



June 9, 2020

Assistant Secretary Robert Destro  
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
State Department  
Harry S Truman Building 2201 C Street Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Destro,

It is our understanding that the Department of Rights and Labor (DRL) is in the process of obligating millions of dollars in FY2019 funds for internet freedom that will help breach the firewall in places like China and Iran. We are also aware that the bulk of the US Agency for Global Media's (USAGM) funding for FY 2020 remains available for this purpose.

In the wake of COVID 19, it is easy to see the destructive nature of China's brand of censorship and what it will mean for the people of Hong Kong if we stand idly by. While the problem is easy to see, it seems that the solution remains elusive to the US government agencies tasked with funding technologies that effectively counter censorship as, even now, they have not reacted quickly to counter censorship and disinformation.

For more than a decade, as leaders of an Internet Freedom Coalition of more than 50 organizations and individuals we have worked with Congress, circumvention technology developers, and other stakeholders to help ensure US government Internet Freedom Funds are used on large scale circumvention technologies rather than small peer-to-peer (P2P) and privacy-first tools.

We have been increasingly alarmed, as some within the DRL and USAGM have exhibited a complete lack of knowledge regarding the capability of and best practices for the most effective firewall circumvention tools. This has led to the defunding of tools that are providing access to millions of users daily in the most censored countries. These developers report that they are ready and able to quickly increase their capacity if funding were to resume.

After years of studying this issue, we have come up with a concrete plan that we believe will deliver real results in providing information to hundreds of millions of people who are denied this basic right. There should be no higher imperative for the Trump Administration. It is a simple plan to execute and could provide increased uncensored Internet access in China and Iran within a matter of a few weeks as well as establish best practices for procurement and analytics that will allow for better collaboration and decision making between USG agencies for funding circumvention tools in the future.

Freemate, Lantern, Psiphon, and Ultrasurf are widely acknowledged as the only existing large-scale firewall circumvention technologies. Several of these have a long history of successfully circumventing firewalls in China and Iran. In the past, they have all received USG funding, but since 2017, only one of them has been funded. This has cut the amount of access provided by USG funds by more than half and exponentially limited increases in capacity as developers have had to cut operational servers by 70%.

We propose the following:

- 1.) That DRL and the USAGM work together to immediately dedicate \$20 million dollars to rapidly increase traffic in highly censored environments by funding Freemate, Lantern, Psiphon and Ultrasurf.

- 2.) If necessary, these funds could be transferred under the Inter Agency Agreement to the U.S. Agency for Global Media's Office of Internet Freedom (OIF). These companies, which are on the GSA schedule, could then go under contract to OIF.
- 3.) Currently each of these technologies serve between 150,000 and 2 million unique users per day and funding would be most effective if it was performance based in relation to the amount of traffic currently served in the most highly censored environments.
- 4.) While there have already been studies on these tools, no one has compared them against each other in real time and best practices for development, analytics, and procurement have not been identified. Such a study would provide guidance on how to proceed, and, hopefully, open a way forward for better ways to combat censorship utilizing USG funds.

COVID-19 has given cover to authoritarian regimes as they continue to increase censorship of their citizens and attack democracy abroad. We believe this plan is a good first step toward addressing this urgent issue and hope that what we have proposed is beneficial in assisting DRL and the USAGM to rapidly implement a strategy for funding and analyzing firewall circumvention tools.

While future work will be necessary, including exploring options for expanding funding and promoting bureaucratic reform, what we have proposed is widely recognized as the quickest and most effective way to counter the current encroachment on basic rights. It will also have a tremendous impact on paving the way to effectively confront these abuses of power in the future. We stand ready to help in any way that we can.

Sincerely,



Katrina Lantos Swett  
President

cc: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo  
USAGM CEO Michael Pack