

Microsoft criticized for investing in Israeli firm spying on Palestinians



Ramallah, August 5 (RHC)-- Human rights groups have criticized American tech giant Microsoft for funding an Israeli facial recognition company, which is spying on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

Microsoft's M12 venture capital arm announced in June that it participated in a \$74 million round in funding for the Israeli company AnyVision, whose face-recognition technology is used by the Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank. Other European and American investors also joined the funding round.

Haaretz published a report in mid-July that said the Israeli army was using AnyVision's technology at checkpoints on the way into Israel and across a network of cameras within the West Bank.

Referring to Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Amos Toh, a senior researcher on artificial intelligence at New York-based Human Rights Watch, told the American magazine, *Forbes*, earlier this month that the use of such technology "in a very fraught political context" could be problematic.

"I think it's incumbent on Microsoft to really look at what that means for the human rights risk associated with the investment in a company that's providing this technology to an occupying power," Toh said,

adding: “It’s not just privacy risk but a privacy risk associated with a minority group that has suffered repression and persecution for a long time. There are special considerations of discrimination there.”

According to Forbes, Microsoft was also censured by cybersecurity entrepreneur Matt Suiche, who described the investment in AnyVision as “scandalous.” The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) also condemned the investment.

Shankar Narayan, the director of the Technology and Liberty Project at the ACLU, told Forbes he had met with Microsoft officials last year and at the time the company seemed to be open to the idea of holding back the spread of the facial recognition technology.

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