

June 21, 2022

Dan Kurzius
Co-Founder
Atlanta, GA

Eric Muntz
Chief Technology Officer
Atlanta, GA

Kate Lee
Chief Communications Officer
Atlanta, GA

Kieran Helbling
Director of Customer Operations
Atlanta, GA

Malinda Sandman
Senior Director of Marketing,
Campaign Performance
Atlanta, GA

Michelle Taite
Chief Marketing Officer
Oakland, CA

Dear Mr. Kurzius, Mr. Muntz, Ms. Lee, Mr. Helbling, Ms. Sandman, and Ms. Taite,

[Access Now](#), an international digital rights organization with a mission to defend and extend the rights of users at risk around the world, and [Teplitsa. Technologies for Social Good](#) (Teplitsa), an independent educational and capacity building project that aims to strengthen Russian anti-war civil society with the smart use of technology, are writing to you to urge Mailchimp to reconnect Russian human rights organizations, charities, and independent media to your services.

Access Now and Teplitsa deplore Russia's invasion of Ukraine, condemn in the strongest possible terms the grave violations committed by Russian forces there, and appreciate efforts by the United States and other governments to respond with strong and targeted measures.

However, we have also called on [U.S.](#) and [U.K.](#) governments and [companies](#) to ensure that broad restrictions affecting online services and internet access do not further isolate embattled pro-democracy and anti-war activists, and impede the ability of NGOs, human

rights groups, journalists, and attorneys inside and outside of Russia to provide critical information to citizens about the current state of affairs in Ukraine and their rights to protest and dissent.

As a result of our advocacy, the U.S. government [issued *General License 25.A*](#) to exempt internet communications services, and related software, hardware, or technologies, from U.S. sanctions against Russia, [stating](#) that such services “are not the target of [U.S. government] efforts, and U.S. and Western companies can continue to operate in these sectors in Russia.” The Treasury Department then followed with [General License 27](#) exempting transactions supporting [NGOs and democracy advocates](#). The U.K. government responded with [similar exemptions](#).

Despite these developments, your company took measures that interfere with Russian civil society and anti-war movements' ability to organize in opposition to the war, report openly and honestly on events in Russia, and access information about what is happening in Ukraine and abroad.

Based on the reports we received from our civil society partners, on March 15, 2022, following a [statement](#) from Mailchimp's owner company, Intuit, Mailchimp blocked all customer accounts in Russia, allegedly to signal your support for the people of Ukraine. Moreover, Mailchimp suspended Russian customers' accounts without providing the opportunity to retrieve the data stored on those accounts. Among those blocked by Mailchimp are NGOs and independent media vital to defending human rights in Russia and opposing the war in Ukraine, including:

- [Crew against Torture](#) (formerly Committee against Torture), a prominent human rights group which for the past 22 years has investigated torture and extrajudicial killings in Russian prisons. Their lawyers risk their lives daily to defend victims, for which the Russian government has [labeled](#) the organization a “[foreign agent](#)” several times.
- [Declarator](#), a project that runs a database used to identify and target Russian officials for sanctions over corruption and the invasion of Ukraine.
- [GOLOS](#), an election monitoring movement, established in 2000, that protects the electoral rights of citizens and fosters civil society. Their dedicated work has earned them an [OSCE award](#) for defending democracy and a [place on the “foreign agent” registry](#).
- [Humanitarian Aid Fund](#), a charity fund that helps individuals with addiction and HIV to get medical and social support. They were declared a “foreign agent” in 2020.
- [Holod](#), an independent media organization, famous for its in-depth publications, podcasts, and videos delving into Russian society and politics. It has become one of the leading publications to uncover the horrors of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Kholod was declared foreign agent in Russia and their website is [blocked](#).
- [OVD-Info](#), an independent human rights media project that provides legal advice and assistance to those persecuted for exercising their right to freedom of assembly and other fundamental human rights. It is now at the forefront of defending Russians who are protesting the war in Ukraine. They have been [declared](#) a “foreign agent” and [blocked](#) by the Russian government.

- [Territory of Respite](#), a charity that helps homeless individuals and those at risk of homelessness.
- [Center for Equal Opportunities “Step Up.”](#) a charity that works with residents and graduates of correctional orphanages and psychoneurological institutions to help every child receive an education and develop as an individual.

The work and existence of these and other independent NGOs and news media depends on receiving regular donations from their supporters. However, due to Mastercard, Visa, American Express, PayPal, and Apple Pay discontinuing their services in Russia and blocking cross-border transactions between Russia and the outside world, these organizations have been cut off from their sources of income, and are struggling to survive. And as Mailchimp blocked their accounts, these organizations have now also lost access to their contacts and are unable to carry out crowdfunding campaigns or reach their audiences through newsletters.

In response to the outcry by the international organizations, Russian civil society, and inquiries by the Western media, a Mailchimp spokesperson issued a [statement](#) to CNN saying that the company recognizes “that many individuals and organizations within Russia oppose the war and share [Mailchimp’s] values, including some of [Mailchimp’s] customers affected by this policy.” Your company representative added that Mailchimp now has a “process for evaluating and reinstating select accounts, including independent news organizations, civil rights, and similar groups.” Despite this statement, almost two months later, Mailchimp has yet to implement this policy and reinstate any of our partners’ accounts.

Thus, we are asking Mailchimp to live up to your public statements to make exceptions for Russian civil society actors, including journalists, independent media, human rights defenders, charity organizations, and activists and allow them to keep their Mailchimp accounts. In fact, another U.S. tech company, Namecheap, has already [taken steps](#) to enforce a similar policy. Mailchimp should not fall behind its peers.

At the very least, we are asking you to grant these actors access to their databases of contacts and allow them to download the necessary data that will allow them to continue their existence.

Thank you for your consideration of these important points. We have chosen to reach out to you privately first and would appreciate a response that we can publish along with this letter by June 28. We are available to discuss and assist with any further efforts along these lines, as appropriate. Feel free to get in touch with us by emailing Natalia Krapiva, Tech Legal Counsel at Access Now at natalia@accessnow.org.

Sincerely,

Access Now and Teplitza