

Google branded as 'evil' by lawmaker

LONDON - A senior British lawmaker on Thursday (16 May) described Google as "evil" and accused the US internet company of unethically avoiding paying vast amounts of tax in Britain.



Margaret Hodge, the chairman of parliament's influential Public Accounts Committee, made the comments as she questioned the company's vice-president Matt Brittin.

But the Google executive, making his second appearance before the committee, denied trying to disguise the way the firm operated in order to minimise its tax bill in Britain.

The row centres on Google's insistence that all the firm's advertising in Europe is sold through its offices in Ireland.

Hodge accused Google of what she said was "devious, calculated and, in my view, unethical behaviour by deliberately manipulating its business to avoid paying a fair share of tax.

"You do do evil"

"You are a company that says you do no evil, and I think that you do do evil in that you use smoke and mirrors to avoid paying tax," she said.

Hodge said lawmakers had seen evidence from whistleblowers that the "entire trading process and sales process took place in the UK" and not in Ireland as Google claimed.

Brittin said he stood by comments he made when he appeared before the committee last year.

"We comply fully with the laws that are set down by politicians. Tax is not a matter of choice, tax is a matter of following the law," he said.

He said Google's Dublin operation was its largest operation in Europe with 3,000 staff and that all advertisers in Europe contract through the firm in Ireland.

A series of global companies have come under pressure in Britain in recent months over the amount of tax they pay.

Online retailer Amazon on Wednesday (15 May) came under fire over its British tax status after official figures revealed it paid only £2.4m in tax on UK sales of £4.2bn last year.

The British government has made tackling tax avoidance one of the priorities for the G8 this year.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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