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FORUM: General Assembly (GA)

ISSUE: Addressing Potential Human Right Violations in Personal Information Tracking During the COVID-19 Pandemic

STUDENT OFFICER: Myungha Kim

POSITION: Deputy Chair

Introduction to Committee:

The General Assembly is one of the six major representative organs of the United Nations that is comprised of 193 member states, with its headquarters located in New York, United States. The General Assembly's main objective is to acknowledge international conflicts, generate intercontinental laws, and provide multilateral solutions regarding the issues raised upon in the world. The GA further contemplates problems concerning human rights, international security, nation disputes, and more.

Introduction to Topic:

Personal informational tracking is an exceptionally sensitive issue today, as the vast majority of the people are convinced that governments and companies are tracking their personal information and misusing them. With the unprecedented threat from the COVID-19 pandemic, states propounded an innovative strategy to track the confirmed cases of the virus digitally and reveal the data out to the public. This plan of action has been increasing serious human rights concerns at this time, causing distress for many individuals. Despite the arising concerns, personal information tracking is still expanding with its productivity and efficiency. Positively, personal information tracking can be invaluable and effective when limiting the potential spread of the virus, alerting the vulnerable citizens, and increasing the public awareness during the pandemic. However, states must also understand their fundamental obligation to protect the people's human rights; thus, steps should be taken to make personal information tracking secure.

Nonetheless, the issue of "Addressing Potential Human Right Violations in Personal Information Tracking During the COVID-19 Pandemic" prompts a question of how humans rights can be kept safe while maintaining the necessary tracking for individual's security during the COVID-19 pandemic. Member states must keep in mind that the global population is still diminishing at this moment due to the viral pandemic, and despite the concern of privacy invasion and tracking's inappropriate use, tracking surveillance is still escalating. For instance, the government of North Macedonia established their first Bluetooth app that detects the COVID-19 cases and warns users if they contact the infected ones. Similar apps have been launched in other states as well, including Turkey's GPS based app and Kyrgyzstan's video surveillance app. Once again, the common concern with the use of these applications is the potential for exposure of their personal data, possibly including their names, location, address, health information, household composition, and so on.

Henceforth, the use of these applications still remains contentious as experts are still researching efficient ways to preserve individual's safety and privacy. The potential uses of the gathered information through personal information tracking may include stalking, data trading, illegal evaluation, data exploitation, and more, and with these inappropriate uses of data, the following aspects must be considered deliberately when utilizing the tracking systems: How long will the personal information be retained? What are the qualifications to have access to the data and use them? How will laws or policies adequately limit the secondary use of the data and avoid data retention? States must further address this aspect of concern, make continuous effort on developing effective strategies, and rigorously protect its citizens from potential human rights violation when in the personal information tracking system.



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Key Terms:

COVID-19

Also known as SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease first found in 2019 in Wuhan Province, China. Symptoms of this disease include dry cough, pressure in chest and fever. The vaccines for COVID-19 are being distributed to many states, and the treatments are still being researched and authorized.

Personal Information Tracking

Government, organizations and businesses track or gather personal data of the individuals intentionally for a specific purpose. Personal information tracking is being used at this time of the COVID-19 pandemic to track the infected ones and to warn the vulnerable citizens from the disease.

Tracking Surveillance

This is the close observation of personal data gathered by tracking individual's information. During this COVID-19 pandemic, tracking surveillance is being used to monitor and track people's activities and aggregate information to limit the potential spread of the disease.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

This is the international development network created for the United Nations. The UNDP advocates for better resources and information for nations through the network device. Recently, the UNDP launched a COVID-19 data platform for the people to access and integrate reliable information regarding the viral virus.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

A regulation under the European Union's law to protect individual's personal data and privacy in the EU regions.

Major Parties Involved:

European Union (EU)

The European Union is in charge of collecting the location data of the people in the EU region, ensuring citizen's contribution to the social distancing measures during the pandemic. The data gathered are regulated by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and the personal information of individuals are protected and are kept anonymous. The main health authorities are in Germany, Italy and Austria.

Singapore

TraceTogether is an app launched by the Government Technology Agency of Singapore in collaboration with the Ministry of Health to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Singapore. This app effectively tracks the infected cases using Bluetooth and alerts the individuals who were in contact with the ones tested positive. Singapore is planning to establish privacy-preserving protocols very soon, ensuring individual's safety when collecting their personal data.

France, Italy, Germany

Scientists, technologists, and professionals from eight European countries, including France, Italy and Germany, have contributed to establishing the Pan-European Privacy Preserving Proximity Tracing app, which



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is a non-profit software that detects possible COVID-19 dangers with Bluetooth signals being transferred from the mobile devices. User's identities and data are kept private, encrypted and is stored temporarily.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue:

Privacy-preserving contact apps were first launched in 2020 as an attempt to limit the violation of human rights in personal information tracking. These apps guarantee the protection of individual's privacy through encrypts, anonymous data collection, and privacy policies. An example would be the Pan-European Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing, which was launched in April 1st, 2020 by competent scientists and professionals to detect potential COVID-19 cases and alert the citizens when positive cases are found nearby. Essentially, user's identity and personal information is secured and is stored locally, minimizing the chance of privacy exposal.

Furthermore, HongKong also attempted to protect human rights in personal information tracking by launching a voluntary contract tracking app, LeaveHomeSafe, which records the date and time of the user's location history when scanned the QR codes. All data is collected voluntarily and is not forced upon by the government, leaving the citizens with less distress and concern. Moreover, the government of Hongkong utilizes the geo-fencing technology instead of the GPS location tracking, which only displays the virtual location boundary of user's position history instead of exposing the specific tracking data.

Timeline:

(Year)	(Event)
Dec 31, 2019	Wuhan Municipal Health Commission detected the first cases of COVID-19 from Wuhan, Huabei Province of China.
Feb 11, 2020	The government of Hangzhou City, China, created the Alipay Health Code, which is one of the first digital application which reveals individual's health status to the government regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also used for community registration, health check, and online payment purposes. Alipay Health Code mainly serve as a 'pass' that records individual's location history for the government to look back when positive cases are reported.
April 10, 2020	Apple partnered with Google to launch a privacy-preserving contact tracing, using Bluetooth technology to reduce the spread of COVID-19 while also protecting user's personal information. Unlike the conventional contact tracing, the digital technology enables health authorities to gather information safely and efficiently, in a shorter span of time.
Aug 5, 2020	The first COVID-19 Tracing App in the United States, known as COVIDWISE, was launched in Virginia, which is based out of Apple and Google's technology. The app uses Bluetooth to alert users for the nearby positive cases. The location data and personal information is kept private and is not transmitted to The Virginia Department of Health.



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Dec 3, 2020	TraceTogether, a digital app that detects COVID-19 cases, was first established in Singapore, becoming one of the most successful and effective apps when identifying and alerting the positive cases.
Dec 10, 2020	UNDP establishes a non-profit COVID-19 data platform which integrates specific data and specific analysis of the unprecedented pandemic.

Possible solutions:

Although it is impossible to guarantee every user's data protection at this time, there are effective strategies that may help limit the violation of human rights in personal information tracking. A possible solution could be security auditing, which is evaluating the security and reliability of an organization by detecting their potential vulnerabilities examined by IT professionals. Other possible solutions may include implementing privacy policies, or temporarily and anonymously storing the data during the pandemic, then permanently deleting it afterwards to avoid unintended consequences of tracking.



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