


Google employees: We no longer believe the company places values over profits

- Google employees wrote an open letter calling for the company to cancel Project Dragonfly, an effort to create a censored search engine in China.
- Project Dragonfly has drawn criticism from human rights groups and U.S. politicians since details of the effort leaked this summer.

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 [Sundar Pichai, chief executive officer of Google Inc., speaks during a news conference in New Delhi, India, on Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2017.](#)

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Sundar Pichai, chief executive officer of Google Inc., speaks during a news conference in New Delhi, India, on Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2017.

[Google](#) employees are calling on the company to cancel Project Dragonfly, an effort to create a censored search engine in China.

"Many of us accepted employment at Google with the company's values in mind, including its previous position on Chinese censorship and surveillance, and an understanding that Google was a company willing to place its values above its profits," an open letter signed by Google employees published [Tuesday on](#)

[Medium](#) says. "After a year of disappointments including Project Maven, Dragonfly, and Google's support for abusers, we no longer believe this is the case."

Eleven Google employees had signed the letter as of its posting, and the number of signatures quickly grew, amounting to more than 100 several hours after it published. By 5 p.m. West Coast time, the letter had 300 signatures.

Project Dragonfly has [drawn criticism](#) from human rights groups and [U.S. politicians](#) since The Intercept first reported [details about the internal effort this summer](#), and in August, thousands of Google employees [signed a letter saying that it raised "urgent moral and ethical issues."](#) Google CEO Sundar Pichai responded by saying publicly that the company is "[very early](#)" in its plans but that its experiments found that it could "serve well over 99 percent" of search queries in China. Meanwhile, Alphabet Chairman John Hennessy [said last week](#) that doing business in China requires compromising "core values."

In their open letter, the Google employees wrote that "leadership's response has been unsatisfactory" so far, and called for "transparency, clear communication, and real accountability." They published the letter in alignment with [a petition and day of protests from campaign group Amnesty International](#).

Google originally [withdrew its search service from China in 2010](#) due to increased concerns about [cyberattacks and censorship](#). Since then, the Chinese government has [increasingly curtailed](#) what its citizens can or can't do online by blacklisting websites and access to information about certain historical events — like the 1989 protests at Tiananmen Square — and

requiring people who use online forums to register with their real names.

Google's Chinese search app would have reportedly complied with demands to remove content that the government ruled sensitive and linked users' searches to their personal phone numbers. Critics say that by cooperating with the Chinese government, Google would have violated principles of free expression as well as users' privacy rights.

"We object to technologies that aid the powerful in oppressing the vulnerable, wherever they may be," the letter says.

"Dragonfly in China would establish a dangerous precedent at a volatile political moment, one that would make it harder for Google to deny other countries similar concessions."

A Google spokesperson said in a statement the company's work on search has been exploratory and that it's "not close" to launching a product out of Project Dragonfly.

Two of the original signers of the public letter were among a core group of organizers behind an international walkout of Google employees [earlier this month](#). In the past year, the tech industry generally and Google employees in particular have shown an unusually high level of labor organizing, [with employees sounding off about multiple workplace issues](#), including [diversity](#) and [controversial company business contracts](#).

Google made changes to its [sexual harassment and misconduct policies](#) after employees staged massive walkouts earlier this month (though the company [ignored several of the organizers'](#)

[demands](#) like adding an employee representative to Alphabet's board)

Here's the full letter from Google employees:

We are Google employees and we join [Amnesty International](#) in calling on Google to cancel project Dragonfly, Google's effort to create [a censored search engine](#) for the Chinese market that [enables state surveillance](#).

We are among thousands of employees who have raised our voices for months. International [human rights organizations](#) and [investigative reporters](#) have also sounded the alarm, emphasizing serious human rights concerns and repeatedly calling on Google to cancel the project. So far, our leadership's response has been unsatisfactory.

Our opposition to Dragonfly is not about China: we object to technologies that aid the powerful in oppressing the vulnerable, wherever they may be. The Chinese government certainly isn't alone in its readiness to stifle freedom of expression, and to use surveillance to repress dissent. Dragonfly in China would establish a dangerous precedent at a volatile political moment, one that would make it harder for Google to deny other countries similar concessions.

Our company's decision comes as the Chinese government is openly expanding [its surveillance powers](#) and tools of population control. Many of these rely on advanced technologies, and combine online activity, personal records, and mass monitoring to track and profile citizens. Reports are already showing who bears the cost, including [Uyghurs](#),

[women's rights advocates](#), and [students](#). Providing the Chinese government with ready access to user data, as [required by Chinese law](#), would make Google complicit in oppression and human rights abuses.

Dragonfly would also enable censorship and government-directed disinformation, and destabilize the ground truth on which popular deliberation and dissent rely. Given the Chinese government's reported suppression of dissident voices, such controls would likely be used to silence marginalized people, and favor information that promotes government interests.

Many of us accepted employment at Google with the company's values in mind, including its [previous position](#) on Chinese censorship and surveillance, and an understanding that Google was a company willing to place its values above its profits. After a year of disappointments including [Project Maven](#), Dragonfly, and [Google's support for abusers](#), we no longer believe this is the case. This is why we're taking a stand.

We join with Amnesty International in demanding that Google cancel Dragonfly. We also demand that leadership commit to [transparency, clear communication, and real accountability](#). Google is too powerful not to be held accountable. We deserve to know what we're building and we deserve a say in these significant decisions.

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