

May 20, 2013

Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1601 Willow Road
Menlo Park, California 94025

Re: The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Facebook, Inc.

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

United Against Nuclear Iran (“UANI”) is writing to express its concern about the Facebook (www.facebook.com/www.Khamenei.ir) account of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. As you are surely aware, the Iranian regime uses this account to promote its propaganda even while it bans its own citizens from accessing Facebook. Moreover, in the aftermath of the fraudulent 2009 presidential elections, the regime severely punished citizens that accessed sites such as Facebook to mobilize protest and opposition activities. UANI is therefore calling on Facebook, Inc. to take immediate action to suspend the Facebook account of Ayatollah Khamenei ahead of the June 14, 2013 presidential elections in Iran. UANI believes that Facebook should not allow the Iranian regime to access its platform given the fact that the regime severely restricts and punishes its own citizens' use of Facebook, and when freedom of expression is so severely repressed in Iran.

The Iranian regime is one of the world’s worst violators of human rights, brutally suppressing its own citizens and denying them basic liberties, including freedom of expression. The Iranian regime’s repressive practices include blocking citizens’ access to Facebook. If you recall, following the disputed June 2009 presidential elections in Iran, Facebook was a vital tool used by Iranians to voice their dissatisfaction and organize rallies in protest. (*Reuters*, “[Internet ayatollah: Iran’s supreme leader ‘likes’ Facebook](#),” 12/17/2012) In the post-election crackdown, Iranian authorities blocked access to Facebook and prosecuted a number of protesters who used Facebook for organizing purposes. (*Freedom House*, “[Freedom on the Net 2012: Iran](#)”) While some Iranians are able to circumvent the ban on Facebook through the use of Virtual Private Networks (“VPNs”), their freedom of action is greatly restricted because “some of the most affordable VPNs on the Iranian market are supplied by the Revolutionary Guard itself, and provide no protection whatsoever.” (*NPR*, “[Iran’s Leader Embraces Facebook; Fellow Iranians Are Blocked](#),” 2/4/2013) In short, Facebook is largely inaccessible to Iranians and those Iranians that do have access to Facebook become a target of regime authorities.

The risks of using Facebook and other social media platforms in Iran have intensified since the Iranian regime established its “FATA” cyber-police unit in January 2011. The purpose of FATA is to “take on anti-revolutionary and dissident groups who used Internet-based social networks in 2009 to trigger protests against the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.” (AFP, “[Iran launches cyber crime unit: police](#),” 1/23/2011) As a result, Iranians risk arrest, torture, and death for using Facebook, particularly when such use is determined to be political or “un-Islamic.” For example, in May 2011, Baha'i activist Houshang Fanian was sentenced to an additional year of prison for “disseminating anti-state propaganda on Facebook.” (Radio Farda, “[In Iran, Beware Of New Facebook 'Friends'](#),” 6/8/2011) Iran’s online spying is also used to silence cyber dissidents abroad. In May 2012, Iranian authorities imprisoned a man in the notorious Evin Prison for the Facebook activities of his son, who was studying abroad in the Netherlands. (CNN, “[Son: Iranian dad arrested for my Facebook posts](#),” 7/15/2012; *The Guardian*, “[Iranian student says his father 'abducted' by officials](#),” 6/28/2012) In the most notorious case, FATA tortured to death Iranian blogger Sattar Beheshti in November 2012 for criticizing the Iranian government on Facebook. (*The Guardian*, “[Iran accused of torturing blogger to death](#),” 11/8/2012)

These human rights violations and repression of digital freedom clearly run counter to Facebook’s own stated values. In an interview with Diane Sawyer, you stated, “...a few generations ago, people didn't have a way to share information and express their opinions efficiently to a lot of people. But now they do. Right now, with social networks and other tools on the Internet, all of these 500 million people have a way to say what they're thinking and have their voice be heard.” (ABC News, “[Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg Talks to Diane Sawyer as Website Gets 500-Millionth Member](#),” 7/21/2010) This is clearly not the case in Iran. The only voice that can be heard legally and without risk of punishment in Iran is that of the Iranian regime.

