

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 28, 2022

Mark Zuckerberg  
Chief Executive Officer  
Meta Platforms, Inc.  
1 Hacker Way  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

We write to express our concern over Meta's removal of social media posts raising awareness of ongoing protests in Iran even though the posts complied with your company's Community Standards guidelines. We urge Meta to better ensure its content moderation practices are not suppressing Iranians' online speech and request additional information on how it reviews Farsi language content.

Iran is entering its seventh week of anti-government protests following the arrest and subsequent death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini. News of Amini's death spread rapidly on social media, allowing the United States and the global community—including the Iranian diaspora—to witness the bravery of protestors standing up for their freedoms. The #MahsaAmini hashtag campaign has been shared by millions, accompanied by videos of Iranian women cutting their hair in solidarity and crowds chanting "Women, Life, Freedom." First-hand accounts have also exposed the regime's violent and extreme crackdown on citizens, documenting human rights abuses that Iran tries to cover up.

To suppress dissent and disrupt the protests, the Iranian government has imposed intensifying internet restrictions on its people. On September 21, 2022, Iran restricted access to Instagram and WhatsApp—two of the most widely-used social media platforms among its citizens. The regime is also rolling out periodic internet shutdowns that disrupt the network layer, making it difficult for Iranians to circumvent through VPNs, proxy servers, and other tools. Without a free internet, the Iranian people lack an effective means of countering government disinformation, holding their leaders accountable, and amplifying their message with the global community.

In the face of these actions, social media platforms must recognize their elevated responsibility to protect Iranians' online speech and their free exercise of human rights. Although Meta has publicly pledged to keep messaging services available to Iranians, there have been reports that it has erroneously taken down social media posts condemning the Iranian government or raising awareness of the protests. Manoto TV, which broadcasts coverage of the protests in Farsi to an international audience, has seen a large number of its videos removed from Instagram as spam—a move that Meta admitted was an enforcement mistake. Other users have seen important protest footage taken down for including violence or graphic imagery, despite Meta's policy of offering a "newsworthiness allowance" if a content's visibility is in the public interest.

Meta's inconsistent application of its content moderation policies has surfaced long-standing concerns about how the company reviews Farsi language content. Digital rights activists, including Meta's own independent Oversight Board, have criticized the company's algorithmic content moderation tools for lacking a sufficient consideration for different dialects and cultural contexts. This has contributed to incorrect violations of the Community Standards, particularly for political speech; since Meta has Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on its list of "Dangerous Organizations and Individuals", even content condemning the security forces has been automatically removed from its platforms. Meta has failed to make appropriate investments in the human review process to rectify these issues and is instead reliant on outsourcing content moderation to third parties.

While we commend Meta's work to improve community input in content moderation, we also recognize that these efforts are not enough to support the millions of Iranians who use its platforms. Meta's Oversight Board was designed to intervene in some of the company's most controversial and complex content moderation issues, reviewing content take-downs and offering opportunities for public comment; however, while the Board's findings have led to Meta reversing its original decision in some instances, the body only decided twenty cases in its first year (out of over one million user appeals it received). On platforms like WhatsApp, Meta has also neglected to translate its privacy policy, terms of service, and other community guidelines to Farsi, further falling short of its commitment to inclusion and accessibility.

In an era when people and governments are increasingly critical of social media's impact on society, platforms like Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp must serve as tools for accountability by enabling people to organize, document abuses, and speak truth to power. The current haphazard enforcement of Meta's Community Standards complements the efforts of Iran's authoritarian regime to distort the truth and cover up its crimes. We urge Meta to review how it is moderating social media posts regarding the Iran protests, including but not limited to Farsi language content, and to implement policies to encourage coverage of the demonstrations and the state's violent response.

To improve public transparency and understanding, we request that Meta provide responses to the following questions:

1. How many Farsi-speaking content moderators does Meta employ, either directly or through its contractors?
2. What artificial intelligence tools does Meta use to support content moderation of Farsi language content? What metrics does Meta use to evaluate the accuracy of such tools, and how do tools for Farsi language content compare to tools for English and other languages in terms of accuracy?
3. Has Meta organized an internal Task Force (or similar mechanism) to coordinate its response to the Iran protests? How does Meta decide when to convene such a Task Force? And if no Task Force exists for the current Iranian protests, in what ways does the situation fall short of Meta's bar for setting one up?
4. Has Meta recently solicited the input of the Iranian community concerning its content moderation policies? If so, how does it plan to incorporate this feedback into its practices?

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



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Katie Porter  
Member of Congress



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Tom Malinowski  
Member of Congress



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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



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Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress



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Maria Elvira Salazar  
Member of Congress



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Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress



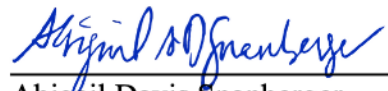
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Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress



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Deborah K. Ross  
Member of Congress



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Abigail Davis Spanberger  
Member of Congress



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Mike Levin  
Member of Congress



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Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress



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Josh Gottheimer  
Member of Congress



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Stephanie Bice  
Member of Congress



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Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress



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Norma J. Torres  
Member of Congress