

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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February 8, 2010

Michel de Rosen
Chief Executive Officer
Eutelsat Corporation

Dear Mr. de Rosen,

We understand that Eutelsat has suspended the Persian television services of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Voice of America (VOA) from one of its Hot Bird satellites. This suspension apparently followed successful jamming operations against both these news networks by the government of Iran.

According to press reports, the main reason for this suspension was to avoid disruption caused by the Iranian government's jamming operation to the transmissions of other, non-political, television networks on the same satellite. At the same time Eutelsat is apparently continuing to transmit Iranian government funded new networks such as Press TV and Al-Alam on Hot Bird.

We are concerned that Eutelsat's actions create a perception that the company has voluntarily censored programming and impeded the free flow of information.

Could you please clarify whether Eutelsat has indeed suspended the BBC and VOA broadcasts? If so, could you please detail the justification and the circumstances for this measure (including the dates and planned period of suspension)? For example, were you asked by the Iranian government to do this or was this the sole decision of Eutelsat?

It is our understanding that the decision to suspend these broadcasts came after the Iranian government succeeded in jamming them following the disputed presidential election in June 2009 and ensuing protests. Can you confirm that these broadcasts had been jammed and detail what steps you took to circumvent such jamming? Press reports suggest that the company did try to circumvent those efforts and we would welcome a detailed explanation on your efforts to circumvent or any other measures to address Iranian jamming.

We also note that these efforts by the government of Iran are part of a larger effort to silence independent media. The government has also arrested and held several Iranian and foreign journalists in

incommunicado detention, refused to extend visas to visiting journalists, expelled several foreign journalists, including the BBC correspondent, closed and harassed several national independent newspapers, and restricted websites, mobile telephone use, internet access and social networking forums. The situation is of such concern that the US Congress passed a law in October 2009 that mandates a report detailing the role of non-US companies in aiding Iranian censorship or surveillance.

Human Rights Watch believes that broadcast, online, and other similar media can be powerful tools in support of human rights because they help citizens to seek and receive information that will allow them to hold their governments and other institutions accountable. In this context, we believe that companies involved with these mediums should have rigorous policies to safeguard freedom of expression. For example, we have developed and are board members of the Global Network Initiative (GNI), an effort started by Google, Microsoft, Yahoo!, human rights groups, academics, and socially-responsible investors to safeguard free expression and user privacy for the internet and telecommunications industries. Given our concerns, we would welcome information about policies and procedures Eutelsat has to safeguard freedom of expression generally and how it would apply them to Iran or elsewhere. In the case of Iran, we also urge Eutelsat, to resist censorship so that Iranians can access alternatives to the government-controlled media.

We welcome your answers regarding these issues and the opportunity to discuss them with you further.

Sincerely,

Sarah Leah Whitson
Director
Middle East & North Africa division

Arvind Ganesan
Director
Business & Human Rights