

November 13, 2012

Marissa Mayer, CEO
Yahoo!, Inc.
701 First Avenue
Sunnyvale, CA 94089

Cc: Patrick Robinson
Director, Business and Human Rights Program

Dear Ms. Mayer:

As privacy, security, and human rights advocates and organizations from around the world, we are writing to you to express our deep concern with Yahoo!'s continued delay in supporting encrypted connections to its vital communications services. As individuals who engage with at-risk communities targeted for surveillance and censorship, we see on a daily basis how this negligence endangers human rights activists who fight in some of the most repressive environments to protect the basic freedoms that we take for granted. Five years ago, in response to serious concerns about Yahoo!'s human rights record, Yahoo! founder and then-CEO Jerry Yang promised to the US Congress:

Yahoo! is a company committed to doing the right thing and to protecting human rights globally. We are a company founded on openness, the exchange of information and user trust, and we believe deeply in free expression and privacy.

We want to see Yahoo! live up to those commitments in the implementation of its services, and we regard the use of transport encryption as a fundamental security requirement for e-mail. Yahoo's principal direct competitors in the web-based e-mail market, Microsoft and Google, have implemented HTTPS by default to protect their users against hacking and spying. This leaves Yahoo! Mail as the only major web-based e-mail service that continues to rely on insecure connections.

Over the last several years, Yahoo! has repeatedly been urged by security experts to adopt HTTPS, but has taken no visible steps to do so. Unfortunately, this delay puts your users at risk, which is particularly disturbing since Yahoo! Mail is widely used in many of the world's most politically repressive states. There have been frequent reports of political activists and government critics being shown copies of their email messages as evidence during interrogation sessions, underscoring the importance of providing basic measures to protect the privacy of e-mail. Where online communications platforms are essential channels for the the free flow of information and outlets for expression, offering HTTPS by default is a critical step that Yahoo! must take to blunt some of the effects of mass surveillance and censorship.

A 2009 open letter to Google signed by 37 prominent computer security and privacy experts, urging the use of HTTPS security on services that process personal information, emphasized that HTTPS is “industry standard” security for protecting personal information on web services; these experts added that research shows “most users have no idea of the data interception risks that they face when using public wireless networks [...] few users notice the presence or absence of HTTPS encryption and [users] fail to take appropriate precautions when HTTPS is not used.” All the e-mail and social network providers criticized in this letter have since made HTTPS available or mandatory on their sites—except Yahoo!.

Some of us have already been compelled to recommend that users avoid Yahoo! Mail because of its continued lack of essential security protections. For example, a recent video by the prominent security training organization Tactical Technology Collective, with the title “Hey Yahoo! HTTPS my Emails!” <<https://onorobot.org/yahoo/email/security/https>>, warns the public to select only web mail services that can be accessed via HTTPS. In an age of pervasive, inexpensive surveillance, we believe this is reasonable and appropriate advice.

We urge you to act as quickly as possible to act on this commitment to user trust and security by taking the long overdue step of deploying HTTPS for all Yahoo! communications services.

Sincerely,

ASL19

Renata Avila *Human rights lawyer, Guatemala*

Gustaf Björkstén *Access*

Chris Conley *American Civil Liberties Union of California*

Cyber Arabs / IWPR

Ot van Daalen *Bits of Freedom*

Adam Fisk *Brave New Software Project*

Front Line Defenders

Global Voices Advocacy

Allen Gunn *Aspiration*

Gus Hosein *Privacy International*

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran

Mallory Knodel *May First/People Link*

Stefan Marsiske *Hungarian Autonomous Center for Knowledge*

Smári McCarthy *International Modern Media Institute*

Niels ten Oever *Internet Protection Lab*

padeluum *Privacy activist; invited expert member of German Parliamentary Internet commission*

Reporter Ohne Grenzen (Germany)

Reporters Without Borders (United States)

Eleanor Saitta *OpenITP*

Seth Schoen *Electronic Frontier Foundation*

Tactical Technology Collective

Tibet Action Institute

Rena Tangens *FoeBuD e.V. / BigBrotherAwards Germany*

United for Iran

Leon Willems *Free Press Unlimited*