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April 12, 2023

Ms. Yolanda Lopez, Acting Director
Voice of America
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Ms. Lopez,

I am writing to express my shock and dismay at Voice of America (“VOA”) Persian Language Division’s hour-long special entitled the “Islamic Republic’s Lobby in the United States,” which was broadcast on April 6, 2023. I serve as pro bono counsel to Siamak Namazi, one of the American hostages in Iran, who has been detained in Tehran’s notorious Evin Prison since mid-October 2015.

In your broadcast, following an explanation of the term lobbying, there is a three-minute report where my client, Mr. Namazi, is accused of being a co-founder of the National Iranian American Council (“NIAC”) with Trita Parsi. Accompanying the image displayed below, which features my client’s photograph on the right, ominous music plays and the narrator alone – speaking for VOA and not presenting the views of any third party – says “Siamak Namazi and Trita Parsi, in an attempt to bridge the Islamic Republic and the West, co-founded the first lobbying agency for the Islamic Republic called NIAC.”



Not only is the allegation that my client Siamak Namazi co-founded NIAC false and defamatory, but he has *never* been a part of *any* lobby for the Iranian regime in Washington or anywhere else in the world. By publishing these false allegations against my client, you have

also callously put him at immediate risk of being further tortured by the Iranian regime having asserted these views as the official position of the United States. These baseless claims could also negatively impact efforts to bring home Mr. Namazi and the other American hostages in Iran. In short, VOA's special could cause Mr. Namazi, his family, and others irreparable harm.

This broadcast was neither an accidental, casual, or careless undertaking by the VOA Persian Division. In fact, according to VOA journalist and the lead presenter, Siamak Dehghanpour, the entire Division is implicated from top to bottom:



Siamak Dehghanpour

@sdehghanpour

...

این برنامه حاصل یک تلاش حرفه‌ای گروهی و آغاز راه پاسخگو کردن افراد و نهادهایی است که برای جمهوری اسلامی در آمریکا لابی می‌کنند. هدف ما صرفا شفاف‌سازی است و به وظیفه رسانه‌ای مان عمل می‌کنیم. در این مسیر به کمک و راهنمایی همه احتیاج داریم.

Translated from Persian by Google

This program is the result of a professional group effort and the beginning of the way to hold accountable the people and institutions that lobby for the Islamic Republic in America. Our goal is only clarification and we fulfill our media duty. In this way, we need everyone's help and guidance.



Siamak Dehghanpour

@sdehghanpour · Apr 6

Islamic Republic's Lobby in America

@WalidPhares @ScottGreytak @RahaBahreini @LawdanBazargan

@HAMirahmadi @kshahrooz @IrandoostRozita @hasanpix @bahman_saghaei

@KambizTavanaUS youtu.be/-UPXnxiM1WM

12:51 PM · Apr 8, 2023 · 2,579 Views

I demand that you immediately remove the image and mention of Siamak Namazi from this program and that Voice of America issue a public apology to Mr. Namazi to correct the record and make clear that VOA has no evidence or information that he co-founded NIAC or that he has ever been a part of a lobby for the Iranian regime. While it appears the story has been taken down, at least temporarily, this is far from sufficient. In addition, VOA must publish this correction through every channel through which the story was spread, including requiring all VOA journalists and freelancers who sent it out to publish the retraction and correction on their social media accounts. And VOA must rapidly investigate and hold publicly accountable every staff member who was involved in developing and broadcasting this story.¹

¹ These are not the only extraordinary allegations in this news broadcast. VOA also claimed that the New York Times promoted the Iranian nuclear deal because its reporters are on the payroll of Iran and are paid to travel to Iran

First, I will explain who Mr. Namazi is and our response to the specific allegations. And second, I will detail how this broadcast flagrantly violated the Mission and Journalistic Code of Voice of America.

