

June 21, 2018

John W. Mina
City of Orlando Chief of Police
Orlando City Hall
400 S. Orange Avenue
Orlando, FL 32801

Police Chief John Mina,

As you know, Amazon has developed a new facial recognition system, called Rekognition,¹ which it seeks to provide to governments and law enforcement organizations. The system boasts “detection and recognition of text in images, real-time face recognition across tens of millions of faces, and detection of up to 100 faces in challenging crowded photos.”² Rekognition is marketed as giving law enforcement the ability to track “persons of interest” across cameras, within a video, and by creating alerts.³

However, documents obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union have shown that Rekognition can be easily used to violate civil liberties and civil rights.⁴ The software has the potential of being used for discriminatory immigration enforcement, monitoring individuals who attend protests and engage in other non-violent activities, or disproportionately surveilling minority communities and residents who have committed no crimes.

Despite these civil liberties concerns, the Orlando Police Department (OPD) has partnered with Amazon and has at least five Rekognition cameras at headquarters and has already deployed three additional Rekognition cameras in downtown Orlando.⁵ We know first-hand the time and energy the OPD invests into making connections with community members across this city. This is why OPD’s trial of technology with the potential to indiscriminately surveil Orlando streets is troubling. The use of Rekognition will undermine the hard work the Department does to build trust across all communities in Orlando with programs such as Orlando Speaks.⁶

¹ "Amazon Rekognition," Amazon, , <https://aws.amazon.com/rekognition/>.

² Ranju Das, "Amazon Rekognition Announces Real-Time Face Recognition, Support for Recognition of Text in Image, and Improved Face Detection," Amazon, November 21, 2017, , <https://aws.amazon.com/blogs/machine-learning/amazon-rekognition-announces-real-time-face-recognition-support-for-recognition-of-text-in-image-and-improved-face-detection/>.

³ Amazon Web Services Korea. Image & Video Rekognition based on AWS - Ranju Das, GM of Amazon Rekognition, AWS [Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUzuJc-xBEE&feature=youtu.be&t=30m38s>.

⁴ "Re: Public Records Request Related to the Amazon Rekognition Facial Recognition Service." Nancy G. Abudu to Orlando Police Department. January 18, 2018. https://www.aclunc.org/docs/20180522_ARD.pdf.

⁵ Ryan Gillespie and Gal Tziperman Lotan, "Downtown Orlando Has 3 Amazon Facial-recognition Cameras, Police Chief Says – Contrary to Earlier Claim," Orlando Sentinel, May 24, 2018, <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/breaking-news/os-amazon-orlando-police-cameras-downtown-20180524-story.html>.

⁶ "Orlando Speaks," City of Orlando Public Works, , <http://www.cityoforlando.net/oca/orlando-speaks/>.

The context of increased ICE raids,⁷ FBI targeting of Black Lives Matter activists,⁸ the securitizing of communities through Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives,⁹ racial disparities in the use of police force,¹⁰ and the President's Muslim Ban has led to increased levels of distrust both within our community and across the nation. The mere use of Rekognition, or similar public surveillance and facial recognition systems, will exacerbate that distrust, and will promote suspicion and public self-censorship in the Orlando metro area. Communities that already feel under attack by government and law enforcement will be less likely to engage with the OPD, even when they are victims of crime.

While many civil society, religious, and advocacy organizations in Orlando have a positive relationship with both the police department and the mayor's office, the use of facial recognition by law enforcement in public areas would undermine these relationships. For the above reasons, the undersigned organizations ask that you reconsider your trial of Amazon's Rekognition software and commit to forgo the use of public surveillance and facial recognition technology as a tool of law enforcement.

Sincerely,

ACLU Foundation of Florida
Arab American Community Center of Florida
Arab American Institute
Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc.
FL Immigrant Coalition
Mi Familia Vota
NeJame Law
Orange County Classroom Teachers Association
Organize Florida
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
United Faculty of Florida at UCF

⁷ Associated Press, "Federal Government Numbers Show That Immigrant Arrests Are up While Border Arrests Are down," NBC News, December 5, 2017, , <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/ice-deportation-arrests-soar-under-trump-administration-drop-border-arrests-n826596>.

⁸ Beydoun, Khaled A., and Justin Hansford. "The F.B.I.'s Dangerous Crackdown on 'Black Identity Extremists'." The New York Times. November 15, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/15/opinion/black-identity-extremism-fbi-trump.html>.

⁹ "AAI Issue Brief: Surveillance," Arab American Institute, http://www.aaiusa.org/aa_i_issue_brief_surveillance.

¹⁰ German Lopez, "There Are Huge Racial Disparities in How US Police Use Force," Vox, May 6, 2017, , <https://www.vox.com/cards/police-brutality-shootings-us/us-police-racism>.