

Request for commitment: making [town / city name] a space of dignity in the digital age

Dear [town, city or municipality official / Mayor / local or national politician etc],

My name is [XXXXXX] and I have lived in [town/city name] for [XX] years. You are a trusted figure for the people of [town/city name]. I am writing to you to ask you to ensure that our public spaces and the people that live, work and visit here are treated with respect. We should not be the victims of unfair and intrusive biometric surveillance.

Our shared public spaces are areas where we can all feel connected to the diverse, vibrant and open character of [town/city name]. The digital age has brought great benefits to our public spaces. Local and municipal leaders like you have a unique chance to be at the forefront of innovative, human-centric urban development to build together with their people a digital future that truly benefits us all.

However, the digital age can also threaten our dignity and our public spaces. One of the biggest threats is the use of biometric technologies in ways that lead to mass surveillance, such as facial recognition in public spaces.

Such forms of surveillance, linked to our faces and bodies, stand in the way of everyone's right to speak out, organise, vote, access healthcare, or love freely, without fear of judgement or repercussion. It can make us lose confidence to express who we are and the things that matter to us.

Mass surveillance is illegal in Europe. Yet across the continent, we have seen deployments of facial recognition and other biometric mass surveillance technologies that have a severe chilling effect on us. They do this by tracking and analysing anyone and everyone that enters into publicly-accessible spaces. This treats us all as potential criminal suspects simply for going about our daily lives.

People cannot live in dignity if we are always watched, labeled and analysed. We would never accept someone following each of us constantly, noting down everywhere that we go and everything that we do, and making judgments on us based on how we look or how we act. We do not accept this being done through technology either - nor do we believe that you will accept it being done to us.

Can we rely on you to raise your voice publicly against biometric mass surveillance?

I urge you to stand up for our rights and freedoms, and for a [town/city name] that is dedicated to its communities and democratic values.

Across Europe, over 60 organisations and 62.500 people have already spoken out against biometric mass surveillance as part of the Reclaim Your Face campaign (<https://reclaimyourface.eu>). In October 2021, the European Parliament voted to support our call for a ban on biometric mass surveillance. The demand has even been echoed by the most senior human rights official in the world, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as by the EU's top data protection authorities.

Will you join them and live up to the trust that the people of [town/city name] have in you?

Yours,

[name]