I. Background on Siamak Namazi and Response to Allegations

Siamak Namazi is a 51-year-old Iranian-American dual national and businessman. In 2005-2006, he had fellowships at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars and at the National Endowment for Democracy. In 2007, he was recognized as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum. In 2013, he conducted a study to look at the impact of global sanctions on humanitarian assistance being provided to Iran and published an oped in the *New York Times* advocating for changes to be made to sanctions policies to enable more lifesaving medicine and medical equipment to reach the people of Iran.² He traveled to Iran in July 2015 for a weekend visit to see family and to attend services for a loved one who had passed away, at which time the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (“IRGC”) confiscated his passports and subjected him to months of regular interrogations before arresting him on October 13, 2015. Tragically, Mr. Namazi was the only recognized American hostage left behind when the Iranian nuclear deal entered into force on January 16, 2016.

Despite promises to the Namazi family by then Secretary of State John Kerry that Mr. Namazi would be released within weeks, instead in mid-February, his then 79-year-old father Baquer Namazi was induced to return to Iran and then himself arrested and imprisoned in Evin Prison. On October 18, 2016, Siamak Namazi and Baquer Namazi were both summarily convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison for “collaboration with a hostile government,” referring to the United States of America, “against the Islamic Republic of Iran.” On August 22, 2017, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued a judgment on their cases finding that both Namazis must be immediately released. It further added:

The Working Group notes that the present case follows a pattern that is evident to the Working Group in the way that those affiliated with different pro-democratic institutions of the West . . . are treated in Iran. The Working Group considers that the source has established a *prima facie* case that the detention of the Namazis was motivated by a discriminatory factor, namely, their status as dual Iranian-U.S. nationals and their links with various organisations located outside Iran.³

While Baquer Namazi was finally able to leave Iran last year, Siamak remains an American hostage in Evin Prison.

It is important to emphasize that during the first two years of Siamak Namazi’s detention, he was held in Ward 2A of Evin Prison, by the IRGC. He was held in solitary confinement in a

and deliver speeches. And the broadcast also identified Jason Rezaian, a former American hostage in Iran and journalist at the *Washington Post* of being part of the Iran lobby in Washington along with his wife.

² Siamak Namazi, *Blocking Medicine to Iran*, NEW YORK TIMES, Mar. 1, 2013, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/02/opinion/blocking-medicine-to-iran.html?_r=0.

³ Opinion No. 49/2017, *Siamak Namazi and Mohammed Baquer Namazi v. Islamic Republic of Iran*, UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Adopted Aug. 22, 2017, available at <https://www.perseus-strategies.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Namazi-Letter-WGAD-Source-Opinion-49-2017.pdf> (emphasis added).

small cell where he slept on a concrete floor and had no toilet. He was interrogated daily, repeatedly beaten and tased, and subjected to other physical and psychological torture. One of the topics on which he was regularly interrogated was his purported ties to NIAC. Given he had no ties to NIAC and had no useful responses for the IRGC, he was repeatedly tortured to try and get further information from him. The IRGC's erroneous belief regarding this connection emanated from a handful of false and defamatory reports from others who had previously made that claim, which VOA has now resurrected eight years later. This has put Mr. Namazi at immediate risk of further torture in Iran because this broadcast claims to represent the views of the U.S. Government.

But VOA and its journalists cannot not simply rely on reports of others that Mr. Namazi co-founded NIAC. It had its own independent obligation, before making such claims, to investigate those allegations and the evidence for itself. Yet VOA instead decided to willfully libel Mr. Namazi. I do not make that accusation lightly, but this is my considered conclusion based on the facts and evidence in this specific case.

First, Mr. Namazi did not "co-found" NIAC nor did he provide any material support to the organization. Specifically, he was not listed in the 2002 Articles of Incorporation as a Board Member or having any role with the organization. He never served on NIAC's Board of Directors, on any advisory group, or as a paid or unpaid member of its staff. While Mr. Namazi considered Mr. Parsi a friend and discussed many issues with him over the years, he was simply not involved with NIAC.

Now Mr. Namazi had previously, in November 1999, co-published and presented a paper at a conference in Cyprus with Mr. Parsi entitled "Iran-Americans: The Bridge Between Two Nations."⁴ But this paper argued that Iranian-Americans could help "mend the bridge between Iran and the U.S." It affirmed that dual nationals could change views on both sides. And it concluded by explaining that "it is important to clarify that support for a rational approach to Iran is not the same thing as support for the regime in Iran."⁵ But there is literally nothing in this paper that recommends or suggests the creation of a lobby *for* the Iranian regime. Mr. Parsi founded NIAC independently some three years later with no connection to Mr. Namazi. Yet despite the clarity of this paper itself, the VOA broadcast demonstrates its journalists: (1) had read the paper, which is available online; (2) deliberately chose to misrepresent its language as "evidence" the two men planned together and sought to create a regime lobbying organization, when the paper only argued for greater ties between peoples; and (3) intentionally omitted that NIAC was created *three years after the paper's publication*, with no connection to Mr. Namazi himself.

