

Start date: 11/05/06

**[Action title]**

**Take action! Urge Microsoft not to assist human rights abuses**

**[Extract]**

Internet companies have an invaluable role to play in the realization of freedom of expression and information. But in China and elsewhere, Microsoft is instead aiding repression, censorship, and violation of fundamental freedoms.

**[Action text]**

Internet companies have an invaluable role to play in the realization of freedom of expression and information. But in China and elsewhere, Microsoft is instead aiding repression, censorship, and violation of fundamental freedoms.

Microsoft has signed the “Public Pledge of Self-Regulation” for the China Internet Industry [link to <http://www.isc.org.cn/20020417/ca102762.htm>], agreeing to remove any information considered by the Chinese government to be harmful, or which may disrupt social stability, from websites that they host. In accordance with this pledge, in January 2006 Microsoft allegedly cooperated with Chinese authorities to shut down the controversial blog of Zhao Jing, a Beijing-based researcher for the *New York Times*, who had posted articles critical of a management shakedown at Beijing News.

Furthermore Microsoft have committed to “inspect and monitor information on domestic and foreign websites when it provides access to those sites and refuse access to those websites that disseminate harmful information.” As with Google and Yahoo, Microsoft’s search engine MSN blocks searches under certain key words, including “democracy”, “freedom”, “human rights”, “Falun Gong”, and “demonstration”, among others. Users of the product Microsoft Spaces are also prohibited from using these and other words on the weblogs they create.

As a result, websites and webpages dealing with human rights, including many of those of Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, are inaccessible to internet users in China. As a result, Microsoft users in China are denied the ability to access the full range of information available internationally on human rights topics, including via websites and webpages of Amnesty International and other human rights organizations.

Appearing this year before the US Congress, Microsoft made a number of commitments to improve the notification they make when they remove content or access – however these commitments only make the systems of repression more transparent, doing nothing to actually decrease censorship.

**[Call to action]**

Take action! Urge Microsoft to stop assisting human rights abuses – in China and around the world.

**[Text box]**

These examples from China are only the latest examples of Microsoft’s assistance to Government human rights abuse. In 2004, Microsoft released confidential information about nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu [male] without his knowledge or consent to the Israeli authorities. A few months previously Vanunu had completed an 18-year prison sentence for exposing information relating to Israel’s nuclear capabilities in the UK-based newspaper *Sunday Times*. Information handed over by Microsoft was initially used to prosecute Vanunu for his contacts with foreign media, in violation of the ban on contacting foreigners imposed on Vanunu by the Israeli authorities. These restrictions, which are themselves a violation of human rights, have just been extended for a further year. Though the judge in the ongoing Vanunu trial has now agreed not to use the information supplied by Microsoft, the information is in the hands of the Israeli authorities and could be used to continue to restrict his freedom and harass him further.

**[Sample letter]**

Dear Mr. Gates:

I am alarmed that in the pursuit of new and lucrative markets, your company is contributing to human rights violations, in particular abuses to freedom of expression and information. This issue is especially evident in China, where Microsoft has signed the government's controversial Public Pledge of self-discipline for the China Internet Industry, which has led your company to block searches under certain key words, including "democracy", "freedom", "human rights", Falun Gong", and "demonstration", among others. As a result, websites and webpages dealing with human rights, including many of those of Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, are inaccessible to internet users in China. I was extremely disturbed by reports that Microsoft cooperated with Chinese authorities to shut down the controversial blog of Zhao Jing, a Beijing-based researcher for the New York Times, who had posted articles critical of a management shakedown at Beijing News.

Though I acknowledge the new policy recently adopted by Microsoft purportedly to address some of these issues, I remain deeply distressed by your company's evident willingness to support censorship. The fact that the company acts in compliance with restrictive domestic law does not exempt it from its international human rights responsibilities if complying with such request contributes to human rights violations.

Internet companies have an invaluable role to play in the realization of freedom of expression and information – it shocks me that Microsoft would compromise this goal in pursuit of profit. Therefore I urge Microsoft to:

- Guarantee the anonymity of its users.
- Conduct its Internet business in China, and everywhere it operates, in a manner that respects human rights, abides by international human rights standards and avoids complicity in human rights violations.
- Develop an explicit human rights policy, ensuring that it complies with the UN Norms for Business ensuring its policy does not unconditionally allow censorship of the internet but, on the contrary, challenges requests that are a violation of international human rights standards. In this light, make clear to the Chinese authorities as well as to the global community, that Microsoft is not willing to assist Governments in implementing their systems of internet censorship, or to provide information directed at restricting freedom of expression.
- Put pressure on the Chinese government to:
  - 1) Remove blockages on websites that deal with democracy, human rights, freedom, or that peacefully articulate opinions on religion or politics;
  - 2) Stop the filtering of key words on the Chinese internet, including words such as human rights, democracy, freedom and Falun Gong;
  - 3) Ensure the Chinese public have uninhibited access to the full range of information available on the web in line with international standards on freedom of expression and freedom of information.

Thank you for your consideration of these demands.

Sincerely,

**[Target contact details]**

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**[Special instructions]**

If you are a MSN customer, visit their support webpage at: <http://support.msn.com/>  
Click on MSN Search or MSN Spaces Abuses to send them a complaint about their active censorship of these products.

**[Related documents]**

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGASA170072002>

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/business/resources.html>]\*\*\*\*\*