

Google workers want plug pulled on plan for China search

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Google workers on Tuesday posted an open letter calling on the internet giant to abort plans for "a censored search" service in China or risk

setting a dangerous precedent.

Google chief executive Sundar Pichai last month acknowledged publicly for the first time that the company is considering a search engine for China, saying it could offer "better information" to people than rival services.

Unconfirmed reports of "Project Dragonfly" had sparked protest from Google's workforce as well as groups including Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International, which is encouraging people to sign an online petition calling for its cancellation.

"Our opposition to Dragonfly is not about China: we object to technologies that aid the powerful in oppressing the vulnerable, wherever they may be," read the workers' letter, which bore the names of 90 Google employees and called for more of the firms' more than 94,000 employees to sign.

"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 search application designed to filter out censored content from results could damage all internet users' trust in Google, Amnesty International said in a post on its website on Tuesday.

"This is a watershed moment for Google," said Amnesty International researcher on technology and human rights Joe Westby.

"As the world's number one search engine, it should be fighting for an internet where information is freely accessible to everyone, not backing the Chinese government's dystopian alternative."

Speaking at a conference last month, Pichai said Google leaders "feel obliged to think hard" about China despite criticism over the possibility of cooperating with Chinese censorship.

"We are always balancing a set of values," he said, while adding that "we also follow the rule of law in every country."

Google shut down its search engine in China in 2010, refusing Beijing's requirement to censor search results.

Pichai described Project Dragonfly as an effort to learn about what Google could offer if it resumed its search operations in the world's second largest economy.

"It turns out we would be able to serve well over 99 percent of the ([search](#)) queries," he said onstage in a question-and-answer session.

"And there are many, many areas where we would provide better information than what is available."

Pichai offered no details on the status of the effort but said he was taking a "long-term view" on China.

"We don't know whether we would or could do this in China but we felt it was important to explore," he said.

"I think it's important for us given how important the market is and how many users there are."

US internet titans have long struggled with doing business in China, home of a "Great Firewall" that blocks politically sensitive content, such as the 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and The New York Times website are blocked in China, but Microsoft's Bing [search engine](#) continues to operate.

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