



INTERNET CENSORSHIP FACT SHEET

US technology companies aiding repression in China and beyond

Amnesty International is concerned about US technology companies aiding the repression of freedom to information and expression in China, and the implications this may have worldwide.

- In China, individuals can be sentenced to death for publishing information on the Internet considered a “state secret” – the definition of “state secret” can change daily, and can include important public health information (i.e., SARS or HIV/AIDS) or simply controversial opinions. Scores of people have been imprisoned for using the Internet, and, of those arrested, some have died as a result of torture by the police.
- Some companies, including Cisco Systems and Sun Microsystems, have helped to build the infrastructure that makes Internet censorship possible while others, including Yahoo, Microsoft, and Google, are increasingly complying with government demands to actively restrict Chinese users.
- In China the internet is heavily policed. To operate in China, US companies say they must monitor and restrict search results and blogs, and are actively restricting topics such as human rights, political reform, Tiananmen Square and Falun Gong, among others. Yahoo, Microsoft and Google all help to implement China’s draconian system of censorship.
- Yahoo! has sacrificed the privacy of users to facilitate their subsequent imprisonment for peacefully expressing opinions over the Internet. Shi Tao, a Chinese poet and journalist, is serving a ten-year prison sentence in China simply for sending an email to the USA. In a disturbingly similar case, Li Zhi, another Yahoo email customer, was jailed for eight years in 2003, after posting comments that criticized government corruption. Amnesty considers them both Prisoners of Conscience.
- These companies claim that accepting China’s restrictions is unavoidable. Yet these forms of censorship contradict the very principles that these companies were founded upon, and also go against the constitution of the People’s Republic of China and violate Articles 17 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantee privacy and freedom of expression.
- The state machinery of repression is deeply embedded in China’s internet infrastructure. The Chinese Government’s investments in Internet controls appear to be keeping pace with technological developments, and if we permit American companies to continue give in to the Chinese on censorship, the government’s infrastructure for control only becomes more powerful. And other repressive governments around the world are encouraged to further develop their own online censorship based on China’s model.
- At a February 2006 Congressional hearing, Yahoo, Google, Microsoft and Cisco presented formal testimony regarding their role in internet censorship in China. Yahoo stated that it did not know the nature of the Chinese government’s request for information on Shi Tao. But, now a US congressional committee is investigating whether Yahoo intentionally misled Congress, since documents have surfaced indicating Yahoo knew the request on Shi Tao was based on Chinese “state secrets” law, a justification invoked to punish peaceful dissidents.
- New Jersey Representative Chris Smith reintroduced his bill, the Global Online Freedom Act, in January of this year, to prevent censorship and abuse of freedom of expression on the Internet by placing restrictions on US Internet companies operating in countries that censor, prosecute and/or persecute individuals based on the exercise of such freedoms. Companies, thus far, have refused to support the bill. Amnesty is following it carefully and may call on you to take action on this or other legislation in the near future.
- **The message that Chinese people are receiving very clearly is that America’s most prominent IT companies are partners in repression, and that they find it acceptable.** This is a huge blow for human rights, and for the perception of American values abroad. These companies must conduct their Internet business in China, as elsewhere, in a manner that respects human rights, abides by international human rights standards and avoids complicity in human rights violations.

Learn more and find out how you can take action by joining the Corporate Action Network (CAN).

Visit <http://www.amnestyusa.org/business> or e-mail corpaction@aiusa.org

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Computers are seized. Chat rooms monitored. Blogs deleted. Websites blocked. Search engines restricted. People are imprisoned for simply posting and sharing information.

The Internet is a new frontier in the struggle for human rights. Governments – with the help of some of the biggest IT companies in the world – are cracking down on freedom of expression.

Amnesty International is launching a campaign to show that online or offline, the human voice and human rights are impossible to repress.

Be irrepressible.

Irrepressible: Adj. 1) Impossible to repress or control

Sign our pledge on Internet freedom to call on all governments and companies to ensure the Internet is a force for political freedom, not repression.

Undermine censorship by publishing *irrepressible* fragments of censored material on your own site. The more people take part, the more we can defeat unwarranted censorship and create an unstoppable network of protest.

Send a message to the Chinese authorities and Yahoo! calling for the release of Shi Tao, a journalist serving 10 years in prison just for sending an email to a pro-democracy website.

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irrepressible.info

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