This willful misrepresentation is clear because VOA invoked the *direct language* from the paper about the need to "build bridges" and the importance of "bridging" the relationship between Iran and the United States. Yet VOA clearly knew the entire paper was about the role Iranian-Americans could play in improving U.S.-Iran relations in both directions and that it says nothing about creating some nefarious Iranian regime lobbying group in the U.S. to advance the

⁴ This paper is *available at* <https://iraniansforum.com/Document/iranamericans.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.*

regime's interests. On the contrary it advocates for a rational approach on Iran, which it emphasizes does not mean supporting the Iranian regime.

Second, there is a enormous amount of information available online to refute the allegation that Mr. Namazi was ever part of any Iran lobby in Washington or, according to VOA journalist Siamak Dehghanpour in his tweet, has somehow remained a part of a pro-regime lobbying group while having spent almost eight years as a hostage of the Iranian regime.⁶ Indeed, since 2015, three U.S. Presidents, multiple Secretaries of State, and countless Members of Congress, and media outlets have publicly called for the release of all the Americans wrongly imprisoned by Iran, including Siamak Namazi by name.⁷

But it wasn't just senior U.S. officials repeatedly demanding Mr. Namazi's release, it was also Voice of America *in a series of its own editorials, across both Democrat and Republican Administrations*. Importantly, every VOA editorial online comes with a clear label in a large blue font that says:

**| Reflecting the Views of the U.S.
Government as Broadcast on The
Voice of America**

- In a VOA editorial in March 2021 entitled "Wrongful Detention of Americans in Iran," U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan called the unjust detention of American citizens in Iran a "complete and utter outrage," and U.S. Special Presidential Envoy on Hostage Affairs Roger Carstens was reported having tweeted "Today is another sad day for @FreetheNamazis as this American family continues to be separated. For five years, Iran has held U.S. citizen Baquer Namazi while his son Siamak is wrongfully held in Evin Prison . . ."⁸
- In a VOA editorial in November 2020 entitled "Victims of the Iranian Regime" reported that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had "called on Iran to release wrongfully detained U.S. citizens Morad Tahbaz and Siamak and Baquer Namazi, as well as to account for the fate of FBI agent Robert Levinson who was abducted 13 years ago."⁹

⁶ Mr. Dehghanpour in his tweet explains VOA is beginning an effort to "hold accountable the people and institutions that lobby [present tense] for the Islamic Republic in America." His statement makes clear he is referring to everyone named in the broadcast, without exception. And yet the program presents literally zero evidence to explain how VOA concluded Mr. Namazi previously lobbied for the Iranian regime, let alone how since his return to Tehran in July 2015 and his imprisonment since October 2015, he has managed to run a Washington lobbying organization for the Islamic Republic.

⁷ This public link on my law firm website provides a very small sample of public information about Siamak Namazi and his father's cases: <https://www.perseus-strategies.com/siamak-and-baquer-namazi-iran/>

⁸ Editorial, *Wrongful Detention of Americans in Iran*, VOICE OF AMERICA, Mar. 6, 2021, available at <https://editorials.voa.gov/a/wrongful-detention-of-americans-in-iran/5803431.html>.

⁹ Editorial, *Release U.S. Citizens Unjustly Held in Iran*, VOICE OF AMERICA, Nov. 17, 2020, available at <https://editorials.voa.gov/a/victims-of-the-iranian-regime/5666065.html>.

