



CONCEPT NOTE
TAASH COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK [TCN]:
VIRTUAL SANCTUARY FOR IRANIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

BACKGROUND/JUSTIFICATION:

Among the lessons learned from the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia is the value and affect of unencumbered access to information and communications technology (ISCT), including but not limited to independent information and social networking across multiple platforms, such as mobile, internet, web-based, and satellite broadcast.

The current ICT available in and outside Iran remain largely silod platforms (i.e. lacking technology that facilitates convergence of information and interactivity). In general, the younger generation that support reform and actively oppose the regime from within have not been able to effectively access newer technologies or have been dissuaded from participating in communications programs operated by less legitimate traditional opposition parties from outside. Most these platforms are either state sponsored, like VOA and BBC, or are exile opposition websites and channels out of Los Angeles with a political agenda and low tolerance for alternative viewpoints. Most have failed to stay up to date with the language, trends, mentality, culture, and sociopolitical situation of the today Iran. The partisan nature of the older generation opposition groups further limit their ability to reach the younger demographic.

The traditional opposition groups based outside Iran do not maintain the legitimacy, technical capability, or political synergies to collaborate with the new generation of civil society organizations in Iran. Moreover, none of the existing available communication platforms effectively leverage digital content and networking by combining interactive mobile, internet, web, and satellite based secure communications vehicles.

The Democracy Council, in response to requests from prominent activists and organizations representing the Green Movement and other emerging sectors of civil society to collaboratively develop and deploy a “virtual sanctuary” for reform – minded Iranians to communicate, inform, network, organize, and advocate with each other and the larger Iranian society as well as the outside world. Currently, a significant amount of digital networking and content is produced by organizations affiliated with the Green Movement and independent civil society organizations (CSOs) in and outside Iran. However, distribution and leveraging f such content is limited by: 1. Technology available to CSOs, 2. Unaccommodating regional distribution platforms, internet, web and satellite based, 3. Lack of resources or skills to circumvent censorship and security regimes, 4. Lack of shared practices and resources. TCN will provide solutions to these four issues. In addition, CSOs and activists will merge their communications’ operations into the TCN platform to facilitate immediate

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and leveraged impact in Iran and the Persian-speaking world. For example, TCN will leverage the databases, mailing lists, and informal and formal marketing and advocacy operations through the single branded portal. These individual CSOs and independent producers would continue to manage their networking and marketing operations through the larger platform.

Taash Communications Network (TCN), developed by the Democracy Council (the Council) in collaboration with the leading representatives from the **Green Movement**, will help to meet this demand by providing the first robust, multilevel (internet, web, mobile, and satellite broadcast) communications channel for regionally produced progressive (uncensored) content and communications. TCN will operate as branded technological distribution portal (platform) made available to independent content and communications produced by and for progressive and reform – minded Iranians.

TCN will be the Facebook, twitter, NPR, and C-Span of Persian media under one roof with a focus on social and political issues concerning the Iranian public inside the country, in the region, and abroad. It will be a uniting factor that is demand-driven (commercially sustainable).

TCN will not produce content but provide technical services for the benefit of Iranian civil society.

SUMMARY PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

Developed in coordination with prominent civil society figures in Iran, including representatives of the Green Movement, TCN would serve as a secure, robust, multilevel communications platform by which civil society members can deliver Persian content through:

- Interactive Website
- Advanced online (e.g. social networking) and mobile tools to secure unfettered access, availability, and interactivity to the content.
- Branded Persian Language video broadcast platform

TCN would be owned by the nonprofit TCN Foundation registered in a European country, such as Denmark. The foundation's mission would be to make available an independent, branded Persian-language communications platform that is available for high-quality user-generated programming. TCN will serve as an independent distribution platform without production activities and distributing largely "homegrown" content.

TCN would not produce or fund any content itself. Content will be broadly through independently produced user-generated local and regional programming. These contents will be supplemented by the purchase of Persian rights to acquisition of online or TV entertainment programming, with progressive themes from Hollywood to Bollywood. TCN will be an independently-owned multi layer open platform for progressive, reform-minded or "edgy" programming without censorship.

A number of civil society organizations and other groups, such as prominent figures in the **Green Movement** have already expressed an interest and are committed in producing programming and content for distribution by many different TCN platforms.

