

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
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China: Amnesty International website blocked again

Chinese authorities should immediately re-establish access to the organization's website, Amnesty International said today.

Amnesty International has discovered that its main website, www.amnesty.org, is once again blocked inside mainland China. Other sites recently blocked include the popular blog portal Bullog.

"We fear the re-blocking of Amnesty International's website indicates a widening crackdown, particularly as 2009 will see a number of important commemorations," said Roseann Rife, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Asia Pacific Programme.

This year will see many notable anniversaries in China, including the 50th anniversary of the 1959 uprising in Tibet, the 30th anniversary of the "Democracy Wall" movement, and the 20th anniversary of the crackdown on the 1989 pro-democracy Tiananmen protests, all of which could inspire protests and trigger government crackdowns.

Chinese authorities unblocked Amnesty International's website shortly before the 2008 Beijing Olympics along with the websites of a number of other human rights organizations and media outlets, including the BBC Chinese website. At the time, Amnesty International welcomed the move and expressed hope that this signalled a more open attitude toward human rights.

Chinese authorities recently announced an effort to clean up "vulgar" internet content and targeted many sites including MSN, Baidu and Google. State media reported on 11 January that since 8 January, the authorities had closed down 91 websites.

"These retreats on human rights are unacceptable, especially now as China is preparing to release its first ever Human Rights Action Plan," said Roseann Rife.

On 4 November 2008, the State Council Information Office announced the drafting of a two-year human rights action plan, to cover areas such as governance, democracy, rule of law, the rights of women, children and ethnic minorities, and including provisions for human rights education. On 30 December, Wang Chen, Minister of the State Council Information Office, revealed that the action plan would be released in early 2009.

Despite this, authorities have targeted websites and blogs that reprint and collect signatures for Charter 08, a petition signed by many well-known academics and human rights activists that proposes a blueprint for fundamental legal and political reform in China. Recently Amnesty International called for the immediate release of Liu Xiaobo, a signatory of Charter 08 who is currently under "residential surveillance".