

25<sup>th</sup> May 2022

To: The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP  
Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions

Dear Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions,

### **Removal of Hikvision and Dahua CCTV cameras from DWP buildings**

We are a diverse coalition of rights groups, writing to raise our concerns about your Department's dealings with Chinese state-owned companies that are involved in serious human rights abuses and associated with significant security issues. In particular, we urge you to remove Hikvision and Dahua cameras from your Department buildings.<sup>1</sup>

These Chinese state-owned companies provide technology that facilitates the persecution and oppression of ethnic and religious groups in the Uyghur region ("Xinjiang"), Tibet and Hong Kong and have no place in the UK. These cameras also give rise to serious national security concerns, given their links to the Chinese state and their history of security flaws.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly critical within the context of the Chinese government's transnational repression and surveillance of dissidents abroad.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Sajid Javid has recognised the serious ethical issues associated with Hikvision and recently prohibited the procurement of these cameras in his Department.<sup>3</sup> It is now incumbent for ministers across Government to blacklist Hikvision and Dahua, and make arrangements to remove their surveillance equipment from department buildings at the soonest possibility.

In the United States, Congress recently passed a Bill to prohibit the sale and importation of new Hikvision and Dahua products due to security concerns.<sup>4</sup> There are suggestions that the U.S. Treasury Department is considering imposing further

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<sup>1</sup>Big Brother Watch received information via a Freedom of Information request confirming the use of Hikvision cameras at the Department for Work and Pensions

<sup>2</sup>Widely-Used Hikvision Security Cameras Vulnerable To Remote Hijacking – Lee Matthews, Forbes, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/leemathews/2021/09/22/widely-used-hikvision-security-cameras-vulnerable-to-remote-hijacking/?sh=60ca6fa72f31>

<sup>3</sup>Health department bans Chinese cameras that caught Matt Hancock's affair – James Titcomb, the Telegraph, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2022: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2022/04/16/health-department-bans-chinese-cameras-caught-matt-hancocks/>

<sup>4</sup>Congress passes bill banning new FCC equipment authorizations for Hikvision, Dahua and others – Joel Griffin, Security Info Watch, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021: <https://www.securityinfowatch.com/video-surveillance/article/21243600/congress-passes-bill-banning-new-fcc-equipment-authorizations-for-hikvision-dahua-and-others>

sanctions on the companies.<sup>5</sup> Other countries and institutions have also taken steps to reduce the reach of Hikvision and Dahua surveillance cameras. Last year, the European Parliament voted to remove the newly installed Hikvision thermal cameras, citing “an unacceptable risk that Hikvision, through its operations in Xinjiang, is contributing to serious human rights abuses”.<sup>6</sup> The Australian Defence Force and the South Australian Government have also removed Hikvision cameras from their buildings,<sup>7</sup> as well as the Indian navy.<sup>8</sup> A report published by Lithuania’s defence ministry reported “a chance that cyberattacks (...) or malicious code insertion, will be carried out” if Hikvision’s equipment is installed.<sup>9</sup> There is an increasing global awareness that Hikvision products are not appropriate for public sector use.

We are also aware, through a Cabinet Office response to a Freedom of Information request, that the Ministry of Defence has provided internal guidance warning government departments against the use of Hikvision cameras.<sup>10</sup> This reveals that our national security advisers understand that the use of Hikvision poses a risk to British interests.

### Implicated in human rights abuses

Hikvision and Dahua cameras are used in concentration camps throughout the Uyghur region, and both companies have contracts worth at least \$1.2 billion for 11 separate, large-scale surveillance projects across the region.<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International has reported that the “brutal effectiveness and tremendous scale of the government’s campaign derive[s] from the government’s unprecedented use of surveillance technology.”<sup>12</sup> The capabilities of these cameras include ethnicity recognition and “Uyghur alerts”.<sup>13</sup> Recently, a man previously held in a concentration camp in the

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<sup>5</sup>US moves towards imposing sanctions on Chinese tech group Hikvision – Demetri Sevastopulo, the Financial Times, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022: <https://www.ft.com/content/7bc70335-138e-4f56-afe1-ae4383eefb2b>

<sup>6</sup>EU Parliament Removes Hikvision, Citing Human Rights Abuses – Charles Rollet, IPVM, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021: <https://ipvm.com/reports/hik-eu>

<sup>7</sup>Chinese surveillance cameras removed due to security concerns – Anthony Galloway, Sydney Morning Herald, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/chinese-cameras-removed-out-of-security-concerns-20200121-p53t7u.html>

<sup>8</sup>Indian military under target by Chinese origin surveillance systems – Pradip R Sagar, the Week, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021: <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2021/09/03/indian-military-under-target-by-chinese-origin-surveillance-systems.html>

<sup>9</sup>China’s cameras face fresh scrutiny in Europe – Liv Klingert, Politico, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021: <https://www.politico.eu/article/hikvision-china-surveillance-chinese-tech-europe/>