- Before that, a VOA editorial in February 2018 entitled “Release U.S. Citizens Unjustly Held in Iran,” reported that White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders reiterated the Trump Administration’s call for the “unconditional release of all unjustly detained and missing United States citizens in Iran,’ including Baquer and Siamak Namazi, as well as graduate student Xiyue Wang and former FBI agent Robert Levinson”¹⁰
- And in July 2017, in a VOA editorial entitled “Detaining U.S. Citizens and Other Foreign Nationals,” it was reported that “Iran has continued to engage in malign activity, including the arrest and imprisonment of U.S. citizens and foreign nationals. In 2016, Iranian American businessman Siamak Namazi was sentenced to 10 years in prison for espionage; his eighty-year-old Iranian American father, Baquer, who had traveled to Iran to help his son after his arrest, was also sentenced to ten years for the same crime.”

According to VOA itself, its role among others is to “present the policies of the U.S. clearly and effectively.”¹¹ Here, VOA journalist Mr. Dehghanpour presented – with no reference to any third-party source – the unequivocal conclusion Mr. Namazi was a co-founder of NIAC, which was described as the first lobbying arm of the Iranian regime. Given VOA’s operating principles, any ordinary viewer of this broadcast would reasonably conclude this is the official position of the U.S. Government.

In addition, this broadcast makes clear the U.S. Government no longer considers Mr. Namazi to be unlawfully or wrongfully detained by Iran. This is the only logical conclusion one can reach because unlike the four prior VOA editorials, this special made no mention of Mr. Namazi’s ongoing imprisonment in Tehran, it omitted that he had previously been determined by the State Department as being held unlawfully or wrongfully, and there was no call for his immediate release.

In short, VOA, with its \$250 million budget, and its Persian Division, which is estimated to reach approximately 16 million people weekly, has unilaterally rewritten how the U.S. Government now views Mr. Namazi. As a result, this broadcast raises four important legal questions:

1. What legal authority does the U.S. Agency for Global Media (“USAGM”) and VOA have to overrule the determination by President Biden that securing the release of the wrongfully detained Americans in Iran, including Siamak Namazi, is a “top priority” for the Biden Administration?
2. What legal authority does USAGM and VOA have to reverse the determination that is exclusively made by the Secretary of State under Section 302(a) Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act that there was credible information that Mr. Namazi’s detention is unlawful or wrongful?

¹⁰ Editorial, *Victims of the Iranian Regime*, VOICE OF AMERICA, Feb. 16, 2018, available at <https://editorials.voa.gov/a/release-us-citizens-unjustly-held-iran/4257377.html>.

¹¹ Its operating principles are available at this link: <https://www.insidevoa.com/p/5831.html>.

3. What legal authority does VOA’s Persian Division in broadcasting a “news” story have to overrule VOA editorials, which are “reflecting the views of the U.S. Government as broadcast on Voice of America”?
4. What legal authority does USAGM, VOA, and its Persian Division have to render and make public specific conclusions of fact and law that a specific person is a lobbyist for a foreign government and that a specific organization is a lobbying arm of that foreign government when under U.S. law, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Foreign Agents Registration Act (“FARA”) Unit of the Counterintelligence and Export Control Section (“CES”) in the National Security Division has exclusive responsibility for the administration and enforcement of FARA?

I am unaware of any legal authority for USAGM and VOA to have acted in this manner. As far as I can tell, the way Mr. Namazi was described in this special by USAGM, VOA, and VOA’s Persian Division was *ultra vires*.

Beyond all these issues, as noted earlier, the United Nations in 2017 issued a legal judgment finding Mr. Namazi was illegally detained in violation of international law and it demanded his immediate and unconditional release. The UN explained Mr. Namazi’s detention was linked to his “pro-democracy,” activities and issued no finding of fact or law suggesting or implying in any way that he was a lobbyist for the Iranian regime. Indeed, I am aware of no credible allegation online that presents any evidence to support such an allegation. Even if VOA saw the false and defamatory *Daily Beast* article about the Namazis from September 2015, which focused on the allegation that Mr. Namazi co-founded NIAC, there was a detailed article investigating these claims published by independent journalists in the *Huffington Post* in December 2015. It began by pointing out that this hit piece on the Namazis was authored by an anonymous author and then directly addressed the claims of Mr. Namazi’s connection to NIAC. Specifically, the journalists Jessica Schulberg and Michael Calderone reported Mr. Namazi’s response:

“I have never been an officer, board member, adviser, or even so much as an intern of NIAC . . . My only links to NIAC are a one-time annual membership of \$50, purchased on the web site in 2005 and never renewed, and my personal friendship with its founder.”¹²

They further report that in relation to their story that the anonymous author “did not respond to an email HuffPost sent to the account he used to contact Namazi and other people he mentioned in the *Daily Beast* story,” which only reaffirmed the abject lack of transparency and accountability for this person to make unsubstantiated allegations.

