Censored Chinese search project is “terminated,” Google rep testifies

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Google has ended all work on its censored Chinese search engine, a company representative testified on Tuesday.

“We have terminated Project Dragonfly,” said Karan Bhatia, Google’s vice president of public policy, at a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The secret project was first revealed by the Intercept a year ago. The new search engine would have initially been offered as an Android app, and it would have reportedly blacklisted “websites and search terms about human rights, democracy, religion, and peaceful protest,” according to the Intercept.

While the concept of a censored Chinese search engine is controversial in the United States, it also represents a big business opportunity for Google. China has the world’s largest population and its second largest economy, with hundreds of millions of active Internet users.

After the effort was revealed, Google came under pressure from employees, human rights advocates, and US elected officials to abandon it. Google CEO Sundar Pichai reassured angry employees last August that Google was “not close to launching

a search product” in China.

But Pichai didn’t rule out launching a censored search project. He took a similar position when he testified before Congress in December, saying, “right now, we have no plans to launch search in China” but declined to rule out such an effort in the future.

Google insisted to Buzzfeed that this week’s testimony wasn’t a new development. The company pointed to a March statement saying that “there is no work being undertaken on such a project” and that “team members have moved to new projects.” But Bhatia’s Tuesday statement was Google’s clearest statement yet that the company won’t be building a censored search engine in China.

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