption of innocence, and the State has the obligation to protect people,” reads the petition.

Ten countries have been named as having allegedly used the software, including Bahrain, Hungary, India, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Mexico is the only Latin American country on the list.

NSO’s Pegasus spyware can infiltrate a mobile device either through a text message that the user would click or more recently through “zero-click attacks” that compromise phones without any action by the user. Messages, chats, phone calls, contacts and emails can be monitored.

Amnesty says the results of its research in Mexico call into question NSO’s claim that its product is only used by states to tackle serious crime and terrorism.

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