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Contact:

Rebecca Farmer, ACLU of Northern California, 415.621.2493, rfarmer@aclunc.org

Doug Honig, ACLU of Washington, 206.624.2184, dhonig@aclu-wa.org

Andrew Lewman, The Tor Project, execdir@torproject.org

Angus Fisher, Ontario Information and Privacy Commissioner's Office, 416.326.3902, angus.fisher@ipc.on.ca

Privacy Groups Announce Developer Challenge for Mobile Apps

Competition Challenges Developers to Build Solutions for Mobile Privacy Concerns

Today four groups announced the 2011 Develop for Privacy Challenge (www.develop4privacy.org), a new competition for mobile application developers to address privacy concerns surrounding mobile phones and other portable devices. Sponsoring the Challenge are the ACLU of Northern California, the ACLU of Washington, and the Tor Project, with the assistance of the Ontario Information and Privacy Commissioner's Office. The winner will be announced in August 2011 at an event in Las Vegas, coinciding with the DEFCON and Black Hat security conferences.

By the end of 2011 the majority of cell phones sold in the U.S. will likely be smartphones that allow users to pull up maps, browse the Internet, check e-mail, and more. Roughly 50 million Americans already carry these devices. With all their convenience, smartphones can also collect and share vast amounts of data that can paint a detailed picture about someone's life: their current location, where they have been, who they know, what they search for online, and more. Unfortunately, the outdated federal law governing electronic privacy, the Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA), was passed in 1986, long before smartphones or the Internet as we know it even existed.

"We shouldn't have to choose between using a smartphone and keeping our private information private," said Chris Conley, Technology and Civil Liberties Fellow at the ACLU of Northern California. "It's increasingly difficult for most people to understand where their data is going, let alone how they can reclaim control. Technology has evolved at breakneck speed, and although privacy laws don't auto-update, innovative developers can help fill the gap."

The 2011 Develop for Privacy Challenge is designed to address this imbalance by encouraging amateur and professional software developers to create tools that help mobile device users understand and address the privacy threats that all users face.

"We created the Develop for Privacy Challenge to call upon application developers to show that privacy doesn't need to be an afterthought in new technologies," said Brian Alseth, Technology and Liberty Director for the ACLU of Washington. "Rather, privacy can and should be a fundamental building block."

Applications submitted for the 2011 Develop for Privacy Challenge will be judged by a panel of leading privacy and technology experts, including Jacob Appelbaum of the Tor Project, Caspar Bowden of

Microsoft, Chris Hoofnagle of the University of California-Berkeley, Yoshi Kohno of the University of Washington, Jules Polonetsky of the Future of Privacy Forum, and Kai Rannenberg of Goethe-Universität. Applications will be judged based on several criteria including the seriousness of the privacy issue the app addresses; effectiveness, quality of user documentation, quality of source code, originality, portability, and performance. Submissions will be received at develop4privacy.org until May 31, 2011.

“Sometimes the best way to protect the privacy of your information is to ensure that it isn’t being exposed or collected in the first place,” said Andrew Lewman, Executive Director of the Tor Project. “Tor helps users protect their own data on the Internet—and this Challenge can help them protect that data on their mobile device.”

“I am delighted that my Office is assisting with this exciting initiative,” said Dr. Ann Cavoukian, Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, Canada. “I encourage developers to participate in this Challenge and to keep *Privacy by Design* top of mind as they develop these tools to allow users to take control of their information. If we want to preserve the privacy that so many of our freedoms rest upon, we need to commit to new and innovative approaches, and we need to do it now.”

More information, complete rules, and entry requirements are online at www.develop4privacy.org.

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