

NSO Group says it doesn't condone human rights violations

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NSO Group insists it is governed by high standards that “explicitly characterize human rights violations as a misuse” of its technology.

In a statement to the Star, it further adds that it only licenses its products to government intelligence and law enforcement agencies “for the sole purpose of preventing and investigating terror and serious crime.

“NSO investigates any credible allegations of misuse, and if necessary takes action, including shutting down the system,” the statement says. “While misuse is extremely rare, NSO has shut down the system three times in the past and has declined to renew contracts out of concern for the potential of misuse.”

Due to contractual or security constraints, NSO says it can't reveal the names of its clients or discuss specific use of its technology.

In an interview with “60 Minutes” on Aug. 18, the company's CEO, Shalev Hulio, declined to say whether it prevented Saudi Arabia from further using Pegasus after Citizen Lab revealed it was used to infect the phone of Canadian resident Omar Abdulaziz.

Abdulaziz exchanged hundreds of WhatsApp messages with Washington Post columnist and high-profile Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi, who was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018. The company did not respond when the Star asked if the targetting of Abdulaziz's phone was a legitimate use of NSO spyware.

“I can tell you that we’ve checked, and we have a lot of ways to check,” Hulio, a former major in the Israel Defense Forces, told “60 Minutes.” “And I can guarantee to you our technology was not used on Jamal Khashoggi or his relatives.”

In the statement to the Star, NSO further quoted Hulio as saying: “Khashoggi was not targeted by any NSO product or technology, including listening, monitoring, location tracking and intelligence collection.”

Abdulaziz is suing NSO Group, and the company said it wouldn’t comment on ongoing court proceedings. NSO is also being sued separately by a Qatari citizen and Mexican journalists and activists who were also targeted with Pegasus.

Regarding Citizen Lab reports on NSO, the company said: “While Citizen Lab bills its investigative findings as concrete and fact-based, a closer look shows they are based on conjecture and guesswork and are written to generate publicity rather than the truth. Even Citizen Lab acknowledges that its research is not foolproof, using phrases like “we suspect (but cannot confirm)” and “technical limitations prevent us from conclusively saying.”