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### IBIA Responds to UK Facial Recognition Controversy

In the wake of recent BBC news regarding the use of facial recognition by police forces in England and Wales, the International Biometrics & Identification Association (IBIA) sees a need to highlight important considerations on the important and legitimate use of facial recognition biometrics in law enforcement deployments.

IBIA advocates for privacy by design and policy so that the acceptance of biometric technology can be frictionless and beneficial. It is essential that agencies all around the world exercise proper operational procedure to garner trust from the public at large, especially those entrusted with the protection of its citizens.

“Any agency or organization deploying new technology that can impact the public’s privacy needs to exercise rigorous transparency so as to foster a healthy amount of trust,” says Elke Oberg, Marketing Manager, Cognitec Systems, referring to the BBC report that of the nearly 18 million headshots in a facial recognition database used by police forces in the United Kingdom, hundreds of thousands belong to innocent people.

The public understanding of facial recognition is still largely nascent. To betray public trust through practices such as this can be harmful to legitimate efforts to use biometric technology to protect society against criminals and terrorists.

A follow up article by the BBC, which examines the effectiveness of applying facial biometrics to CCTV data, cites the example of the 2011 London riot investigation where the application of facial recognition to security camera footage produced only one positive match.

Given the nature and quality of the underlying CCTV crime video footage, this is not surprising. “The best deployments of facial recognition technology rely on images being taken in a controlled setting,” says Oberg. “In law enforcement, these can be photos taken in the field via mobile devices, or mugshots taken during the booking process. The quality of CCTV images is simply not high enough to expect much success from current facial recognition technology.”

“Though the angles captured by CCTV often don’t yield the full face of a suspect, the usefulness of a partial match should not be underestimated,” says Jim Albers, Senior Vice President, Government Operations, MorphoTrust (Safran) adds, “Just like partial fingerprints, an incomplete picture of a face can still help law enforcement officers successfully identify subjects.”

IBIA strongly supports the responsible use of facial recognition in law enforcement in protecting public safety and positive discourse and open communication to ensure its effective and responsible use.