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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Institut International pour les Droits et le Développement, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 January 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Human Impact of Espionage Unveiling the Abu Dhabi Secretes

Alp Services is a Swiss company based in Geneva, known for providing a range of services including intelligence, political, business, and communication advisory services. Their operations are diverse, encompassing crisis and reputation management, global investigations, public affairs consulting, political risk assessment, asset searches, and screening and due diligence.

However, Alp Services has been involved in several controversies, particularly related to its alleged espionage activities. Notably, in 2021, the company was implicated in a scandal known as "Abu Dhabi Secrets". This involved allegations of conducting private intelligence missions on behalf of the United Arab Emirates' intelligence services. The company was accused of disseminating information under false identities on the internet to harm adversaries of the United Arab Emirates, mainly targeting Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood. The firm allegedly utilized various methods, including wiretapping, infiltration, impersonation, reconnaissance, and spreading negative information through offensive viral communication campaigns, often characterized as the "power of dark PR." These activities reportedly included targeting politicians, representatives of Islamic organizations, activists, and feminist figures.

The activities of Alp Services were brought to light following a hack and subsequent investigation into the leaked data. The investigation, known as "Abu Dhabi Secrets," was published in 2023 by European Investigative Collaborations. It revealed that Alp Services, under the leadership of Mario Brero, had been involved in various controversial practices such as infiltration, honey trapping, accessing bank and telephone records of targets by impersonation, and spreading negative information through offensive viral communication campaigns.

Moreover, Alp Services has faced legal challenges, including a conviction in a French court in 2014 related to its controversial methods. The company's tactics have been characterized as "the power of dark PR," reflecting the extent to which they have allegedly gone to manipulate narratives and influence public opinion.

These revelations about Alp Services highlight significant ethical concerns and underscore the potential for manipulation in intelligence and investigative operations. The company's activities have had a wide-reaching impact, affecting the lives, businesses, and reputations of those targeted across Europe.

The company was founded by Mario Brero in 1989, initially acting as a subcontractor for Jules Kroll's international corporate-investigation business, focusing on investigations in the domains of finance, law, and crisis management. Alp Services has been involved in several high-profile cases and controversies, particularly related to espionage and intelligence activities.

Business and Human Rights

The role of business is integral to support and promote human rights. Responsible business counts on stability – sound institutions, the smooth functioning of justice, sustainable development and public confidence in the prospects for personal safety in a larger peace. These interlocking elements can only be generated when human rights are upheld.

Many business leaders acknowledge that good business means doing business right. They are implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to address human rights impact in their operations and supply chains, and they incorporate the UN Global Compact's Ten Principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption into their operations. Through these efforts, they are better prepared to manage the risk of the massive reputational damage which arises when corporations are perceived as involved with serious human rights abuses, such as Espionage, wiretapping, infiltration, impersonation, and spreading negative information as the case of Swiss Alps company.

Institut International pour les Droits et le Développement is looking for the role of private sector in dealing with human rights issues with great suspicion and fear and call for respecting human rights in strong translating of broad commitment into action across the corporate sector. the French journal Mediapart, pointed on 10 July 2023 to the fact that the United Arab Emirates falsely and purposefully targeted individuals as being linked to the Brotherhood.

The campaign was only the tip of a huge Alp Services mission dubbed by the code name 'Arnica' or 'Crocus'. The mission centered on the United Arab Emirates' two issues: Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood organization.

The Alp Services' delivery presents an infographic showing pictures of people, allegedly radical Muslims, intertwined with lines in a network. Several Mediapart and New Yorker reports have displayed many of the secretive strategies implemented by the the United Arab Emirates-hired entity.

Furthermore, a more shocking reveal from the latest probe that relies on Mediapart-acquired confidential data was sent to the European Investigative Collaborations (EIC) network.

In March 2023, the Economist Intelligence Unit found that 83% of senior executives considered business to be an important actor in respecting human rights. In practice, fewer than half their companies had drawn up a human rights policy statement – a key expectation for all companies under the UN Guiding Principles. While Swiss Alps company trying to build their bottom line and reputation based on controversial methods (involvement in money laundering, counterfeiting, wiretapping, infiltration, impersonation, and spreading negative information and corrupt practices) without any Ethical Considerations, as they were Convicted in a French court in 2014 due to controversial methods

These operations raised questions about ethical integrity in intelligence and investigative practices. Implications for transparency and journalistic independence.

Spyware Threatens the Essence of Human Rights

Within the last few year, an international coalition of brave investigative journalists released information about the Pegasus Project. The disclosure of the leak of over 50,000 phone numbers, including those of many human rights defenders, journalists, academics, and opposition leaders, that had been identified as potential targets for surveillance through the Pegasus spyware, shocked the world. Long-standing. This scandal is happening again and might be integrte with the activitis of Swiss Alps company.

Institut International pour les Droits et le Développement calls the Governments have a duty to ensure security within their borders and the use of sophisticated surveillance technology may be necessary in a democratic society for the protection of national security or to safeguard the rights and freedoms of others. The case-law of the European Court of Human Rights establishes, however, that all surveillance must occur in accordance with the law, serve a legitimate aim, and be necessary and proportionate. What is more, the legal framework must provide precise, effective, and comprehensive safeguards on the ordering, execution and potential redress opportunities against surveillance measures, which must be subject to adequate judicial review and effective oversight.

Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence) of the European Convention on Human Rights provides that:

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

The Way Ahead

Institut International pour les Droits et le Développement would like to highlight that these actions, undermine the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law . Recognizing that the common values on which the EU is built –democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law – lie also at the heart of political association and economic integration; Committed to further strengthening respect for fundamental freedoms, human rights, including the rights of privacy, democratic principles, the rule of law, and good governance.

No individual or organization should be subjected to unwarranted interference, intimidation, or character assassination based on their beliefs, affiliations, or activities, particularly when it comes to peaceful advocacy for human rights and the well-being of communities.

We request that Alp Services immediately ceases all activities that infringe upon the rights and freedoms of individuals and organizations. We also demand a thorough and impartial investigation into the allegations made against Alp Services, ensuring that all responsible parties are held accountable for their actions.

we call upon the relevant European authorities to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into this matter. It is essential to determine the extent to which Alp Services may have violated European laws and regulations, particularly those related to data protection, privacy, and private security services. The perpetrators must be brought to justice, and appropriate measures should be taken to prevent similar incidents in the future.

We trust that human rights council will treat this complaint about private sector espionage with the seriousness it deserves, recognizing the urgency and importance of remedying these serious human rights violations. Act accordingly to ensure that the rights of the individuals concerned are fully respected and protected.

The perpetrators must be brought to justice, and appropriate measures should be taken to prevent similar incidents in the future.

We call on Council of Europe member states to use of highly intrusive zero-click spyware tools such as Pegasus, and to put in place a precise, human rights compliant legislative framework for the use of modern surveillance technology. This framework should provide for meaningful procedural guarantees, robust systems of ex-ante and ex-post oversight through judicial review and parliamentary scrutiny, and effective redress mechanisms for victims. Once in place, this framework should be rigorously enforced.
