

Call to Ban Facial Recognition Technology that amplifies racist policing



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Amnesty International has today launched a global campaign to ban the use of facial recognition systems, a form of mass surveillance that amplifies racist policing and threatens the right to protest.

The Ban the Scan campaign starts with New York City, before expanding to focus on the use of facial recognition around the world. Facial recognition systems are a form of mass surveillance that violate the right to privacy and threaten the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.

Facial recognition technology can be developed by scraping millions of images from social media profiles and driver's licenses, without people's consent. Software then runs facial analysis of images captured on CCTV, or other video surveillance, to search for potential matches against the database of scraped images.

The technology exacerbates systemic racism, as it could disproportionately impact people of colour who are already subject to discrimination and violations of their human rights by law enforcement officials. Black people are also most at risk of being misidentified by facial recognition systems.

Matt Mahmoudi, AI and Human Rights Researcher at Amnesty International, said:

"Facial recognition risks being weaponised by law enforcement against marginalised communities around the world. From New Delhi to New York, this invasive technology turns our identities against us and undermines human rights.

“New Yorkers should be able to go out about their daily lives without being tracked by facial recognition. Other major cities across the US have already banned facial recognition, and New York must do the same.”

Amnesty International is calling for a total ban on the use, development, production, and sale of facial recognition technology for mass surveillance purposes by the police and other government agencies, and calling for a ban on exports of the technology systems.

Albert Fox Cahn, Surveillance Technology Oversight Project Executive Director at the Urban Justice Centre, said: “Facial recognition is biased, broken, and antithetical to democracy. Banning facial recognition won’t just protect civil rights: it’s a matter of life and death.”

While many US cities - including Boston, Portland and San Francisco - have banned the use of facial technology by law enforcement, the New York Police Department [NYPD] continues to use the technology to intimidate and harass law abiding residents, as seen during last year’s the Black Lives Matters protests.

On 7 August 2020, dozens of NYPD police officers tried to force their way in to Derrick Ingram’s apartment in an attempted arrest. They accused Ingram, a co-founder of the social justice organisation Warriors in the Garden, of allegedly assaulting a police officer by shouting loudly into a megaphone at a June protest.

One officer was caught on camera outside his home holding a document titled ‘Facial Identification Section Informational Lead Report’, revealing that facial recognition had likely been used to inform his arrest. The document featured his face, matched to an Instagram photo.

The NYPD misinformed Ingram about his rights, threatened to break down his door, attempted to interrogate him without a lawyer, used at least one police helicopter and drones, and stationed dozens of officers in his hallway, on his fire escape, and in tactical positions in and around nearby buildings. The police left only after Ingram live-streamed the events, a large

crowd of protesters gathered, and the media began asking questions.

Police later plastered 'Wanted' posters - with photos taken without consent from his private Instagram account - around his neighbourhood. While the NYPD initially confirmed it had used facial recognition technology, it has yet to adequately disclose documentation in Ingram's legal case on the use of facial recognition technology.

Ingram said: "We're being specifically targeted with this technology because of what we're protesting, and because we're trying to deconstruct a system that the police are a part of."

Amnesty International's Ban the Scan campaign launch is accompanied by a website (banthescan.amnesty.org) where residents of New York can generate comments on the NYPD's use of facial recognition via the Public Oversight on Surveillance Technologies act. Later in the campaign, users will also be able to generate Freedom of Information requests to see where facial recognition technology is being used in their communities.

The site will be expanded in May 2021, when Amnesty Decoders - a worldwide network of digital activists - will help geolocate facial recognition-capable surveillance devices in New York to ensure residents know exactly where the technology is being used. The site also features resources to help people better protect themselves at protests against the use of facial recognition technology.

Press release distributed by Media Pigeon on behalf of Amnesty International UK, on Jan 26, 2021. For more information subscribe and [follow us](#).

Press Contacts

1. Press Office

press@amnesty.org

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Amnesty International UK

Newsroom: <https://mediapigeon.io/newsroom/amnesty-international-uk>

Website: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/>

Primary Email: press@amnesty.org

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