Google employees demand the company end police contracts

Over 1,650 Google employees have signed an open letter to CEO Sundar Pichai demanding the company stop selling its technology to police forces across the US. The letter comes as protests against police brutality, spurred by the killing of George Floyd, continue to spread for the fifth straight week.

“The past weeks have shown us that addressing racism is not merely an issue of words, but of actions taken to dismantle the actual structures that perpetuate it,” the letter, written by the employee group Googlers Against Racism, reads. “While we as individuals hold difficult but necessary conversations with our family, friends and peers, we are also incredibly disappointed by our company’s response.”

“We should not be in the business of criminalizing Black existence while we chant that Black Lives Matter.”
Employees are specifically calling out Google’s ongoing Cloud contract with the Clarkstown Police Department in New York, which was sued for allegedly conducting illegal surveillance on Black Lives Matter protestors in 2015. They’re also highlighting the company’s indirect support of a sheriff’s department in Arizona tracking people who cross the US-Mexico border.

To workers, the partnerships stand in sharp contrast to the external statements of racial equity that executives like Pichai have been making. While the company has pledged $175 million to support black business owners and job seekers, and YouTube created a $100 million fund to amplify the voices of black creators, it continues to profit from police contracts. “We should not be in the business of criminalizing Black

existence while we chant that Black Lives Matter," the letter says.

The demand comes roughly two weeks after Amazon announced a one year moratorium on police using its facial recognition tool Rekognition. IBM went even further, pledging to stop developing facial recognition technology altogether, due to potential human rights abuses. So far, Google hasn't said whether it plans to continue its work with law enforcement agencies.

The letter has been circulating among Google employees since last Wednesday and has received a notable amount of support in that short time. So far, employees say they have not received an official response from company management.

In a statement, a Google spokesperson tells *The Verge* the company has no plans to cease its work with the government, law enforcement agencies, or police departments, citing Google's ethics guidelines as protections against abuse.

"We're committed to work that makes a meaningful difference to combat systemic racism, and our employees have made over 500 product suggestions in recent weeks, which we are reviewing. On this one, we were the first major company to deiced, years ago, to not make facial recognition commercial available and we have very clear AI Principles that prohibit its use or sale for surveillance," the statement reads. "We have longstanding terms of use for generally available computing platforms like Gmail, GSuite, and Google Cloud Platform, and these these products will remain available for Governments and local authorities, including police departments, to use."

***Update June 22nd, 8:55PM ET**: Added statement from Google.*

https://www.theverge.com/2020/6/22/21299736/google-employees-cut-ties-police-law-enforcement-black-lives-matter