



Five Country Ministerial Statement Regarding the Threat of Ransomware

On 7/8 April 2021, the Interior, Home Affairs, and Public Safety Ministers of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States (the Five Countries) met via video conference for the Five Country Ministerial meeting.

During this meeting, we discussed the common security challenges arising from the threat of ransomware, and how we can best protect our countries from this threat. Our discussion identified a number of shared policy challenges, which is a first step towards using our partnerships to counter this malicious cyber activity that impacts our society and national security every day.

Ransomware is a growing cyber threat which compromises the safety of our citizens, the security of the online environment, and the prosperity of our economies. It can be used with criminal intent, but is also a threat to national security. It can pose a significant threat to Governments, critical infrastructure and essential services on which all our citizens depend. Ransomware can also compromise the data of individuals and businesses, with cascading consequences.

Our Governments will continue to work with industry, businesses, and individuals to develop collective responses to this growing threat. We acknowledge that everyone has a role to play in cyber security, and that Government and industry have a shared responsibility to combat this threat to ensure confidence in the digital systems that are fundamental to our security and prosperity.

As with other malicious cyber activity, ransomware is not constrained by borders, and the international reach of cyber threats pose challenges to investigating ransomware offences and identifying those responsible. It can be deployed broadly and indiscriminately to incapacitate victims or withhold their data, and compel them to pay a ransom in order to resume their day-to-day operations and/or prevent their data from being released.

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen cyber threat actors exploiting this new environment as a means of furthering malicious activity. With an increase in the prevalence of cyber incidents, including targeted ransomware attacks on hospitals across the globe, we the Five Countries condemn cyber threat actors targeting the public health response. Such activity can risk lives and jeopardises confidence in healthcare systems. Countering malicious cyber activity is also fundamental to creating sufficient confidence within the business community and the general public to support economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cyber threat actors should not be rewarded for their actions. Payment incentivises further ransomware attacks and offers no guarantee of a successful outcome. Affected systems may not be restored, data may be released or sold, and victims can be targeted again.

FIVE COUNTRY MINISTERIAL



To more effectively address this threat, we will work closer together to counter cyber security threats and improve public awareness measures. With this in mind, we agreed to:

- Work collaboratively to address ransomware by actively sharing lessons learned and, as appropriate, more closely aligning our policies, activities, public messaging, and industry engagement.
- Better understand and address the underlying factors that lead to ransomware payments—including how we can reduce the public’s risk of exposure to ransomware.
- Ensure efforts to fight cyber threats, including ransomware, are responsive to pandemic-inspired malicious cyber activity.
- Continue to share information on the evolving ransomware threat landscape to enhance our collective understanding of, and responses to, ransomware activity.

We stand united in our commitment to prevent, discourage and counter the threat of ransomware. We reiterate our determination to work together to ensure our response is commensurate to the gravity of this threat.

SIGNATORIES

The Hon Karen Andrews, Minister for Home Affairs (Australia)

The Hon Kris Faafoi, Minister of Justice, Minister for Broadcasting and Media, and Minister of Immigration (New Zealand)

The Hon Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness (Canada)

The Hon Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security (United States)

Rt Hon Priti Patel, Secretary of State for the Home Department (United Kingdom)

7 / 8 April 2021