

2 environmentalists who were targeted by a hacking network say the public is the real victim

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Two environmentalists told a federal judge Thursday that the public was the real victim of a global computer hacking campaign that targeted

those fighting big oil companies to get the truth out about global warming.

A [climate scientist](#) and the director of a fund that creates initiatives to address [climate](#) change spoke at the sentencing of an Israeli man who prosecutors said enabled the hacking of thousands of individuals and entities worldwide.

Aviram Azari, 52, of Kiryat Yam, Israel, was sentenced to six years and eight months in prison for his role in a global computer-hacking network that authorities say targeted environmentalists, companies and individuals.

"I was the target, but the public at large was the intended victim," said Peter Frumhoff, director of science and policy and chief scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

"It is our job to tell the world the truth about a world on fire" and who "lit the flame," said Lee Wasserman, director of the Rockefeller Family Fund.

In a release, prosecutors said Azari owned an Israeli intelligence firm from November 2014 to September 2019, earning \$4.8 million after clients hired him to manage "projects" that were really hacking campaigns targeting climate change activists, individuals and [financial firms](#), among others.

Some hacked documents were leaked to journalists, resulting in articles related to investigations by attorneys general in New York and Massachusetts over what Exxon Mobile Corp. knew about climate change and potential misstatements the company made regarding what it knew about the threat, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors said the theft of identities and [personal data](#) from victims resulted in some of them describing a "psychological assault" that left them with "anxiety, paranoia, depression, sleeplessness and fear" and the sense that their personal safety was in jeopardy.

Wasserman said he was "appalled and shaken" by the invasion into his personal and professional life.

"I found myself whispering in my own home," he said.

"It was unnerving," said Frumhoff, who also teaches at Harvard University.

He said the online invasion had a "completely detrimental, chilling effect on our work."

Azari was sentenced after pleading guilty to conspiracy to commit computer hacking, wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. He has been detained since his September 2019 arrest when he traveled to the U.S. from abroad.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Juliana Murray told the judge that Azari's victims, including those working for public interest groups and [climate change](#) advocates, were "carefully chosen" to interrupt their work.

When he spoke, Azari apologized to his victims, saying he was accepting full responsibility for his crimes and promising not to "repeat this ever again."

Frumhoff said he hoped the investigation continues so that prosecutors can expose who paid Azari "to carry out these attacks."

After he was sentenced, Azari was given a chance to speak again and

said that he listened as victims spoke at the proceeding.

He predicted "there will come a day" when he would be able to speak more about his crimes. Until then, he added, he asked for the forgiveness of his victims.

"You don't know everything," he said.

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