# STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN IRAN

by Sohrab Razzaghi

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# ABOUT
# THIS POLICY PAPER

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During the past five years, a new class of political power strived to act as the only player in politics, society, economics, and culture. It interfered in all areas of Iranian society according to its own beliefs, occupied all civil spaces, and prevented other discourses. This has resulted in a curtailing of the socio-political freedoms and constraints on civil society.

This emerging political force has used culture as a tool of civic dominance, distorting the identities and the mentalities of individuals and socio-political groups in order to harmonize thought and silence or sideline opposing voices.

# *Civil Society in Iran, Transition to Which Direction?*

## *Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies*

Sohrab Razzaghi

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the face of organizational limitations and roadblocks, parts of civil society in Iran have enjoyed significant growth over the past few decades. Recently, however, autocratic powers planned and executed an extensive attack on it. At present, civil society is in a hazardous situation. This is as a combined result of the following:

- The emergence of a new class of politicians

- The formation of a garrison-based government

- The involvement of the established Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in politics, economy, culture, and cyber space

- The prevalence of anti-democratic, civil society phobic discourse

Additionally, civil society organizations in Iran lack a clear understanding of the situation and are hampered in their efforts to manage the changes required to respond to emerging social needs and political and social transformations. The conservative and passive approach of Iranian civil society organizations on the one hand, and the silence and indifference of the international community on the other, bodes ill for civil society in Iran. Continuation of the current situation might mean the replacement of authentic, independent civil society with a "paper" one.

This study is based on interviews and discussions with a number of Iranian civil society activists. The focal point of the study is to identify the transitional orientation of civil society in such a dangerous situation. The study includes a situational analysis of the present state of civil society in Iran. It defines strategic challenges and gives an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. Furthermore, it offers proposals in order to transform weaknesses into strength and threats into opportunities in order to prevent the premature death of Iran's civil society.

## A.    Consensus on the following major propositions

- The key element in the underdevelopment and lack of sustainable democracy in Iran is the weakness of civil society and non-participation in the development process.

- Civil society is a transitional force into democracy and control of political power.

- Transition from a weak civil society to a strong and sustainable one is the most important and effective way to battle the two historical problems of underdevelopment and lack of sustainable democracy.

- The structure and the nature of the government in Iran is anti-civil society. In recent years, the garrison-based state has employed strategies of suppression, limitation, and replacement of civil society.

- To play a decisive role in the development and establishment of democracy and civil rights movement in Iran, civil society must have a defined strategy and plan of action, otherwise it will become a follower of other strategies.

## B.    Key priorities in the present situation

*A democratic government necessitates a strong democratic society without which it cannot sustain itself.*

- Expansion of the discourses of democracy, human rights, and peace for the creation of a healthy, vital and democratic society.

- Development of knowledge and skills on networking, advocacy, leadership, peace-building, and civil society building.

- Empowerment of the political, social, cultural, and digital environments as key strategies in the transition to democracy and strengthening of civil society. Empowerment of citizens through increasing awareness, education on rights and responsibilities, expansion of knowledge and skills to work within associations, and practice with democracy at the micro-level.

- Development and expansion of communications and relations with international civil society.

- Reconstruction of social networks both in physical and cyber space and expansion of cooperation and solidarity among civil activists; coalition among civil society organizations; and coalition-building with international civil society.

- Development of a strategy to combat the imposing culture of silence, stagnation, and limitations on the circulation of information;media-pluralism and free access to information among activists and organizations

# 2. INTRODUCTION

Over the past one hundred years, Iran's civil activists have tirelessly aspired to free Iran from under-development and to establish democracy and a civil society. Many of the political discourses and sharp socio-political upheavals – from the "constitutional revolution" to "the nationalization of the oil industry," to "Pahlavi's modernization" to the "Islamic revolution" – were manifestations of the efforts towards the establishment, transformation, or limitation and even cancellation of democracy and civil society.

The notion of democracy and civil society has met with times of vigor and prosperity along with years of stagnation and silence.