<sup>10</sup>UK Ministry of Defence “Guidance Is Not To Use / Install Hikvision” – Charles Rollet, IPVM, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2021: <https://ipvm.com/reports/uk-mod-no-hik?code=xybl>

<sup>11</sup>Dahua and Hikvision Win Over \$1 Billion In Government-Backed Projects In Xinjiang – Charles Rollet, IPVM, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018: <https://ipvm.com/reports/xinjiang-dahua-hikvision>

Uyghur region told IPVM that three Hikvision cameras were in this prison cell, pointed directly at him and other detainees and used as “virtual guards”.<sup>14</sup>

In January 2021, the Foreign Secretary denounced “the scale and the severity of the human rights violations being perpetrated in Xinjiang against the Uyghur Muslims”, and noted the “extensive and invasive surveillance targeting minorities” specifically.<sup>15</sup>

These companies also hold contracts in Hong Kong and Tibet, which are both regions over which the UK government has expressed concern due to widespread human rights abuses.<sup>16</sup>

In Tibet, Hikvision equipment is known to be in use by local authorities, including by the Public Security Bureau and in detention centres. Hikvision forms part of a wider network of surveillance installed by the Chinese government over the past two decades with the stated aim of ensuring that dissidents and potential protesters are quickly identified and detained, what officials call “nets in the sky and traps on the ground”.<sup>17</sup>

It is deeply concerning that technology which enables widespread human rights abuses in China is being purchased and installed in the heart of the UK government.

### ***Cybersecurity risk***

Both companies have track records of significant cybersecurity problems that could put the privacy and security of your Department at risk. In 2021 alone, several high-risk vulnerabilities were identified in Dahua’s camera software.<sup>18</sup> Researchers identified a critical vulnerability impacting millions of Hikvision cameras that could have allowed malicious parties to override and take control of affected cameras across

<sup>12</sup>“Like We Were Enemies in a War”: China’s Mass Internment, Torture and Persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang – Amnesty International, June 2021: [https://xinjiang.amnesty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ASA\\_17\\_4137-2021\\_Full\\_report\\_ENG.pdf](https://xinjiang.amnesty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ASA_17_4137-2021_Full_report_ENG.pdf)

<sup>13</sup>‘There’s cameras everywhere’: testimonies detail far-reaching surveillance of Uyghurs in China – Johana Bhuiyan, the Guardian, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/30/uyghur-tribunal-testimony-surveillance-china>

<sup>14</sup>‘Hikvision Cameras In My Concentration Camp Cell,’ Says Victim – Conor Healy, Gurami Jamaspishvili, and Charles Rollet, IPVM, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022: <https://ipvm.com/reports/hikvision-cell>

<sup>15</sup>Human rights violations in Xinjiang and the government’s response: Foreign Secretary’s statement – Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, GOV.UK, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-on-the-situation-in-xinjiang-and-the-governments-response>

<sup>16</sup>Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet: Dialogue with UN Human Rights – GOV.UK, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/xinjiang-hong-kong-and-tibet-dialogue-with-un-human-rights>

<sup>17</sup>China: Alarming New Surveillance Security in Tibet – Human Rights Watch, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2013: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/20/china-alarming-new-surveillance-security-tibet>

<sup>18</sup>Dahua Broken Access Control Vulnerability – John Scanlan, IPVM, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2022: <https://ipvm.com/reports/dahua-33046.html>; Dahua New Critical Vulnerabilities 2021 – Ethan Ace and Gurami Jamaspishvili, IPVM, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021: <https://ipvm.com/reports/dahua-21-critical>

the world.<sup>19</sup> Both companies have significant state links and this is important context when considering who may have access to their software and technology as well as any security backdoors, accidental or not, that may exist in their products.

Surveillance cameras have grown rapidly in Britain in recent years, both in prevalence and capabilities. This means that, where it is proportionate to use surveillance cameras, their security must be highly trusted and their ethical impact fully understood. Given the rapid pace of change in recent years, we are calling on the Government to commission an independent national review of the scale, capabilities, ethics and rights impact of modern CCTV in the UK. Relatedly, we recommend a ban on the sale and operation of Hikvision and Dahua surveillance equipment in the UK.

It is vital that the UK government stands against unsecure, rights-abusive technology that has no place in a democratic nation. We urge you to commit to removing these cameras from your Department buildings and to prohibit any further procurement of Hikvision and Dahua surveillance equipment.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Madeleine Stone, Legal and Policy Officer, Big Brother Watch

Rahima Mahmut, Director, Stop Uyghur Genocide

John Jones, Campaigns, Policy and Research Manager, Free Tibet

Sam Goodman, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Hong Kong Watch

Luke de Pulford, CEO, Arise

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<sup>19</sup>Cybersecurity Vulnerability Could Affect Millions of Hikvision Cameras – Info Security Magazine, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2021: <https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/vulnerability-hikvision-cameras/>