



OFFICE OF THE BIOMETRICS
AND SURVEILLANCE
CAMERA COMMISSIONER

Professor Fraser Sampson
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[www.gov.uk/
surveillance-camera-commissioner](http://www.gov.uk/surveillance-camera-commissioner)

Justin Hollis
Marketing Director
Hikvision UK & Ireland

Dear Justin

Letter to Surveillance Partners: “The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond.”

May I begin by introducing myself. I am the Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner and am broadly responsible for providing guidance on the regulation of public surveillance camera systems in England and Wales. You will be aware of the considerable public interest in the use of developing surveillance technology, not just in the UK, but globally, and a key part of my role is to promote the statutory Surveillance Camera Code which aims to achieve accountable, proportionate and transparent use of surveillance cameras in public space. I was therefore very interested to see a copy of your letter dated 12 July 2021 addressed to ‘valued partners’, one of whom shared it with my office.

Headed “*The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee published on 8th July its report entitled “Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond.”*” your letter covers a number of important issues that fall within my remit. As you concluded by inviting recipients to get in touch if they have any questions, I hope you will welcome this prompt and inquisitive response. I was heartened to read that Hikvision has a “commitment to openness and transparency” and it is in that spirit of openness and transparency that I am writing to you.

I note that the Chair has said of his Committee’s report that it “*moves the conversation forward, away from the question of whether crimes are taking place and on to what the UK should do to end them*”. It is unclear from your letter to surveillance partners whether you accept that basic premise, namely that crimes are being committed against the Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and I would be grateful if you could clarify this at the outset. For the avoidance of any doubt, I both welcome and support the Committee’s assertion (at para 54) that the role of advanced technologies in the use of oppression

in Xinjiang cannot be ignored here and I would be keen to establish your view as it sets the critical context against which any more technical or nuanced matters of your company's surveillance 'offer' can be meaningfully discussed.

Moving, if I may, to some of your letter's more specific points, you cite 'one of the recommendations' in the Committee's report as 'calling for Hikvision to be banned in the UK', something which you say has been the product of a knee-jerk reaction. You go on to say that, in arriving at its recommendation, the Committee has made a "staggering leap" that is not based on any concrete evidence, leading to an "unacceptable message to all those that support evidence-based policy making". I fully endorse your explicit recognition that the 'messages' we send to supporters of evidence-based policy making are crucial in this area. By clarifying our respective positions, we will ensure that those messages are unequivocal. And while policy making is a matter for others, as one of those who supports an evidence-based approach to developing and influencing it, I would also like to understand your position a little better myself.

You describe the Committee's finding that your cameras have been deployed throughout Xinjiang and provide the primary camera technology used in the Uyghur internment camps as "unsubstantiated and not underpinned by evidence". Again, it was far from clear to me whether Hikvision are denying that their systems have been so deployed. The paragraph in the Committee's report from which you quote in fact recommends the proscription of companies *known to be associated* with the Xinjiang atrocities, of which Hikvision is said to be one. I would be grateful if you could confirm whether your camera technology has in fact been used in the Uyghur internment camps and whether you accept that there is, at least to that extent, such an 'association'.

You also highlight that the report "draws on the views of two academics" and their "concerns about data collected from facial recognition cameras that could be used by the Chinese Government." Are you aware of the extent to which those concerns are shared by your customers and the public in the UK, both in the locations named in the report and at large? I would be very keen to see any evidence you have as the question of how far the public can put their trust in such surveillance technology is currently one of the most pertinent and prevalent in this area. My office regularly receives enquiries from local authorities, the police and the public asking for guidance on this very point, as demonstrated by the sharing of your letter with me.

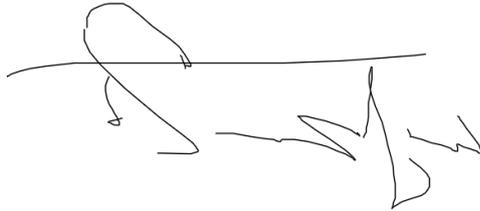
In that letter you share your own experts' views on the absence of any direct interference with human rights by your company. However, you will know that much legitimate public concern in the area of oppression-by-surveillance comes, less from 'deliberate intent' or 'wilful disregard' (the threshold for which is notoriously difficult to satisfy), and more from third parties 'looking the other way' or failing to speak out when that is the only right thing to do - something which, it seems to me, is the elemental premise of the Committee's report as regards an appropriate response from the UK. Is it your position that Hikvision had no knowledge of the use(s) of its surveillance camera systems in the internment facilities? This would seem to be incongruous with your welcome assurance that Hikvision "hold our products to the industry's highest global cybersecurity standards" and I think clarity is particularly

important here. In any event, given that the Committee has found and condemned an association between the surveillance equipment and the perpetration of human rights abuses adverted to in its report, I would be very interested to hear how you will reassure people in the UK that you are both taking the Committee's concerns seriously and addressing the degree to which operators and the public might place their trust in your end-to-end surveillance systems in the future.

In conclusion, I began by referring to the Surveillance Camera Code which provides a set of principles and standards by which regulation and accountability can be achieved in the operation of surveillance camera systems. That Code is about to be revised and will, once approved by ministers, be published for public consultation; I would encourage your engagement in that important democratic process.

In the meantime, I look forward to receiving your response and thank you again for inviting questions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fraser Sampson', written over a horizontal line.

Fraser Sampson
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