

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
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Lawyers' Rights Group Condemns Zoom for Failure to Respect Freedom of Expression

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 17, 2020 - Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) today [issued a letter](#) to Zoom Communications Inc. condemning Zoom's recent suspension of the accounts of human rights activists in China and calling on Zoom to fulfill its responsibilities under international law to guarantee freedom of expression to users of its services.

In early June 2020, Zoom suspended the accounts of human rights activists in the United States (US) and Hong Kong in response to a request from the government of China. The government claimed that the activists' activities – hosting meetings to commemorate the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre – were illegal in China.

Zoom claimed that suspension of the accounts was necessary to comply with local laws. No local laws were cited by Zoom, and China's Constitution upholds freedom of expression.

Zoom has since reinstated the accounts of US- and Hong Kong-based users and says it will, in future, “not allow requests from the Chinese government to impact anyone outside of mainland China.” However, Zoom plans to develop technology to remove or block participants based on geography so as to enable Zoom to comply with requests from local authorities when those authorities deem an activity the platform to be illegal within their country.

“Zoom intends to continue a policy that has the effect of curtailing the rights to privacy and freedoms of expression, association, and assembly guaranteed by the international human rights law,” says the letter. LRWC raised serious concerns about Zoom's failure to comply with the company's international legal responsibilities to uphold the rights to freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

LRWC's letter draws on multiple international legal instruments to outline the clear responsibility of all businesses to respect human rights. It holds that Zoom's actions and plans are in breach of its responsibility to respect rights.

“Zoom's callous acquiescence to the request of the government of China has the effect of censoring human rights defenders in China,” said Joey Doyle, a director of LRWC and author of the letter. “All international businesses, including Zoom, must ensure that all their users can enjoy the rights and freedoms afforded to them under international law. This is particularly important in this present world where most communication takes place over online platforms such as Zoom,” he added.

LRWC called upon Zoom to ensure that online communications of Zoom users are never again suspended or disrupted in violation of international human rights law;. LRWC asked Zoom to develop a clear policy for how Zoom will, in the future, fulfil its responsibility to respect human rights.

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Full letter available at: www.lrwc.org/lawyers-rights-group-calls-on-zoom-to-respect-freedom-of-expression-letter

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) is a committee of lawyers and other human rights defenders who promote international human rights law, the rule of law, the integrity of legal systems, and advocacy rights globally, through advocacy, education and legal research. LRWC has Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council.