And third, in its broadcast, VOA failed to explain how Mr. Namazi could today be a part of an Iranian regime lobby in Washington when since July 2015, he has been in Iran, and since October 2015, he has been imprisoned in Tehran’s Evin Prison. VOA intentionally chose not to provide Mr. Namazi’s unequivocal reply to these allegations of his alleged role with NIAC

¹² The article is available at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/siamak-namazi-iran-daily-beast_n_56706adbe4b0e292150f8781.

dating back to 2009 and repeated in 2015. I say intentionally because not only is this quotation widely available online but VOA also chose not to reach out to me for comment, despite knowing I have served as Mr. Namazi's pro bono counsel since late 2016 and having interviewed me many times before.

II. Application of VOA's Mission and Journalistic Code to the Investigation and Publication of This Broadcast

While as a general matter, I have long respected VOA and participated in more than a hundred interviews with both its English and foreign-language services over my career, I must begin by emphasizing that this broadcast was not just done in a sloppy or shoddy manner, but it was intentionally-designed propaganda. The key questions are why, who specifically made the decision to commission and publish this broadcast, and who was involved in making it. As a starting point for my analysis, a common definition of propaganda is: "Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view."

Next I will turn to looking at VOA's Principles and Journalistic Code. According to VOA, the following principles govern your broadcasts:

1. VOA will serve as a consistently **reliable** and **authoritative** source of **news**. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a **balanced and comprehensive projection of significant** American thought and **institutions**.
3. VOA will **present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively**, and will also present **responsible discussions and opinion** on these policies.¹³

Now consider all the ways in which these principles were violated in accusing Mr. Namazi of co-founding NIAC, which is described as the lobbying arm of the Iranian regime.

- **"News"** – How is making this claim news? This accusation was first made in 2009 and made again in 2015. All questions had long been asked and answered. There hasn't been a single news story published since 2009 that has presented any evidence that contradicts Mr. Namazi's description of his utter lack of a role with NIAC. And yet, almost eight years since 2015, how is making this allegation again not only "news," but worthy of leading off a one-hour special?
- **"Reliable"** and **"Authoritative"** – VOA's allegation against Mr. Namazi is neither reliable nor authoritative. VOA was simply re-reporting allegations last made over eight years ago, with literally not a single new fact being reported in its broadcast. It intentionally omitted Mr. Namazi's prior response and no one at VOA contacted me for one either. How can any allegation made against a person be reliable and authoritative when the news story omits that

¹³ Emphasis added. These principles are *available at* this link: <https://www.insidevoa.com/p/5831.html>.

person's clear prior response and when the news organization intentionally decides to not provide that person's lawyer an opportunity to respond?

- **“Balanced and Comprehensive Projection of Significant American Institutions”** – Not only was this allegation presented as propaganda, omitting contravening evidence and a response from counsel, but VOA has taken a position that is **unequivocally and indisputably the opposite position** of the United States as stated by President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Tony Blinken, and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, let alone numerous Members of Congress. In 15 trips to Washington and the literally more than 500 meetings with U.S. officials that I have had with Babak Namazi, Siamak Namazi's brother, every official, whether Republican, Democrat, or Independent, has taken the very same position – that Siamak Namazi is wrongly detained by the Iranian regime and must be immediately and unconditionally released. Beyond all that, President Obama, President Trump, and President Biden have all adopted that same position regarding Mr. Namazi's innocence and actively worked to secure his release along with that of other American hostages.
- **“Present the Policies of the United States Clearly and Effectively”** – What makes this broadcast so incredibly damaging and devastating is that it is first time where *a U.S. Government official or agency* has accused Mr. Namazi of being part of a lobby for the Iranian regime, and it was paid for by taxes paid by the Namazi family and all Americans. Such a broadcast not only resurrected this long-discarded allegation that directly resulted in Mr. Namazi being tortured in the past, but it has now shown the Iranian regime that there are differing views within the U.S. Government about him, when that clearly doesn't reflect the position of President Biden, Secretary Blinken, or National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.
- **“Responsible Discussions and Opinion”** – This broadcast was propaganda and was grossly irresponsible, which was only reinforced by the other bizarre allegations made against the *New York Times* and Jason Rezaian at the *Washington Post*.

