

22nd February 2023

To: Jason Tarry, Chief Executive Officer, Tesco UK & ROI

cc Guus Dekkers, Chief Technology Officer
Lindsay Pownell, Corporate Responsibility Committee Chair

Dear Jason,

Removal of Hikvision and Dahua CCTV cameras from Tesco buildings

We are a diverse coalition of rights groups, writing to raise our concerns about Tesco's use of Chinese state-owned surveillance 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 stores.¹

These 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 security concerns, given their links to the Chinese state and their history of security flaws.²

On 24th November, the Cabinet Office recommended that Government departments remove surveillance equipment made by "companies subject to the National Intelligence Law of the People's Republic of China" due to "security risks".³ On 28th November, Security Minister Tom Tugendhat suggested that the Government was planning to take steps to remove these cameras from across the UK and on 30th November, Peers in the House of Lords voted to require the Government to remove all Hikvision and Dahua cameras from the public sector.⁴ Lord Alton, a crossbench Peer and human rights advocate said of the companies:

"Both Hikvision and Dahua Technology [...] have been blacklisted in the USA for their links to the internment camps in Xinjiang and their role working hand-in-glove with the CCP to construct the largest authoritarian surveillance state, which has surpassed even George Orwell's wildest dreams.

1As a snapshot, we are aware that Hikvision cameras are used in Tesco Express, Soho Dean Street, London W1D 3RF, Tesco Express, Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TJ, Tesco Express, 16, 22 Wandsworth Rd, London SW8 2JW, Tesco Extra, White Cliffs Park, Honeywood Pkwy, Dover CT16 3PS.

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

3Security Update on Surveillance Equipment – Written Statement, 24th November 2022, UIN HCWS386: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2022-11-24/hcws386>

4Peston, Twitter, 28th November 2022: <https://twitter.com/itvpaston/status/1597339479781408768?s=20&t=2-ggLUPb2pKWfx944MYopQ>; HL Deb (30th November 2022), vol. 825, col. 1835-1837: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-11-30/debates/5D74C5CD-FACB-43DB-BC2E-653F8C7DFD92/ProcurementBill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-11-30/debates/5D74C5CD-FACB-43DB-BC2E-653F8C7DFD92/ProcurementBill(HL))

[...]

“We need an urgent timetable and a plan to remove Hikvision and Dahua from the UK supply chain in its entirety.”⁵

The legislation continues to make its way through Parliament. In Scotland, the Government has committed to removing Hikvision cameras from public buildings as “part of an on-going security improvement programme”.⁶ The Welsh Government has made a similar commitment.⁷ Responsible UK companies should similarly acknowledge the security and ethical risks these devices pose and must stop procuring Hikvision and Dahua surveillance technology immediately, and remove existing hardware at the soonest possibility.

Other countries and institutions have also taken steps to eliminate Hikvision and Dahua surveillance cameras. In the United States, the sale and importation of new Hikvision and Dahua products is prohibited due to security concerns.⁸ 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”.⁹ There is an increasing global awareness that Chinese state-owned surveillance products are not appropriate for use in rights-respecting countries.

Implicated in human rights abuses

Hikvision and Dahua cameras are used in “re-education” 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.¹⁰ Mass arbitrary detention, torture, forced organ harvesting and forced sterilisation have all been credibly reported.¹¹ Amnesty International has reported that the “brutal effectiveness and tremendous scale of the [Chinese] government’s campaign derive[s] from the government’s

⁵HL Deb (30th November 2022), vol. 825, col. 1818: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-11-30/debates/5D74C5CD-FACB-43DB-BC2E-653F8C7DFD92/ProcurementBill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-11-30/debates/5D74C5CD-FACB-43DB-BC2E-653F8C7DFD92/ProcurementBill(HL))

⁶‘Dangerous’ Chinese CCTV cameras to be phased out in Scotland – Mark McLaughlin, the Times, 21st November 2022: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/dangerous-chinese-cctv-cameras-to-be-phased-out-in-scotland-ntnh29m96>

⁷CCTV: Welsh police and government – BBC News, 16th February 2023: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-64629861>

⁸US government bans Huawei, ZTE and Hikvision tech over ‘unacceptable’ spying fears – Carly Page, TechCrunch, 28th November 2022: <https://techcrunch.com/2022/11/28/fcc-huawei-zte-hikvision-hytera-dahua-ban/>

⁹EU Parliament Removes Hikvision, Citing Human Rights Abuses – Charles Rollet, IPVM, 29th April 2021: <https://ipvm.com/reports/hik-eu>

