



Personal Statement

Prepared by *McMaster Stands with Hong Kong* for the *Student Representative Assembly*
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Content Warning: genocide, concentration camp in East Turkestan

Thank you for giving me the time to speak. I wanted to speak in person, but I do not feel safe showing my face and revealing my name in Canada due to safety reasons.

First, Let me introduce myself. I am a Hong Kong international student and a member of McMaster Stands With HK, a public project sponsored by OPIRG. We are a community which raises awareness about the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement at Mac, and we are also strong advocates for human rights and democracy in Hong Kong. I am here to speak to you today regarding issues surrounding the use of zoom at McMaster and how that affects my own safety and students like me.

The current situation in Hong Kong is getting increasingly severe as it pertains to human rights violations and all kinds of oppression. The new national security law punishes those who commit the act of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign or external forces. These are ambiguous terms with no concrete meanings, which mean Any one could be accused of breaking this law by doing any unknown number of things for example chanting “Hong Kong Independence” and showing its image. It not only affects Hong Kong citizens, but according to Article 38 of the national security law, **anyone** outside of Hong Kong and not from Hong Kong that speaks against or expresses any negative sentiments about the Chinese government could be violating the law and could be detained upon entering Hong Kong.

Personally, **I do not feel safe**. I’m scared of using zoom as a student at mac and as an activist. I do not know what zoom would do if I discuss something political in class that the chinese government decides is in violation of the national security law. Because the law is ambiguous, I could be found in breach of it for discussing something that I don’t see as being controversial, but that the state does. I am being forced to self-censor when I want to discuss certain views on the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement, especially since people who violate this law could be sentenced up to life in prison.

I am worried about myself, friends, and family, that we may face persecution like what has occurred in the concentration camps in East Turkestan where over a million Uyghurs are detained and forcibly brainwashed. The national security law allows for indefinite, arbitrary detention, as well as extradition to mainland China, where the judicial system is rife with torture. This **could** and **has** happened to people living in Hong Kong, mainland China, and foreigners who are in China who conflict with the Chinese government.

After last October's Lennon Wall incident in front of Mills Library when someone vandalized our display and assaulted some of our members, many McMaster Stands with Hong Kong members do not feel safe because their masks were ripped off and close-up pictures of our faces were taken. We are afraid that, one way or the another, these pictures will end up in the hands of the Chinese government or its security services. At every advocacy event we have done at McMaster, we've all had to wear masks, not only because it is symbolic of the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement, but more seriously because we fear being persecuted by the Chinese government. We have no choice but to try our best to protect everyone's privacy and identities. Under this new law, as of July 1st in Hong Kong all slogans, symbols and chants that are related to the movement have been banned. Our advocacy work, though fully legal in Canada, could now mean life imprisonment when we return to Hong Kong.

This is also why I am very concerned about Zoom, even here in Canada, as there have been many incidents where Zoom has cooperated with the Chinese government. In June, Zoom stopped a virtual memorial of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre and banned the organizers, who were all **located outside of China**, because the Chinese government asked them to do so. This was devastating to see. The 1989 Tiananmen Square protests are notable for how a massive movement of young Chinese students and workers took to the streets to call for political reform in China. The Chinese Communist Party responded by violently silencing them — not only with tanks and gunfire that killed thousands, but also with the ongoing campaign to erase and censor the event from collective memory. It is therefore quite symbolic that Zoom banned the online memorial at the request of the Chinese government. I'm shaken and frustrated that, although Zoom is a U.S. based company, where freedom of speech exists, they still follow what Chinese government says. This prevents students from freely engaging in critical thinking and free expression.

So how does this issue relate to the Mac community? With the outbreak of Covid 19, many post-secondary institutions have started to use zoom, including McMaster University. Zoom has experienced substantial user growth despite the multitude of security issues and censorship problems. Since April, the Student Success Centre, meetings with faculty, and online classes have all used Zoom as their **main platform** of communication, despite the many news

articles about Zoom's surveillance and safety risks. I am shocked and puzzled as to why this is the case. McMaster students already pay for Microsoft 365, which includes Microsoft Teams (the very software you, the SRA, are using right now) which allows for virtual meetings just as Zoom does. The school has had access to Microsoft 365 since 2017. Also, I noticed that McMaster released an article titled, "Zoom video conferencing: Best practices for privacy and security", but this does not nearly sufficiently address the myriad of privacy and security issues surrounding zoom. In fact it does not even highlight this particular concern of censorship. This article does not help me to feel safer and I am disappointed with how McMaster University addressed the concerns surrounding Zoom usage earlier in March.

Although Zoom has apologised for its multiple misleading marketing and security concerns, I do not feel relieved in the slightest. At this point, Zoom continues to use an encryption standard that does not align with the privacy and security concerns that many people have. I continue to be suspicious about Zoom's association with the Chinese government given their continuous lack of transparency. Chinese law legally requires private companies to assist the government with national security operations, including censorship and surveillance of government targeted groups, which include advocates for human rights and democracy in Hong Kong. The AES 256 encryption standard that Zoom currently uses allows the company to decrypt a call at any point. Even with a VPN connection, similar to the VPN that is set up at the University, all of the data is routed through Zoom's servers, therefore rendering any VPN ineffective in protecting privacy. Due to this, Zoom has been banned in Taiwan since April. Many organizations around the world choose not to use the service due to security concerns. Increased surveillance and censorship on Zoom makes me fearful that I may be caught by the Chinese government and accused of separatism or subversion, simply for being a member of McMaster Stands with Hong Kong and speaking out about human rights and democratic reform. This troubles me deeply because I should not need to hide my identity here in Canada. As a McMaster student and an activist, I find Zoom's privacy and censorship issues extremely concerning. Due to my active role in human rights advocacy, I am in likely violation of the National Security Law. Therefore, I call upon the MSU to take action in regards to the concerns of using zoom.