January 15, 2019

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer

Kent Walker
Senior Vice President, Global Affairs
Google LLC

Dear Mr. Pichai and Mr. Walker,

We are a coalition of organizations dedicated to protecting civil rights and liberties and safeguarding communities. We are encouraged by the initial steps Google has taken to recognize the harms of invasive surveillance technologies and artificial intelligence. As Mr. Pichai has said, the tech industry has a responsibility to think about the consequences of its technology, it “just can’t build it and then fix it.” We were also encouraged to see Google announce that it has not, and will not, sell a facial recognition product until the technology’s dangers are addressed, acknowledging its susceptibility to abuse and the importance of Google’s artificial intelligence (AI) principles.

We write today to call on Google to follow its AI principles and fully commit to not releasing a facial recognition product that could be used by governments.

Google has positioned itself as a leader in the field of responsible and ethical artificial intelligence. This year, in response to sustained employee activism over its work for the Pentagon, Google published its AI principles, pledging that the company will only seek to develop AI that is socially beneficial, free from unfair bias, and tested for safety. The Principles specifically state that Google will not release technologies that gather or use information for surveillance that violates international norms. Consistent with these Principles, Google announced in December 2018 that it has not, and will not sell a facial recognition product until the technology’s dangers are addressed.

The dangers of face surveillance can only be fully addressed by stopping its use by governments. Face surveillance provides the government with an unprecedented ability to track who we are, where we go, what we do, and who we know. Face surveillance gives the government new power to target and single out immigrants, religious minorities, and people of color in our communities. Systems built on face surveillance will amplify and exacerbate historical and existing bias that harms these and other over-policed and over-surveilled communities. In a world with face surveillance, people will have to fear being watched and targeted by the government for attending a protest, congregating outside a place of worship, or simply living their lives.

This past year, Google employees have made it clear that they expect the company to stand up for the vulnerable and refuse to “outsource the moral responsibility of our technologies to third parties.” In recent months, there has been widespread public concern about face
surveillance, with dozens of members of Congress, shareholders, and over 150,000 members of the public blowing the whistle on the dangers of face surveillance both to the public and to public trust in companies.

By finalizing its commitment not to sell a face surveillance product, Google would also be safeguarding the trust of its workers, shareholders, and customers. Google has a responsibility to follow its AI principles. Selling a face surveillance product that could be used by the government will never be consistent with these Principles. It’s time for Google to fully commit to not releasing a face recognition product that could be used by governments.

We look forward to your written response to this letter.

Signed,

American Civil Liberties Union
ACLU Foundations of California
ACLU of Massachusetts
ACLU of Washington
New York Civil Liberties Union
18MillionRising.org
A New PATH
Access Now
ALIGN (The Alliance for a Greater New York)
American Friends Service Committee
American Muslim Empowerment Network-Muslim Association of Puget Sound
American Muslims of Puget Sound
Arab American Institute
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus
CAIR San Francisco Bay Area
Californians United for a Responsible Budget
Campaign for Accountability
Casa Latina
Center for Media Justice
Center on Policy Initiatives
Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice
Color Of Change
Council on American Islamic Relations, Massachusetts
Council on American-Islamic Relations, California
CREDO Action
Data for Black Lives
Defending Rights & Dissent
Demand Progress

John T. Williams Organizing Committee
Justice for Muslims Collective
LAANE (Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy)
Legal Services for Prisoners with Children
Library Freedom Project
Lucy Parsons Labs
Make the Road New York
Media Alliance
Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee of Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court
Mijente
Muslim Justice League
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Immigration Law Center
National Immigration Project of the NLG
National Lawyers Guild - New York City Chapter
National Lawyers Guild - Massachusetts Chapter
New Economy Project
New York Communities for Change
Oakland Privacy
OCCORD (Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible Development)
OneAmerica
Our Revolution Arlington
Partnership for Working Families
Policing and Social Justice Project at Brooklyn College
RAICES
Real Change Homeless Empowerment Project
Restore The Fourth
Silicon Valley Rising
Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood
Starting Over, Inc.
SumOfUs
Tenth Amendment Center
The Greenlining Institute
The Legal Aid Society (NYC)
The Project on Government Oversight
Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment
Unitarian Universalist Mass Action
War Resisters League
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
X-Lab
Densho
El Centro de la Raza
Electronic Frontier Foundation
End Solitary Santa Cruz County
Entre Hermanos
Fair Chance Project
Families for Justice as Healing
Families Belong Together
Fight for the Future
Free Press
Freedom for Immigrants
Freedom of the Press Foundation
Government Accountability Project
Government Information Watch
Grassroots Collaborative
Harrington Investments, Inc.
Harvard Law School National Lawyers Guild
Human Rights Watch
Immigrant Defense Project
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
International Committee for Robot Arms Control

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