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Your Excellency President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi,

On Wednesday 24th February we released a new investigation about the Technical Research Department (TRD), a unit we understand is under your command, as part of the General Intelligence Service.

Our report stresses the lack of publicly available information regarding the TRD, including the absence of: any official acknowledgement of its existence; any publicly available description of its role; information about its relation to other intelligence agencies; and details of who the head of the TRD is.

This lack of information is all the more worrying considering the extensive budget the TRD appears to have, as our report highlights. For instance, the TRD was about to invest about $1.5 million on Hacking Team spyware in 2015 alone. A source we have spoken to suggests the TRD have the largest budget for surveillance technologies compared to any other Government body in Egypt. Such a large public expenditure must also have strict public oversight.

We ask you to publicly and explicitly avow the existence and the role of the TRD. Its operations must be explained to the public. The TRD must be subjected to proper oversight. This oversight mechanism must be public so that individuals may obtain redress if their communications have been unlawfully intercepted.

To increase the accountability of the TRD, the Egyptian Government should make TRD's surveillance activities subject to public judicial authorisation.

Egypt is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which both explicitly protect the right to privacy. Provision 93 of the 2014 Constitution states that "the State shall be bound by the international human rights agreements, covenants and conventions ratified by Egypt, and which shall have the force of law after publication in accordance with the prescribed condition." The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights therefore have the same power and value as any other Egyptian laws. According to its own laws, Egypt therefore has a duty to become far more transparent about the surveillance infrastructure in place.

Mr President, we hope you will take the publication of our report as an opportunity to improve your government's current practices and to bring more transparency to your surveillance operations.

Yours sincerely,

Privacy International