

## [China | Civil society calls on Google to cancel Dragonfly project, citing serious human rights risks](#)

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**ISHR joins dozens of organisations and individuals today, ahead of a key U.S. congressional hearing, to call on Google CEO Sundar Pichai to respond meaningfully to broadly-held human rights concerns and cancel Project Dragonfly, Google's censored search app project.**



Activists and human rights groups are once again raising the alarm about the risks of Google's Project Dragonfly, a censored search app which aims to help them gain a foothold in the Chinese market. This would 'set a terrible precedent for human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide', says an [open letter published today](#) and supported by dozens of human rights groups.

Google left China in 2010, citing concerns about the government's policy of censorship; to reverse that position now, when the global expectations of companies' respect for human rights have increased and when the Chinese government is more intent than ever on suppressing dissent, is almost incomprehensible.

An earlier civil society letter dated 28 August, drawing attention to Google's commitments and to the serious situation in China, received scant attention from Google leadership.

In [a press conference yesterday](#), focused on the impact of censorship and surveillance on Chinese, Uyghur and Tibetan activists, ISHR's Asia advocate Sarah M Brooks noted:

'The United Nations' Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights apply to all companies, including those in the ICT sector. On issues of due diligence, transparency, and avoiding human rights harm - all of which have been part of the discussion of Project Dragonfly - international standards are unequivocal: the expectations on a company, in this case Google, are not merely questions of doing good, or 'not being evil', but of international law.'

The joint civil society letter notes that 'facilitating Chinese authorities' access to personal data, as described in media reports, would be particularly reckless. If such features were launched, there is a real risk that Google would directly assist the Chinese government in arresting or imprisoning people simply for expressing their views online, making the company complicit in human rights violations. This risk was identified by Google's own security and privacy review team, according to former and current Google employees.'

'Evidence of human rights risk in China is widely available, including through reports and press releases of the UN's human rights experts,' says Brooks. 'If Google goes forward with the project, knowingly compromising its commitments to human rights in exchange for access to the Chinese search market, it could send a chilling message to activists not just in China, but in similarly restrictive environments around the world.'

According to media reports, as well as a joint letter issued by Google employees, warnings about the risks of working with China were ignored and those making it sidelined during the development phases and planning for rollout of the project.

The letter concludes by urging Google to abandon the project and reaffirm its commitment to not provide censored search services in China. It further calls on Google to respect the rights of whistleblowers and refrain from taking any retaliatory action against the employees, current and former, who have stood up for their own values. These workers have stated clearly: 'We object to technologies that aid the powerful in oppressing the vulnerable, wherever they may be.'

Brooks concludes: 'When it comes to the risks and real-life impacts of censorship and surveillance by the Chinese government, Google is in the position of knowing better, and yet choosing anyway. For Chinese

human rights defenders, and anyone who stands with them, this is unacceptable.'

*For more information, contact Sarah M Brooks at [s.brooks\[at\]ishr.ch](mailto:s.brooks[at]ishr.ch) or on Twitter at [@sarahmcneer](https://twitter.com/sarahmcneer). Initial coverage of the letter [via The Intercept](#) can be found [here](#).*

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