

Companies appeal to China to drop Web filter plan

June 27 2009, By JOE McDONALD , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Global business groups have made an unusual direct appeal to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to scrap an order for personal computer makers to supply controversial Web filtering software, citing security and privacy concerns.

Just days before the deadline to comply with China's order, the letter from 22 chambers of commerce and trade groups representing the world's major technology suppliers adds to mounting pressure on Beijing to halt the plan following a formal protest by Washington.

The order requires PC makers to pre-install or supply "Green Dam" [filtering software](#) with PCs made for sale in [China](#) beginning Wednesday.

"The Green Dam mandate raises significant questions of security, privacy, system reliability, the free flow of information and user choice," said the letter from business groups, which was dated Friday. It appealed to Wen to "reconsider implementing the Green Dam requirements."

Such a direct appeal to Chinese leaders is highly unusual in a system where companies usually avoid commenting publicly on government policy for fear of retaliation.

The letter was signed by leaders of the American, European and Japanese chambers of commerce in China, the U.S. National Association of Manufacturers and trade groups representing the world's major

technology suppliers.

Chinese authorities say the system is needed to block access to violent and obscene material online. But analysts who have reviewed the program say it also contains code to filter out material the government considers politically objectionable.

Top U.S. trade officials have called on Beijing to revoke the order requiring the filtering software, calling it a "serious barrier to trade" and citing security concerns. They said Beijing might have violated its World Trade Organization commitments by failing to give companies adequate advance notice and time to comment.

The conflict reflects the clash between the authoritarian government's efforts to control information and China's high-tech ambitions. China has assembled the world's most extensive system of Internet monitoring and filtering, but the new software system would take the controls to a new level, placing monitoring technology inside the individual's computer.

China is important to PC suppliers both as a major manufacturing site and a fast-growing market. It accounts for up to 80 percent of world production and sales.

The new software also has been criticized by free-speech advocates and some of China's 298 million Internet users.

The Chinese manufacturer of the software has even received death threats. Workers at Jinhui Computer System Engineering Co. have received more than 1,000 harassing phone calls this month, Zhang Chenmin, the general manager of the company, told the official Xinhua News Agency. Zhang was quoted saying Wednesday that one caller had even threatened to kill his wife and child.

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