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China: IOC caves in to China's demands on internet censorship

"The International Olympic Committee and the Organizing Committee of the Beijing Olympic Games should fulfil their commitment to 'full media freedom' and provide immediate uncensored internet access at Olympic media venues. Censorship of the internet at the Games is compromising fundamental human rights and betraying the Olympic values," said Mark Allison, East Asia researcher for Amnesty International.

The organisation was reacting to statements by Kevin Gosper, International Olympic Committee (IOC) press commission chair, saying "I regret that it now appears BOCOG has announced that there will be limitations on website access during Games time (...). I also now understand that some IOC officials negotiated with the Chinese that some sensitive sites would be blocked on the basis they were not considered Games related."

Foreign journalists working from the Olympics press centre in Beijing are unable to access the Amnesty International website. A number of other websites are also reported to have been blocked.

The IOC has on many occasions highlighted the loosening of restrictions on foreign media in China as an example of the promised improvement in human rights by the Chinese authorities through the hosting of the Olympics. On 1 April, Kevin Gosper said that the continued blocking of some websites would "reflect very poorly" on the hosts. On 17 July Jacques Rogge, IOC President, said "there will be no censorship of the internet."

"This blatant media censorship adds one more broken promise that undermines the claim that the Games would help improve human rights in China," said Mark Allison.

On Monday 29 July, Amnesty International published the report "Olympic Countdown: Broken Promises" which evaluates the performance of the Chinese authorities in four areas related to the core values of the Olympics: persecution of human rights activists, detention without trial, censorship and the death penalty. They all relate to the 'core values' of 'human dignity' and 'respect for universal fundamental ethical principles' in the Olympic Charter. The new report showed there has been little progress towards fulfilling the Chinese authorities' promise to improve human rights, but rather continued deterioration in key areas.