¹⁰Dahua and Hikvision Win Over \$1 Billion In Government-Backed Projects In Xinjiang – Charles Rollet, IPVM, 23rd April 2018: <https://ipvm.com/reports/xinjiang-dahua-hikvision>

¹¹“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; China is harvesting thousands of human organs from its Uighur Muslim minority, UN human-rights body hears – Will Martin, 25th September 2019: <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-harvesting-organs-of-uighur-muslims-china-tribunal-tells-un-2019-9?op=1&r=US&IR=T>

unprecedented use of surveillance technology.”¹² The capabilities of these cameras include ethnicity recognition and “Uyghur alerts”.¹³ A Big Brother Watch investigation recently uncovered Hikvision advertising the same ethnicity recognition technology in the UK.¹⁴ A man previously held in a concentration camp in the Uyghur region told IPVM that three Hikvision cameras were in his prison cell, pointed directly at him and other detainees and used as “virtual guards”.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

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, many of which are enabled by pervasive surveillance.¹⁷

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”.¹⁸

It is deeply concerning that technology which enables widespread human rights abuses in China is being purchased and installed by UK companies. Tesco has professed a strong commitment to ethical sourcing and human rights. Your Code of Business Conduct states that Tesco supports the UN Declaration on Human Rights and that “any breach of a person’s human rights is wrong”.¹⁹ To that that end, Tesco expects “all suppliers, including those who provide goods not for resale and services,

12 “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

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

14 Chinese security firm advertises ethnicity recognition technology while facing UK ban – Alex Hern, the Guardian, 4th December 2022: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/04/chinese-security-firm-advertises-ethnicity-recognition-technology-while-facing-uk-ban>

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

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

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

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

19 Our Code of Business Conduct – Tesco PLC, September 2021, pg. 32: https://www.tesco plc.com/media/757929/tesco-cobc_sept-2021.pdf

such as construction companies, labour agencies and logistics firms to meet our ethical trading requirements.”²⁰ In-store CCTV clearly falls under this obligation.

Tesco’s human rights policy states:

“We have a responsibility to respect the human rights of, and an opportunity to make a difference to, our colleagues, our customers, the communities we operate in and the people who work throughout our supply chain.”²¹

We urge Tesco to fulfil its human rights commitments, remove all surveillance cameras made by Chinese state-owned companies and stop funding technology linked to serious human rights violations in China.

Cybersecurity risk

Both companies have track records of significant cybersecurity problems that could put the privacy and security of your business at risk. In 2021 alone, several high-risk vulnerabilities were identified in Dahua’s camera software.²² 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 the world.²³ As early as 2017, the US Department of Homeland Security gave Hikvision its worst score of 10 out of 10, warning that the low-cost cameras were "remotely exploitable/low skill level to exploit" for "improper authentication."²⁴

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.

It is vital that UK companies do not invest in insecure, unethical and rights-abusive technology. We urge you to prohibit any further procurement of Hikvision and Dahua surveillance equipment and remove these cameras from your stores.

²⁰Our Code of Business Conduct – Tesco PLC, September 2021, pg. 33:

https://www.tescopl.com/media/757929/tesco-cobc_sept-2021.pdf

²¹Our approach to human rights – Tesco PLC, 11th January 2022, accessed 28th November 2022:

<https://www.tescopl.com/sustainability/documents/policies/our-approach-to-human-rights/>

²²Dahua Broken Access Control Vulnerability – John Scanlan, IPVM, 25th January 2022: <https://ipvm.com/reports/dahua-33046.html>; Dahua New Critical Vulnerabilities 2021 – Ethan Ace and Gurami Jamaspishvili, IPVM, 7th

September 2021: <https://ipvm.com/reports/dahua-21-critical>

²³Cybersecurity Vulnerability Could Affect Millions of Hikvision Cameras – Info Security Magazine, 24th September 2021: <https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/vulnerability-hikvision-cameras/>

²⁴ICS Advisory (ICSA-17-124-01) – Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, US Department of Homeland Security, 4th May 2017: <https://www.cisa.gov/uscert/ics/advisories/ICSA-17-124-01>; see also Hikvision Backdoor Confirmed – Brian Karas, IPVM, 8th May 2017: <https://ipvm.com/reports/hik-backdoor>

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Silkie Carlo, Big Brother Watch

Benedict Rodgers, Hong Kong Watch

Rahima Mahmut, Stop Uyghur Genocide

John Jones, Free Tibet