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October 7, 2019

Dear Mr. Silver:

I write today to express my disgust about the position of the National Basketball Association (NBA) with respect to Hong Kong and the freedom of the Chinese people. Doing business in China is one thing, but for the NBA to kowtow to the demands of one of the world's most brutal regimes in the pursuit of profit is, frankly, revolting. You know better. And the people of this country deserve better.

Not so long ago you said that the NBA is more than just a basketball league. Your comment was, "I think in this day and age, you really do have to stand for something."¹

Let me remind you what the people of Hong Kong are standing for. For five months now, Hong Kong's citizens have been calling for representative government and preservation of their basic liberties. In response, and at the instruction of the Chinese Communist Party, the Government of Hong Kong has engaged in escalating repression. The Government has sought emergency powers and deployed riot police to put down the protests, often violently. Police have employed tear gas, batons, water cannons with dye, pepper spray, and rubber bullets against their own people. Thousands have been hospitalized and arrested. Some may even have paid with their lives.² On the 70th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party earlier this month, the Hong Kong police fired live ammunition at a protestor, further escalating the violence.³

Yet when Daryl Morey, General Manager of the Houston Rockets, tweeted in support of the demonstrators, the NBA swiftly condemned not the violence and repression in Hong Kong, but Morey's show of support for democracy. The League said yesterday that Morey's comments "deeply offended many of our friends and fans in China, which is regrettable."⁴ What is regrettable is the suppression and political violence carried out by the Chinese Communist Party against the good people of Hong Kong.

¹ Ahiza Garcia, "The NBA is not afraid to lead on social justice," CNN Money, 19 February 2018,

<https://money.cnn.com/2018/02/16/news/companies/nba-adam-silver-player-activism/index.html> Accessed 7 October 2019.

² Emma Graham-Harrison, Lily Kuo, Verna Yu, "A battle for the soul of the city: why violence has spiraled in the Hong Kong protests," The Guardian, 6 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/06/a-battle-for-the-soul-of-the-city-why-violence-has-spiralled-in-the-hong-kong-protests> Accessed 7 October 2019; Erin Hale, "Hong Kong authorities deny protester death claims after police raid," The Guardian, 10 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/10/hong-kong-authorities-deny-protester-death-claims-after-police-raid> Accessed 7 October 2019.

³ Shibani Mahtani, Timothy McLaughlin, Casey Quackenbush, Anna Kam, "Hong Kong protester shot as police disperse anti-China demonstrations on National Day," The Washington Post, 1 October 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/clashes-expected-in-hong-kong-as-protesters-try-to-spoil-chinas-70th-anniversary-celebrations/2019/09/30/a54fb004-c396-11e9-b0a6-3d03721b85ef_story.html Accessed 7 October 2019.

⁴ Sopan Deb, Marc Stein, "N.B.A. Executive's Hong Kong Tweet Starts Firestorm in China," The New York Times, 6 October 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/06/sports/daryl-morey-rockets-china.html> Accessed 7 October 2019.

While the NBA silences pro-democracy voices, the Chinese government seems to have outspoken defenders in the League. Joseph Tsai, co-founder of the Chinese conglomerate Alibaba and owner of the Brooklyn Nets, yesterday echoed Chinese Communist Party talking points castigating Morey and calling the Hong Kong demonstrations a “separatist movement.” Never mind that the people of Hong Kong are themselves Chinese and are seeking nothing more than basic liberties Beijing has promised them. Tsai went on to say said “the hurt that this incident has caused will take a long time to repair.”⁵

Hurt? Here’s what hurt is: the Chinese Communist Party brutally suppressing free speech, jailing political dissidents, torturing its own people, and interning perhaps millions of religious minorities in concentration camps.

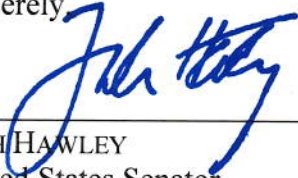
And as the people of Hong Kong risk their lives for freedom, the NBA offers apologies ... to the Chinese regime.

That was wrong. Reconsider.

Remember the democratic tradition of this nation in which your organization is headquartered, and where twenty-nine of your member teams are based. Remember that some things are more important than money. Remember your responsibility. You may not think of your League as an American undertaking, but whatever you think, what you say and do represents America to the world. And for an American organization to help the most brutal of regimes silence dissent in pursuit of profit is appalling.

The NBA and its owners should reverse course immediately, apologize to Mr. Morey, and cancel all exhibition games in China pending a peaceful resolution to the crisis in Hong Kong.

Sincerely,



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⁵ Ibid.

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