

A former Google employee, Jack Poulson, who had been a senior researcher at the company until resigning in August, wrote that he was fearful of Google's ambitions in China, in a letter to US lawmakers.

His letter alleges Google's work on a Chinese product - codenamed Dragonfly - would aid Beijing's efforts to censor and monitor its citizens online.

A report by news site *The Intercept* last week alleged Google had demanded employees delete an internal memo that discussed the plans.

Google said: "We've been investing for many years to help Chinese users, from developing Android, through mobile apps such as Google Translate and Files Go, and our developer tools."

It added: "We are not close to launching a search product in China."

Aiding Chinese regime

Poulson's letter was submitted to the Senate Commerce Committee, which held a hearing recently in Washington DC.

The topic of the hearing was "*examining safeguards for consumer data privacy*".

Google's chief privacy officer, Keith Enright, faced questions from Senator Ted Cruz about the company's intentions to launch a new search engine in China.

Mr Enright confirmed that Project Dragonfly existed but added that a product was not close to launch.

Representatives from AT&T, Apple, Twitter and Amazon also took part in the hearing, most of which centred on whether there was a need for a new federal data privacy law.

The letter alleges Google is working on a prototype interface designed to allow a Chinese joint venture company to search for a given user's search queries based on their phone number. Among others, it contained the English term "human rights", the Mandarin terms for 'student protest' and 'Nobel prize', and large numbers of phrases involving 'Xi Jinping' and other members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Censorship blacklist

Also a censorship blacklist developed in accordance with Chinese government demands.

Explicit code to ensure only Chinese government-approved air quality data would be returned in response to Chinese users' search.

Mr Poulson said the sum of these efforts amounted to a "catastrophic failure" of Google's internal policies on privacy - as well as going against assurances made to the US trade regulator regarding data protection measures in its products.

"Dragonfly is part of a broad pattern of unaccountable decision making across the tech industry," Mr Poulson wrote.

Mr Poulson's letter follows a joint statement signed by hundreds of current Google employees against Dragonfly last month.