Furthermore, you should be aware that Ayatollah Khamenei’s official Facebook page appears to violate Facebook’s Terms of Use, specifically regarding its policy on safety. Specifically, Facebook’s Terms of Use state that users “will not post content that: is hate speech, threatening, or pornographic; incites violence; or contains nudity or graphic or gratuitous violence.” (www.Facebook.com/legal/terms) The page for Ayatollah Khamenei often displays offensive, anti-Western posts. For example, on May 1, 2013, the page displayed an image of Ayatollah Khamenei alongside the statement, “You (the U.S. government) are the symbol of evil! This is you who wages war in the world, plunders the nations...” (www.facebook.com/www.Khamenei.ir, post on 5/1/2013)

The Iranian regime has also openly demonized Facebook as an evil tool of the West. In an Iranian military parade in 2012, for example, a military vehicle bore a billboard with the Facebook logo and a slogan that read, “Facebook - the West's weapon in its soft war against Iran.” (BBC News, “[Iran’s supreme leader ‘likes’ Facebook despite ban](#),” 12/19/2012)



Considering such statements and the fact that Facebook remains illegal and inaccessible for Iranian citizens, it is clearly hypocritical for the Iranian regime to utilize Facebook to spread its anti-Western and hateful propaganda. Facebook should set a moral precedent and immediately suspend Ayatollah Khamenei's account.

UANI recognizes that it is not Facebook's intent to provide a tool for the Iranian regime to spread its propaganda. UANI also acknowledges that Facebook does not control the firewall and censorship system that blocks and monitors Iranian access to the site. However, given that Facebook is illegal to Iranians and its usage has led to the unjust imprisonment, torture, and death of many activists, UANI believes that the only responsible course of action is for Facebook to suspend Ayatollah Khamenei's Facebook account.

Unfortunately, the Iranian regime has already begun its pre-election crackdown this month by disrupting and drastically slowing down the Internet, which has neutralized the proxy servers, anti-filtering software, and VPNs normally used by Iranians to circumvent regime control. Human rights groups fear this could be a "trial run for unplugging the Internet" during the upcoming election, or even "be a prelude for switching to the domestic intranet Iran has been building for the past two years, a strategy to cut World Wide Web access." (*The Wall Street Journal*, "[Iran Cracks Down Ahead of Election](#)," 5/8/2013) At the same time, some of the Ayatollah's favored presidential candidates, including Tehran mayor Mohammad Baqir Ghalibaf (<https://www.facebook.com/President.IRAN>) and the regime's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili (<https://www.facebook.com/Dr.Saeed.Jalili>) have recently created Facebook pages to promote their respective candidacies.

The time to take principled action is now. The Iranian regime is imperiling the long-term stability of the region, the security of the international community, and the human rights of its own citizens. It is incumbent on all of us, private citizens, governments and corporations alike, to take concrete steps to oppose this ongoing and dangerous threat. By suspending the official Facebook account of Ayatollah Khamenei and other senior regime officials, Facebook will be sending a powerful message to the Iranian regime that it does not tolerate the regime's denial of digital freedom for the Iranian people and that all Iranian citizens, not just the Ayatollah, should enjoy the freedom to speak up and express themselves.

Please let us hear from you by May 27, 2013 regarding the status of the Facebook account of Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mark Wallace', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ambassador Mark D. Wallace

cc: The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States

The Honorable Joseph Biden
Vice President of the United States

The Honorable John Kerry
United States Secretary of State

The Honorable Robert Menendez
Chairman, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

The Honorable Bob Corker
Ranking Member, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

The Honorable Ed Royce
Chairman, United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs

The Honorable Eliot Engel
Ranking Member, United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs

The Honorable Tim Johnson
Chairman, United States Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

The Honorable Michael Crapo
Ranking Member, United States Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
Chairman, United States House Committee on Financial Services

The Honorable Maxine Waters
Ranking Member, United States House Committee on Financial Services

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Steve Israel
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Tara Sonenshine
Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, United States
Department of State

The Honorable David S. Cohen
Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, United States
Department of the Treasury

The Honorable Adam Szubin
Director, Office of Foreign Assets Control

The Honorable Mary Jo White
Chairman, Securities and Exchange Commission

Sheryl K. Sandberg
Chief Operating Officer and Director, Facebook, Inc.

David A. Ebersman
Chief Financial Officer, Facebook, Inc.

David B. Fischer
Vice President, Business and Marketing Partnerships, Facebook, Inc.

Mike Schroepfer
Chief Technology Officer and Vice President of Engineering, Facebook, Inc.

Theodore W. Ulyot
Vice President, General Counsel, and Secretary, Facebook, Inc.

Marc L. Andreessen
Director, Facebook, Inc.

Erskine B. Bowles
Director, Facebook, Inc.

James W. Breyer
Director, Facebook, Inc.

Susan D. Desmond-Hellmann
Director, Facebook, Inc.

Donald E. Graham
Director, Facebook, Inc.

Reed Hastings
Director, Facebook, Inc.

Peter A. Thiel
Director, Facebook, Inc.