

Axis response to Amnesty International

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your letter. Before getting into your more specific findings, we should begin with saying that our network video solutions are used all over the world to help increase security and safety. You can find our cameras in places like airports, stadiums, shopping malls, train stations, office buildings, power plants and government buildings to protect people and property.

We understand that our solutions, like many other technologies, can be used for purposes both positive and less desirable. Privacy is ranked as one of the most important sustainability issues for Axis to work with and to report on. Because of this, we put great effort in integrating ethics into our business operations. This includes workshops for all employees to raise awareness and increase knowledge about ethical challenges in our industry. It also includes ongoing dialogue with customers, partners and other external stakeholders for us to better understand and act on ethical challenges in our market.

We respect human rights and oppose discrimination and repression in any form. This, together with our respect for applicable laws and regulations, is communicated in our internal guidelines. We only develop commercial offerings for user scenarios we believe in and clearly communicate how we intend our solutions to be used, balancing society's need to feel secure with the individuals' need for privacy. We are transparent and acknowledge that we have a responsibility when it comes to how our products are used. This includes communicating the complexity of ethical questions to our employees and business partners, for instance in workshops and in trainings, based on how we intend our offerings to be used. It also includes placing expectations on our business partners to fully support our intentions.

One concrete example of our work to mitigate privacy risks is that we have developed technologies like AXIS Live Privacy Shield, which masks the identities of individuals in live and recorded video. You can read more about protecting privacy in video surveillance on our [website](#). And we do not provide software for the kind of large-scale city surveillance installations that are common in many Chinese cities. Nor do we offer facial recognition technology.

Below you can find our comments (marked in blue) to your questions and statements.

Amnesty:

Axis Communications is repeatedly listed as a 'recommended brand' or a 'compatible third-party brand' in Chinese state surveillance procurement calls and inquiries dating from 2012 to 2019.

Axis comment:

Chinese bidding regulations allow end customers to recommend brands in public procurements. Axis has been listed as one such recommended brand or one of compatible third-party brands in the cities of Shanghai and Wuhan from 2012 to 2019. Since Axis has a global leading position in network cameras, it is natural that Axis is a recommended brand in procurements of network video cameras, even though the Chinese government in the vast majority of cases recommends Chinese manufacturers.

Amnesty:

Axis Communications supplied technology to the Skynet Upgrading and Reconstruction Project in Guilin. In 2013 Axis provided cameras to the Gui I in Municipal Public Security Bureau to expand the Guilin Police Bureau's "Social Management Video Surveillance System Construction Program 2012". The Axis cameras improved the surveillance capacities of the Skynet program by providing better video imagery.

Axis comment:

It's correct that Axis provided network cameras to the local police in Guilin city in 2013.

Amnesty:

Axis Communications technology is listed in tender awards for equipment for Skynet projects of the public security agency of Lingchuan County. These tenders were won by Guangxi Kaiyale Network Technology Co., Ltd. but involve the purchase of Axis Communications products. In 2015 the tender included the purchase of Axis cameras and an Axis city networking alarm management platform and in 2018 included the purchase of Axis cameras, camera supports, power supply modules, and a city networking alarm management platform.

Axis comment:

Axis provided products for a city surveillance project in "Lingui County", not "Lingchuan County". These products were sold by system integrator and reseller Guangxi Kaiyale. In addition to cameras, Axis supplied a video management system. The main system was provided by Keda. The installation was done around 2016. After this, Axis has no information of our products being sold to this customer.

The "city networking alarm management platform" that you refer to is probably a mistranslation. AXIS Video Management System is a standard video management system with basic functions such as live view of video, video recording and playback functions. It's not designed for or capable of large-scale surveillance. Instead it can be used for local needs, such as video surveillance of a stadium or train station.

Amnesty:

Axis Communications products are sold to the Shanghai Public Security Bureau for deployment in the Shanghai Sharp Eyes Public Safety Video Network Project in 2018. A 2018 award of tender document lists a tender of the Huangpu Branch of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau, won by Strong Digital Technology Co. Ltd. involving the purchase of Axis cameras for the Sharp Eyes project.

Axis comment:

Axis cameras were sold by a reseller to the Shanghai local police for Shanghai city surveillance projects in 2018.

Amnesty:

Axis Communications confirmed to Amnesty International that during the last two years, the company has been part of city surveillance projects in Shanghai.

Axis comment:

It is correct. Our part in these projects was to provide cameras for increased safety.

Amnesty:

Axis provided cameras to the Jingjiang Public Security Bureau for their '3.20' anti-crime campaign.

Axis comment:

This is correct. Our cameras were used in a project in 2013 for the local police in Jingjiang, mainly for traffic surveillance.

Amnesty:

The export and use of surveillance cameras do not automatically pose a significant risk to human rights. But this is different when the use of this exported technology is related to indiscriminate mass surveillance projects.

Axis comment:

Major cities all over the world use cameras to detect traffic incidents and to fight crime. As we have stated above, we put great focus on ensuring that our products are used with the highest respect for human rights, and we have developed technology with the purpose to protect privacy in video surveillance. In the vast majority of Chinese city surveillance projects, Axis is not a supplier of cameras since we don't provide the kind of technologies they want to use for large-scale surveillance, for instance facial recognition.