For example, TCN has received written expressions of support and pledges to produce content from a broad spectrum of independent individuals and organizations, such as:

- Mohsen Sazegara, a leading dissident and one of the original founders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard
- Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan
- Shideh Rezaei, co-founder of Iran-Rooyan
- Ahmad Batebi, Human Rights Activists
- Mohammad Sadeghi Esfahlani, founder and administrator of *Mir Hossein Mousavi's and Zahra Rahnavard's Supporters' Network* on Facebook,

This informative, educational, and entertaining medium will actively engage, inform, inspire, and link Iranians without censorship. To meet the demand of the target market, foreign films, generally illegal in Iran for containing progressive themes, would be acquired and dubbed to augment the original programming. Such content would be distributed and made accessible through multiple mediums: a secure website that contains social networking applications, and utilizes mobile and circumvention tools, and a robust satellite broadcast channel.

TCN would work collaboratively with local and regional CSO's to design and deploy a strategic audience acquisition program leveraging new technologies and viral techniques. Each independent producer would manage their own networking and advocacy component as a back end to their own regular internet or TV programming. TCN provides the technical background to ensure high penetration, distribution, and secure accessibility.

Market research shows that TCN can be financially self-sustaining after three years.

TECHNICAL OPERATIONS:

Website Integration: TCN's main focus would be its robust and secure, but yet user friendly and dial-up compatible website. Due to frequent jamming problems inside Iran, many young activists and users are turning to the internet for content. As a result, TCN will maintain a very active online presence – serving as a virtual sanctuary to further distribute and reintroduce censored content. The TCN website will be a state of the art all inclusive program – a virtual sanctuary for content solicitation, delivery, and dissemination (see attached detailed security program). The content on the website will be downloadable and compressed for the slow bandwidth inside Iran. Other features will include secure links to other sites, small size audio only files of the programs for transfer via Bluetooth inside Iran, and a “blog of blogs” which aggregate and reintroduce censored blogs and news.

TCN will serve as a proprietary social media platform linked to secure applications such as Twitter, Facebook, and Orkut which will be maintained by the content producers. As an interactive channel, users will be able to upload user-generated content in the form of text, audio, or video gathered by secure FTP drop-boxes and secondary research. Each submission will be vetted and its accuracy confirmed before being broadcast. A digital voice recorder on the website could also record audience comments and feedback. These comments and feedback are also broadcast on a special program and are used to modify and improve the shows.

To facilitate interaction and networking in a secure environment, the website will utilize and distribute circumvention tools to bypass government filters. Downloadable tools, techniques and procedures such as: VPNs, Proxy servers, Anonymizers, IP Hiding tools, Voice to Text, Micro-blogging via SMS, JAVA applications, bulk SMS services, and third party anti-filter software, such as Psiphon, and Peacefire, will be available on the website. Each time any of the products are utilized, it will bring the user first to TCN's website and then their website of choice. The initial distribution of anticensorship products will happen through trusted networks and vetted mailing lists. In return, each user who is given the software will refer one trusted friend for product download and the practice will continue. With this method, in a very short period of time a vast network of trusted users will be built. All these users will be connected to the website the moment they open their software copy to bypass the filtering in Iran.

Online Security: In order to sustain TCN as a virtual strategic communications hub, we will add various layers of security and robustness to assure confidentiality, integrity and availability of the platform and the content it supports. The website will help ensure these core precepts of information security are being directed to a select group of end users dedicated to fostering an open interaction.

These steps will include the following life-cycle and risk management steps: Confidentiality: a) We are extending our platform to a trusted network of end users; b) Discreet communication will be facilitated through the use of encrypted proxy servers and Haystack software. Integrity: a) Analytics of cyber forensics end user logs will ensure the integrity and allow for continuing vetting; b) By extending these programs through our secure servers we will be able to authenticate users who will serve as local distributors, thereby providing a multiplier effect.

Mobile: Due to the increasing use of mobile devices inside Iran, a mobile application for iPhone and Android will be developed for TCN to maximize audience interaction and utilize all existing platforms. By utilizing these interactive applications, users will be able to read the latest news and listen to the most updated content on the website. Specially compressed files of high profile and important programs and interviews will also be distributed by these applications. The mobile apps will allow the users to rank each story and also send user-generated content in different formats to TCN's secure servers. TCN's Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube accounts will also be linked to these applications. Users of the TCN app will have the ability to securely chat with each other inside the country.