According to the Journalistic Code, “all staff who report, manage, edit, and prepare content **must** follow these principles.” The staff at VOA who developed and published this broadcast violated these principles across these many different categories. The words below in italics are direct quotes from the VOA Journalistic Code.¹⁴

Sourcing and Attribution

- *Proper attribution is a fundamental element of good journalism. When VOA quotes information from news stories, editorials/opinion pieces, or social media posts, it is mandatory to credit the media organization, NGO or other outlet. Not including that information can open VOA to possible claims of copyright infringement and/or plagiarism.*

In making the allegation Mr. Namazi co-founded NIAC with Mr. Parsi, VOA provided *no source* to support this allegation – it was simply presented as the position of VOA directly by Mr. Dehghanpour. While in this case there was no credible source to cite to in support of this

¹⁴ *Id.* Emphasis added.

proposition, VOA did not even bother citing to a bogus source on the Internet. The failure to provide a citation for this claim violated the *mandatory* requirement for VOA to have credited the source on which it based its allegation. In addition, by failing to cite to any source, VOA denied its viewers the ability to assess the credibility of the source themselves. In short, VOA presented this information as indisputable fact, when it knew it had no evidence to support its allegation.

- ***Plagiarism is illegal and unethical and strikes at the very heart of our journalistic mission. It can cost the individual and VOA its credibility and reputation, and will not be tolerated. We do not present others' work as our own.***

Again, while there was no credible source to support the allegation Mr. Namazi co-founded NIAC with Mr. Parsi, VOA still appropriated and used the bogus work of others as its own.

Accuracy and Balance

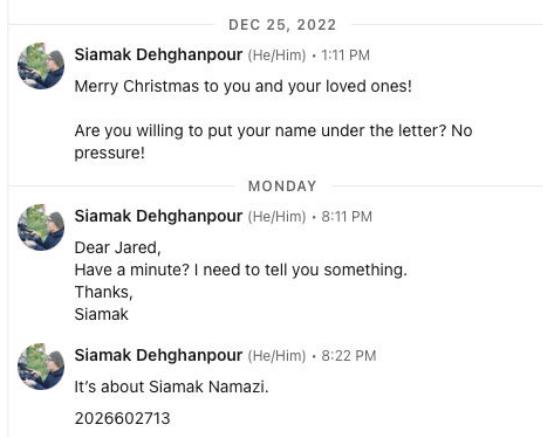
- ***Accuracy and balance are VOA's highest priorities. It is essential that accuracy takes priority over speed in our reporting, programming and online/social media presence. VOA has a legal obligation to present a comprehensive, reliable and unbiased description of events. VOA corrects errors or omissions in its reports, broadcasts, websites and social media sites at the earliest opportunity.***

VOA's broadcast lacked balance and accuracy. The allegation VOA presented against Mr. Namazi was simply false and defamatory and not accurate. And it wasn't balanced both because VOA failed to present Mr. Namazi's publicly available refutation of this allegation dating back to 2009 and repeated in 2015 and because those involved chose not to ask me as his lawyer for a response to this allegation.

- ***Whenever VOA reports a charge or accusation made by an individual or a group against another, or presents one side of a controversial issue, a response and/or balancing information should be included in the initial report. If the response cannot be obtained by deadline, or the subject of the charge declines to comment that will be included in the initial VOA report. The response and/or balancing material will be broadcast and posted online as soon as it is available.***

This principle required that in alleging Mr. Namazi co-founded NIAC – which VOA claimed was part of a lobby for Iran – VOA present his publicly-available response and give me the opportunity as his lawyer to reply on his behalf. I received no email or telephone call from VOA despite information for both ways of reaching me being online. Indeed, I have further proof that the Mr. Dehghanpour on this broadcast both knew how to reach me and intentionally chose not to do so. Specifically, you can see below the full uninterrupted stream of LinkedIn messages that we had exchanged going back to December 2022. Mr. Dehghanpour reached out to me last Christmas asking me to sign on to a letter advocating for the release of several Iranian health workers who had been imprisoned in Iran. As I was not personally aware of the cases and cannot take positions of cases with which I am not deeply familiar, I didn't reply. The next time

I heard from Mr. Dehghanpour was this past Monday April 11, five days after VOA published this broadcast. I did not respond to him directly because this detailed letter serves as my response.