Amnesty:

Projects such as Skynet and Sharp Eyes amount to indiscriminate mass surveillance because of the lack of adequate human rights safeguards that are provided in Chinese legal system, as well as the data being collected and analysed without there being a reasonable suspicion against passers-bys, or individuals having an option to consent or 'opt out' from the surveillance. Exports of products for this end-use or that have public security bureaus as the end-user pose a significant risk to human rights.

Axis comment:

As we have stated above, we have a long-lasting and systematic global approach for ethically appropriate use of our network cameras. In the cases you refer to, we had no information at the time indicating that our products would be used for large-scale surveillance. Also, the cameras that Axis has exported to China are so called non-controlled cameras that are not subject to any export control. These cameras can be bought by anyone via different resellers, to be used for instance for public safety or traffic surveillance. Such cameras are used in cities all over the world. We do not provide any software for large-scale surveillance, for instance facial recognition technology.

Amnesty:

In correspondence with Amnesty International Axis Communications provided no clear answer as to whether and how they mitigate the risks to human rights. Axis Communication explains in their response that its ability to adequately monitor that their products "are used in accordance with [Axis'] ethical standards" is hindered by the size of the company and the fact that Axis uses resellers and distributors for its products. Besides the fact that the size of business operations does not excuse companies from their human rights due diligence responsibilities, the amount of Axis' distributors appears to be conceivable. The website of Axis Communications indicates zero resellers and five distributors in China.

Axis comment:

Today, Axis has almost 2,600 partners/resellers, of which around 10 percent are active partners, and 4 distributors in China. The reason for you not finding any of these partners on our website is simply because they are too many to display on our web. You're right that the size of our business doesn't matter when it comes to due diligence responsibilities. We shared that information for you to get a better picture of our value chain.

Amnesty:

Axis Communications was aware of the end-users and end-use of their products. The company communicated about security bureaus as end-users and mass surveillance projects as end-use on its website.

Axis comment:

It's correct that some of the projects you refer to were described as a "customer stories" on our website. When Axis took part in those projects, we had no information from our customers indicating that our products would be used for purposes that could risk violating human rights.

Amnesty:

Human rights due diligence obligations extend to addressing the potential human rights impacts of business partners in the supply chain. Axis Communications was unable to show how these responsibilities were fulfilled for these particular transactions.

Axis comment:

Since 2018, we have a comprehensive automatic screening process of Axis partners as well as of end customers that are known to Axis (which is the case in most larger projects). This screening includes national and international lists of sanctions and restrictions, including the UN Security Council Consolidated List. Prior to 2018, our screening was carried out manually. In addition to our screening process, we have dialogue with customers to detect any risk of our products being used in a non-intended way. As this evaluation is complex and difficult, we continue to invest in education for our employees as well as close dialogue with customers – efforts aiming at improving our ability to ensure that our products are used in solutions in an ethical way.

Amnesty:

Axis Communication mentions that it “clearly communicates” with buyers and resellers the need to use products “in accordance with [Axis’] intentions”. These measures are insufficient. Communicating intentions and engaging in dialogue with end-users and/or resellers are inadequate measures to prevent and mitigate the potential human rights impacts in a context where there is a significant risk the technologies will contribute to violations.

Axis Communications did not fulfil its due diligence responsibilities under the UNGPs for the above-mentioned business activities.

Axis comment:

There have been several cases where we have decided not to take part in projects where we have seen a risk of violation of human rights. In the cases you refer to, we made the decision at the time that these were appropriate use cases for our solutions, based on the information we received from the customers. In situations where our screening process gives us a reason to believe that our solutions will risk violating human rights, we carry out further investigations to decide if we should decline being part of the project.

Amnesty:

Prior to the above described business operations, what steps did Axis Communications take to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for the potential human rights impacts of these business operations?

Axis comment:

Prior to 2018, our screening was carried out manually. We also had close dialogue with customers to detect any risk of our products being used in a non-intended way. We have several times declined taking part in projects where we have had reason to believe human rights could be violated.

Amnesty:

Are you, or have you been, aware of any further cases of similar instances of exports to central actors in the Chinese mass surveillance apparatus or to research institutions (directly) under the control of these actors?

Axis comment:

We provide network video cameras to help make cities safer and more environmentally friendly to live in all over the world, including China. In large projects we always carry out a screening of the end user and the suggested use case to ensure that our products are used in accordance with our intentions.

Amnesty:

In light of the findings we have now brought to your attention, what steps do you intend to take to prevent further business operations that form a significant risk for human rights?

Axis comment:

First and foremost, Amnesty's investigation in this matter highlights the complexity when it comes to technology development and balancing society's and peoples' need to feel secure with the individuals' need for privacy. Technology that is developed to increase safety can also be used for purposes that have a negative effect on privacy. As a developer of network cameras, we acknowledge our responsibility. Export control mechanisms, automatic screening of customers, education of employees, close dialogue with customers and many other things we do have helped us come a long way. But of course, there is more to be done. We will continue to improve in this area, by for example, becoming even better in our communication with employees and partners, as well as informing end customers about the intent behind our products and that we oppose any violation of human rights. We will continually become better at evaluating customer use cases from a human rights perspective.

We also strongly believe in transparency. Our annual sustainability report covers all material sustainability aspects of our business. Our commitment to UN Global Compact and the Copenhagen Letter also put a responsibility on us to act in accordance with the principles stated in those frameworks. We are confident that our network cameras can contribute to increased safety and security for people and society when used appropriately. However, we recognize that we must continuously work hard when it comes to finding the right balance between security and privacy concerns.