

## Web Action WA 12/06; AI Index POL 30/015/2006

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*Start date: 11/05/06*

### [Action title]

**Google does not censor: take action to defend freedom of information**

### [Extract 1]

Google is aiding the repression of freedom of information and expression in China. Under threat is the right to freedom of information and the free flow of ideas across borders, guaranteed by international human rights law.

### [Extract 2]

Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, and others are aiding the repression of freedom of information and expression in China. Under threat is the right to freedom of information and the free flow of ideas across borders, guaranteed by international human rights law.

### [Action text]

Google is aiding the repression of freedom of information and expression in China.

Early in 2006 Google launched a self-censoring Chinese search engine, google.cn. As with Microsoft and Yahoo, the Chinese version of Google (called "Gu Ge" in Chinese) affects Chinese users by restricting search results for topics such as "human rights", "political reform", "Tiananmen Square" and "Falun Gong", among others.

Google's chief executive has defended Google's decision to cooperate with censors, claiming that accepting China's restrictions was unavoidable. Yet these forms of censorship seem to contradict the very principles that Google was founded upon, and its own unofficial motto of "Don't be evil." Until January 2006, Google's Support Centre claimed that it "does not censor results for any search term", but removed this claim after reaching its deal with China.

These restrictions also go against the constitution of the People's Republic of China, which guarantees freedom of expression. Furthermore, China has signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of information and the free flow of ideas across borders.

Google's inadequate policy and practices regarding the protection of human rights in the context of censorship is not just a concern in China, but around the world, as Google expands into other markets with equally complex human rights environments

### [Sample letter]

Dear Mr. Schmidt:

I am alarmed that in the pursuit of new and lucrative markets, your company is contributing to abuses of freedom of expression and information. This issue is especially evident in China, where Google has

agreed to restrict search results for topics including “human rights”, “political reform”, “Tiananmen Square” and “Falun Gong”, thus denying users of google.cn the ability to access the full range of information available internationally on human rights topics.

Though I acknowledge the policies recently adopted by Google purportedly to address some of these issues, the company still restricts search results in its local search engine and I remain deeply distressed by this 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 Google would compromise this goal in pursuit of profit. Therefore I urge Google to:

- 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.

- Revise its policy to ensure the company does not unconditionally assist censorship of the internet but, on the contrary, challenges requests that are a violation of international human rights standards.

- 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 democracy, human rights, 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.

- Develop an explicit human rights policy, ensuring that it complies with the UN Norms for Business.

Thank you for your consideration of these demands.

Sincerely,

**[Target address]**

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**[Special instructions]**

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