

The Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner Fraser Sampson has challenged central and local government ministers to clarify their positions on buying surveillance cameras from controversial tech company Hikvision, which is part-owned by the Chinese state.

The move comes after media reports quoted an unnamed Whitehall source saying that Health Secretary, the Rt Honourable Sajid Javid, had banned Hikvision for competing for new business in the Department of Health after a procurement review revealed “ethical concerns” about the company.

Professor Sampson, the independent Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner, has repeatedly challenged Hikvision to come clean about the extent of its involvement with the Chinese state’s human rights abuses in Xinjiang. However Hikvision has, for more than eight months, failed to answer the questions put to them.

Professor Sampson has raised the matter in a formal letter sent to the Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, and to the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, who is the minister responsible for local government. Mr Javid was copied into the correspondence.

Hikvision cameras and facial recognition technology have been implicated in systematic human rights abuses against the Uyghur people and other minorities in the Xinjiang province of China. The British Government has already formally recognised that widespread, systematic persecution in Xinjiang, including the extra-judicial detention of over a million Uyghur Muslims and other minorities. This persecution is known to rely heavily on surveillance technology including facial recognition software designed to detect racial characteristics.

Professor Sampson said: “If it is the case that the Department of Health has ruled out Hikvision from future procurement exercises, then that is a step in the right direction as far as I am concerned.

“There are serious unanswered questions about Hikvision’s involvement in appalling human rights abuses in China. The company seems unwilling or unable to provide assurances about the ethics of some of its operations and about security concerns associated with its equipment.

“If companies won’t provide the information needed to do proper due diligence in relation to ethics and security, then they clearly should not be allowed to bid for contracts within government, or anywhere else in the public sector for that matter. If Mr Javid has banned Hikvision for those reasons, then he should be congratulated.

“If the decision as reported is true, the same considerations would apply equally to all branches of government, and, arguably, the whole of the public sector. If other areas of national and local government have carried out due diligence in relation to their human rights obligations, I’d be interested to see the information they used; if they haven’t then I’d be interested to understand how the risks are being properly addressed.”

In his letters, Mr Sampson also raises concerns about potential security implications of the use of surveillance equipment with dormant functions, such as voice recording and facial recognition, which can be switched on remotely.

- To arrange an interview with Professor Sampson email [enquiries@obscc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@obscc.org.uk).
- His letters to Cabinet Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities can be seen here: [Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94421/Biometrics_and_Surveillance_Camera_Commissioner_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk).pdf)
- His correspondence with Hikvision since 2021 can be seen here: [Never again: the UK’s responsibility to act on atrocities in Xinjiang and beyond - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94421/Never_again_the_UK_s_responsibility_to_act_on_atrocities_in_Xinjiang_and_beyond_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk).pdf)

## Notes for Editors

The Commissioner for the Retention and Use of Biometric Material (“Biometrics Commissioner”) and the Surveillance Camera Commissioner are statutory roles which were established by the Protection of the Freedoms Act 2012.

The Commissioner is a public appointee and is independent of government.

The two posts are currently carried out by one full time Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner (Professor Fraser Sampson) whose role is to:

- keep under review the retention and use by the police of DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints.
- decide applications by the police to retain DNA profiles and fingerprints (under section 63G of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984)
- review national security determinations which are made or renewed by the police in connection with the retention of DNA profiles and fingerprints
- provide reports to the Home Secretary about the carrying out of his functions
- encourage compliance with the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice
- review how the code is working
- provide advice to ministers on whether or not the code needs amending