Satellite Broadcast Channel: Affiliations with various satellite channel operators will allow TCN immediate limited access to existing satellite broadcast channels with a footprint covering Iran and the larger MENA region. TCN operations would be marketed and users driven from satellite broadcasts and selected content would be distributed via the affiliated satellite networks.

The second phase of TCN operations would be a satellite channel that will be at the disposal of all TCN contributors. The W3A satellite, owned by Eutelsat operates at position 7E, a comparatively higher orbit that makes it less vulnerable to interference. Other channels on W3A include: BBC Persian, Voice of America Persian, Channel One TV and Simay-Azadi Iran National TV. The uplink/transmission facility will be located in a secure European location, such as the one currently used by the Democracy Council in Slovenia.

The programming will be delivered via a minimum 3Mbps ASI MPEG 2 signal generated at a playout facility in Culver City (Los Angeles), CA. The signal will ride from our Culver City TOC on GlobeCast's Backbone Network (GBN) to a GlobeCast point of presence (PoP) in Paris. GlobeCast will provision a local circuit loop to bring the signal to Telehouse 2 (24/7 operational team on site), also in Paris, where it will be interconnected to a third party network to Rambouillet, France. In Rambouillet, the signal will be inserted into a multiplexed platform on Eutelsat W3A located at 7.0° east as free to air signal. Transponder A1 has a downlink frequency of 10,721 MHz and has a European – Middle East focused beam. Neighboring Channels on W3A at 7.0° east, TP A1, Europe B beam are: BBC Persia, Simay-Azadi Iran National TV, Rang-A-Rang TV, Voice of America Persia, Pars TV, GunAZ TV, and Persian 1.

Marketing: TCN's marketing and messaging program is twofold. First, the groups producing the programming and other civil society organizations would engage in a massive viral marketing campaign drawing upon their own networks. Second, TCN would deploy a technology-based strategic marketing campaign through email, satellite broadcast, instant messaging, online advertising, and SMS.

Email Marketing: We estimate that TCN would be launched with a secondary distribution network of over three million email addresses in Iran. In addition to benefitting from the marketing efforts of those producing original programming, various civil society actors have already pledged to distribute marketing materials through their existing networks. Examples of such multipliers who would be available include: VOA-PNN hosts, Arash Aalaei and Hamed Behravan, and Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRA). In addition to organizations inside and outside of Iran, Voice of America's Persian News Network (PNN) sends out Proxy and anti filter website addresses to its list serve on a daily and weekly basis. TCN would be able to access this list serve, which contains more than 160,000 Email addresses.

Persian Language Satellite Channel Marketing: Approximately twenty million listeners tune in to VOA PNN every day. Hamed Behravan and Arash Aalaei will publicize TCN on their daily and weekly shows. An opportunity to promote TCN on other opposition channels also exists.

Instant Message Marketing: One of the most popular Internet activities inside Iran is online chatting. By utilizing various instant messaging services such as Yahoo Messenger, AIM, ICQ, MSN Messenger, Facebook IM, Skype IM, and G-chat, TCN will have a constant presence in the most popular chat-rooms.

Online Ad Based Marketing: Managers of such popular websites as Iranian.com and Gooya.com indicated that they would allow TCN banner advertisements and hyper links.

SMS Marketing: By utilizing bulk SMS servers, information about TCN and its proxies can be widely distributed. Civil society actors and users would be encouraged to forward the texts to those in their databases.

CONTENT & PROGRAMMING:

Programming on TCN will consist of progressive user-generated original programming as well as foreign content dubbed or translated into Persian. All original content will be produced by and for Iranians and provided free of cost to TCN. Civil society actors expressing support for TCN and an interest in producing programs, include but are not limited to; representatives of the Green Movement, hosts of existing VOA-PNN shows, student activists, Mohsen Sazegara, MirHossein Mousavi and Zahra Rahnavard’s Facebook Administrator, Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, Zirzamin.se, Abdolkarim Soroosh, Akbar Ganji, Sanaz Asadi, Iran Rooyan (women's right group), Nazanin AfshinJam, well-known and respected women's right activist, and Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRA). We anticipate that additional programs and content will be produced once the target audience is aware that independent uncensored distribution platforms are available.

The following is a sample of programs from independent producers who have already expressed an interest in producing content for distribution on TCN.

