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Open letter: Blizzard's commitment to freedom of expression

Dear Mr. Kotick,

We are writing to you in light of the recent reports of the [suspension and penalization of a Hearthstone player](#) for expressing support for the protesters in Hong Kong. We ask you to reverse the penalties and clarify Blizzard's policies and practices that affect your users' right to freedom of expression and to clarify how your policies were implemented in this incident.

Access Now is a global organization working to defend and extend the rights of users at risk. We promote the right to freely express oneself, a human right enshrined in international law. In the digital age, the providers and platforms that deliver access to networks, applications, and services enable realization of free expression and other human rights. With this power, these companies retain a particular responsibility to respect and promote our rights.

Blizzard is no exception. As a major online gaming and user communications platform, Blizzard has a duty to respect human rights in its operations. As the U.N.'s Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights has recently reiterated, in reference to its [call to the Hong Kong Government](#), it is crucial to protect the right to freedom of expression and "ensure that the right of those who are expressing their views peacefully are respected and protected."

However, Blizzard's recent actions indicate inadequate policies and practices in this area, showing a lack of respect for freedom of expression. According to [statements made on the Hearthstone blog](#), the player was penalized for violating Hearthstone Competition Rules set by Blizzard. The two stream casters interviewing the player saw their contracts terminated. Hearthstone Competition Rules prohibit "engaging in any act that, in Blizzard's sole discretion, brings [the player] into public disrepute, offends a portion or group of the public, or otherwise damages Blizzard's image." Such wide discretion facilitates arbitrary implementation of what appear to be intentionally vague policies. By penalizing a player for speaking up in support of protesters exercising their right to freedom of expression as well as assembly and association, Blizzard demonstrates a lack of respect for the human rights of its users.

In support of the right to freedom of expression, we urge you to **reverse the penalties** Blizzard imposed on the player and stream casters, and to provide restitution. In addition, and in the understanding that our civil society organization and others support your ongoing efforts to meet your corporate responsibility, we ask you to clarify Blizzard's policies,

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including how Blizzard determines when and whether to exercise its discretion. Please answer these questions:

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- **Does Blizzard commit to respect the freedom of expression of its stakeholders, including players and stream casters?**
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- **What oversight does Blizzard’s leadership exercise over how the company’s policies and practices impact players’ freedom of expression and other human rights?**
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- **Who is responsible for interpreting and enforcing the Competition Rules?**
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- **What procedures do Blizzard employees follow in determining whether its rules have been violated?**
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- **What channels are available to stakeholders, including players, to appeal determinations and comment on the Competition Rules?**
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We look forward to receiving your response, and we are glad to speak with you in furtherance of your efforts to become a leader of the gaming sector in respecting human rights.

Sincerely,

Peter Micek
General Counsel, Access Now