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Google challenges China to end censorship

The Chinese government should remove restrictions on the internet following Google's decision to stop censoring internet search results in China and direct all traffic from its servers there to Hong Kong, Amnesty International said today.

"By acknowledging that their corporate policies were incompatible with the self-censorship required to operate inside China, Google has challenged the Chinese authorities to respect the principle of freedom of expression provided for in the Chinese Constitution" said Roseann Rife, Asia-Pacific Deputy Programme Director at Amnesty International.

By taking this step, Google acknowledged yesterday that the Chinese authorities could now choose to block access to google.com.hk in China.

Chinese users who are critical of the decision argue that Google was one of the more unfettered sources.

"Chinese users who hoped Google would not leave China and are expressing dismay at this decision should in turn ask their own government how and why the internet is censored in China," said Roseann Rife.

Except for a brief period between July and December 2008, Amnesty International's own website, amnesty.org is blocked in China.

In response to Google's announcement, Chinese authorities accused Google of the "politicization of commercial issues".

"Chinese authorities are themselves politicizing the internet by blocking certain search terms and websites," said Roseann Rife. "When a government limits open discussion and dissemination of ideas on the internet, as the Chinese authorities regularly do, they are already imposing their own political agenda and setting the limits of the debate."

Amnesty International has documented many recent cases, including Liu Xiaobo and Tan Zuoren, where the authorities have silenced human rights defenders through imprisonment for disseminating information and writings through the internet.

The organization has previously urged internet companies such as Yahoo!, Google and Microsoft to commit to honouring the freedom of expression provisions in the Chinese Constitution and to be transparent about the filtering processes used in China and the agreements between the companies and the Chinese government with implications for censorship and the suppression of dissent.