<u>WORKING TITLE</u>	<u>SYNOPSIS</u>
<i>How to bypass filtering</i>	An in depth explanation of methods used in bypassing internet filtering inside Iran. This program which will be available in multiple formats such as audio, video, and script, will teach the Iranian user how to securely surf the web and bypass the filtering inside Iran.
<i>What is Social Media</i>	This program will teach the Iranian user how to use the latest social media tools to gain information and spread any crucial news from inside the country. It will teach the Iranian user how to build a network of trusted activist in the region and how to take steps to assure anonymity. This educational program will be available in multiple formats and on multiple platforms.

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<i>Profiles: Daily Life in Iran</i>	Weekly magazine show featuring examples of challenges facing average Iranians, such as: drugs, prostitution, crime, economy, etc. This program will be available in multiple formats such as online magazine, mobile applications, audio only, and a weekly video shows.
<i>YouTube Compilation</i>	Weekly hosted show of edited YouTube clips with progressive themes. These clips will be available on TCN's YouTube channel and its mobile application. The videos will be specifically compressed for the Iranian user with low bandwidth.
<i>Green Movement Today</i>	Weekly talk show hosted by prominent green movement activists and leaders providing information and highlighting activities of the Green Movement. The content will be available in multiple formats for different distribution platforms.
<i>Corruption Exposed</i>	Weekly magazine-style format of exposés on corruption in Iran.
<i>Minority in Iran</i>	Different minority organizations and ethnic groups will produce shows covering their own disadvantages inside Iran. These shows will cover problems unique to a minority group. This section of TCN will bring minority voices, demands, problems, and concerns under one roof in an organized manner.
<i>University Student Show</i>	Weekly talk and magazine show covering issues of interest to 18-25 year olds and highlighting what problems they face inside Iran. It will be an interactive medium for the students to discuss progressive ideas in secure chat-rooms and via secure mobile applications.
<i>Mohsen Sazegara</i>	As a well-known leader of the Green Movement, Sazegara has already established his daily YouTube show. Within this show he gives updates on the Green Movement and encourages them to continue their civil resistance and push for reform.
<i>Where is My Vote</i>	In many cities all around the world including New York, Washington DC, Boston, Hamburg, and Paris, multiple non-united organizations that are supporting the Green Movement are functioning under the name of "Where is My Vote?" These

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	<p>organizations have their own unique activity in support of the Green Movement. Occasionally all of these groups hold unified gatherings around the world in support of the movement inside Iran. The daily show will be produced by one of these groups per day.</p>
<i>Iran Civil Society online</i>	<p>Tavaana.org is a website dedicated in promoting democracy and freedom for the Iranian people, led by Mariam Memarsadeghi in Washington DC. The TV version of the website will have the same goal.</p>
<i>Zirzamin show</i>	<p>Zirzamin.se is the biggest Iranian underground music hub that is based in Sweden. Many Iranian artists inside Iran, who never get to pass the regime's Islamic guidance and culture censorship, send their music to this website hoping that they get heard. Zirzamin will not only promote these anonymous Iranian artists, but also features prominent Iranian musicians.</p>
<i>Science and Tech show</i>	<p>A fast paced visually pleasing technology show consisting of several segments that will bring the latest to the Iranian audience.</p>
<i>Dr. Soroosh show</i>	<p>Dr. Soroosh is one of the most well-known philosophers in modern Iran. He is a relentless advocate of separation of religion and state. It was because of his lectures at Tehran university and writings about a secular government that he had to flee Iran.</p>
<i>The Ganji show</i>	<p>One of the most famous Iranian dissidents, Mr. Ganji spent many years in Evin prison. He is also an advocate of separation of religion and state. As a pioneer in civil disobedience, Mr. Ganji promotes not violent political movements.</p>
<i>Addiction show</i>	<p>Addiction is by far Iran's most alarming social dilemma. This weekly show will highlight the drug addiction problem inside Iran and what the government is doing to fight it.</p>
<i>Sanaz Metal</i>	<p>Hard Rock is one of the most popular genres of music inside Iran. Sanaz Metal is a well-known hard rock promoter in the US who hosts numerous TV shows.</p>
<i>Anti propaganda</i>	<p>The Iranian government utilizes many mediums to spread propaganda against the west and especially the USA. This show will do a fact check on the entire claim in Iranian media. Claims by Iranian officials will also face TCN "facto-meter." It will be available on all TCN platforms.</p>
<i>Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRA)</i>	<p>HRA is one of the most active organizations inside</p>