Fairness

- *VOA always presents a **full and fair account** of events. VOA staff will **evaluate information on its merits**, and will not support violence, sensationalism, personal value judgment, or **misleading emphases** in its reporting.*

As noted before, the allegations that Mr. Namazi co-founded NIAC were asked and answered in 2009 and again in 2015. By omitting Mr. Namazi's publicly available reply, reference to the *Huffington Post* analysis of the prior claims – and willfully failing to contact me for comment, VOA presented an intentionally biased, one-sided, and false and defamatory report.

- *VOA journalists avoid the use of **unattributed negative terms or labels** to describe persons or organizations, except when the individuals and groups use those labels to describe themselves or their activities.*

In VOA's broadcast, Mr. Namazi was described as a co-founder of NIAC with Mr. Parsi. And NIAC was described as the first Iran lobby in Washington. While I only represent Mr. Namazi and have no connection of any kind with NIAC, by labeling Mr. Namazi a co-founder of such an organization, VOA clearly described him as a lobbyist for the Iranian regime, which is an unattributed negative term.

- *VOA journalists will not **fabricate, distort, or dramatize** an event. At no time should information or audio/video content be used to mislead the audience.*

VOA has presented no evidence and there is no evidence online, except unsupported allegations, that Mr. Namazi co-founded NIAC with Mr. Parsi or that he has served as a lobbyist for the Iranian regime. As a result, it is false and defamatory for VOA to have alleged he co-founded an Iranian regime lobbying organization.

Context and Comprehensiveness

- *VOA staff avoid using political or other biases in their reporting, programming, websites and social media sites. Music will not be used to make editorial statements.*

VOA incorporated ominous music and a scary tone of voice in the lead up to its false and defamatory statement identifying Mr. Namazi as a co-founder of an organization that was a lobby for the Iranian regime.

Procedures

- *VOA staff adhere strictly to copyright laws and agency regulations and always credit the source when quoting, paraphrasing, or excerpting from other news organizations, websites, social media sites, or any print media.*

As noted above, VOA did not even cite to a bogus source that previously had made false and defamatory statements of this kind years earlier. Instead, VOA presenter himself presented the allegation that Mr. Namazi co-founded NIAC, an Iranian regime lobbying organization, as an indisputable fact, with no citation of any kind.

- *VOA staff carry out their work with the **utmost professionalism** and recognize that their conduct both on and off the job reflects on the work of the Voice of America community. Professionalism and respect for the people and the issues we cover and report about are vital to enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of the Voice of America.*

Perhaps the most horrifying aspect of this news broadcast was its transparent agenda to defame Siamak Namazi. But Mr. Namazi is the only person in the broadcast who is currently an American hostage of the Iranian regime and has been for almost eight years.

The callous and utter disregard for the impact of this story, which purports to represent the official views of the United States, on Mr. Namazi's life, safety, and welfare shocks the conscience and is beyond the pale. The broadcast could literally lead to Mr. Namazi being tortured or it could disrupt ongoing hostage negotiations between the U.S. and Iran. The only appropriate and effective corrective measure is for VOA to act immediately to publicly to withdraw and disavow the story in its entirety and announce that all those who have been involved will be subjected to the most serious of consequences. Anything short of that will reaffirm the clear message from the VOA special for the Iranian regime – that the United States isn't really concerned about Siamak Namazi and that it can treat him with impunity. If anything now happens to Mr. Namazi, the blood is literally on your hands.

Sincerely,



Jared Genser

Cc: Amanda Bennett, CEO, U.S. Agency for Global Media
John Lippman, Acting Director for VOA Programming
John Featherly, Acting Director for VOA News Center
Leila Soltani, Director of Persian Language Division
Siamak Dehghanpour, Journalist, Persian Language Division
Bridget Serchak, Director of Public Relations