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	Iran, documenting and reporting human rights violation cases in the country. Many well-known dissidents are active members of this organization. HRA's representatives regularly present their documents on international gatherings. All documents would be available for download and would have a special section on TCN's mobile application.
<i>Open Mic</i>	Open Mic will feature emerging Iranian scholars from around the world. This program will give a voice to those who believe they have something to say and are trying to change the world, one step at a time. All voices can gather in chatrooms and paltalks to securely exchange ideas. All conversations will be available in various digital formats for download or streaming.
<i>International community and the Green Movement</i>	This weekly show will feature the international activities in support of the Green Movement.

TCN will seek to obtain the Persian-language licenses and dub foreign programming, particularly popular Arab and Western produced entertainment, such as films, talk shows, documentaries, novels, and sociopolitical textbooks, training manuals, and articles. These contents will contain progressive or stimulating themes not widely available within Iran, such as social issues, women's rights, the environment, tolerance, etc.

ORGANIZATIONAL DESCRIPTION:

The Democracy Council (DC), a 501c3 organization, was founded in 1999 on the belief that freedom of information, democracy and human rights are fundamental components of stable societies. The Council, A133 compliant, is managed by an independent Board of Directors and is audited by Bandari Beach Lim & Cleland, LLP.

The Council enjoys a global reputation for successfully implementing programming in post-conflict situations and in closed societies. For example, the Council was primarily responsible for bringing over \$700million of secreted assets back to the treasury of the Palestinian Authority. The Council has been the primary conduit for policy-makers to the internal leadership and groups which broadly comprise opposition elements and civil society organizations throughout the Middle East. Current programming aims to encourage the growth of civil society activism and reform through providing internal activists with the tools and platforms capable of offering citizens with alternative, independent sources of news and information. Ongoing activities include transfer of technology; training and mentoring of local CSOs; development and management of satellite broadcast content, programming, and broadcast technology; development and mentoring of a number of online news and information outlets, as well as providing an emergency fund for activists.

The Council has implemented programming to support online social networking in Iran and currently maintains a strong network of internal activists, including the Green Movement, whose leaders have requested direct support from DC to develop its communications strategy and online capabilities. DC

project staff includes the producers and hosts of VOA Persian News Network Technology shows with a focus on digital activism, and internet & mobile access. Their Facebook page attracts 500,000 hits per month inside Iran. In collaboration with VOA PNN, DC staff developed a Persian iPhone and Android application.

Key Democracy Council Project Staff:

Owen Kirby, *Project Director* and the Democracy Council Washington D.C. office director was a senior governance adviser for the Department of State in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan and as a senior adviser and director of political programs in the Department of State's Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative during the Bush administration.

Michael Mylrea, *Director of Cybersecurity*: Has worked as cyber security and technology consultant at Good Harbor Consulting, U.S. Cyber Consequences Unit, Harvard Berkman Center, MIT Lincoln Lab, Office of the Secretary of Defense-Middle East Policy. He speaks Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew and Portuguese. He was a Fulbright Scholar; has two B.As from the University of Wisconsin; and an M.A. from The Fletcher School at Tufts.

Dr. Larry Press, *ICT Application Director*: A long-term consultant to the Democracy Council and is a Professor of Information Systems at CSU Dominguez Hills. Dr. Pres, one of the foremost experts on internet access in developing countries, having conducted studies on Internet in Russia, Cuba, Chile, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Singapore, and Vietnam. He taught at USC and worked for Rand Corp. & IBM.

James Prince, *Project Advisor* and President of the Democracy Council.

Hamed Behravan, *Iran Program Manager*: Has launched numerous progressive and youth targeting programs for voice of America Persian News Network and currently produces and hosts a popular tech show on information access and new media. He frequently trains his audience on use of social media, and digital tools to bypass censorship. He initiated and had a major role in the design of the first two way Persian mobile news application. Hamed has written several manuals on how to safely access and distribute information inside Iran.

Mary Salih, *Director of Satellite Operations* draws upon fifteen years of international satellite broadcast experience including serving as Vice President for Globecast. She speaks Dari, Turkish, and English.