## A. Transition to democracy and the establishment of civil society

The first moment of transition, known as the constitutional period, occurred with the constitutional revolution in 1905 and continued until Reza Khan's coup in 1919. The constitutional revolution marked a turning point from ancient history to the beginning of modern times. The constitutional discourse familiarized Iranians with contemporary thinking and the concepts of democracy, associations, the modern state, the rule of law, and political participation along with civil establishments such as parliament, political parties, and other institutions. The Iranian constitution with its amendments was the first democratic document on the continent of Asia and influenced changes that took place later in the region.

During the first constitutional period, non-governmental and professional associations and unions were set up and developed in many regions, particularly in the cities of Tabriz and Rasht in the northern part of the country. These establishments played a long-term role in Iran's contemporary history against autocracy and in favor of constitutional discourses, modern ideas, and shared control of political power.

Constitutional discourses left a mark on the transformation of Iranian society, but, due to the weaknesses of social forces, were incapable of achieving the main goal, which was the formation of a solid democratic society and democratic state. The defeat of the constitutional revolution saw the emergence of the first autocratic state in Iran. Reza Shah centralized resources and instruments of power, created national alliances, established a modern army, weakened the scattered powers of warlords, forced resettlements, disarmed tribal clans, created modern bureaucracy and financial reform, putting down the foundations of a modern, autocratic state.

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The second moment for transition into democracy came about at the end of Reza Shah's autocratic rule in 1940. During this period (1940-1952), fundamental concepts of modern life such as people's rule, freedom of speech, citizens' basic rights, accountable and responsible government, and the rule of law were introduced and developed. At the beginning of this period, the modern, autocratic state was paralyzed Factors inhibiting the revival of autocracy included the disintegration of the institution of suppression and its ideological tools, the emergence of vigorous social forces and the expansion of civil life, along with the creation of syndicates and unions and cultural institutions. These transformations arose after the downfall of Reza Shah and were due to the revival of the political and social establishments established by the first constitution. Political and cultural life in the society stood on modern establishments such as unions, syndicates, parliament, parties, and the press instead of individuals, tribes, government, and religion. For twelve years (1940-52) and in other words, during the second constitutional period, the prevalent discourse primarily concerned the continuation of the first period with more transparency and stability.

The 1953 coup against the government of Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq and the establishment of an autocratic government created a long, historical split. The government which took shape after the coup controlled sources of scattered political power and created a centralized state. In this process, civil institutions, political parties and groups that had gained independent power in the past were suppressed and the civil society and democratic life which had taken shape during the second constitutional period were shut down

The third moment for transition into democracy and the establishment of contemporary civil society came about with the 1979 Islamic revolution and the defeat of the flawed modernity project of the Pahlavi regime. Once again the organizations of civil society such as political parties, syndicates, unions, and the press emerged and prospered. This moment, like the other two historical moments, did not last long. In 1981, a full blown ideological government with a populist approach dominated Iranian society. The government suppressed the vitality of the civil and political arenas and replaced them with silence and stagnation.

The end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, combined with the decline of revolutionary fervor and the eclipse of populism, caused a crisis within the populist government. The secularization of society and the prevalence of development discourses along with the collapse of the Communist world, global transformations, and the third wave of democracy, brought about a slow return of the civil society and the democracy discourse in the late 1980s that continued throughout the 1990s. Due to the clientalist and oligarchic relations in society, this discourse was weak and bloodless.

The fourth moment of transition into democracy and the establishment of civil society took shape after the presidential elections in June 1997 and lasted for 8 years. During this moment, social forces worked to control political power and to transform the dominant oligarchy into a limited democracy with emphasis on the constitution and the rule of law. As a result, the capacity for participation and political competition developed to some extent. This period witnessed the establishment of an independent press and the expansion of public opinion and the culture of political democracy. The Iranian society witnessed relative freedom of press and circulation of and access to information among the political-social forces.

During these years, further steps were taken to set up and strengthen civil society and numerous programs of capacity building for activists and organizations were carried out. The discourse of democracy and civil society reached into the public domain. Despite limitations and resistance during this transitional period, social forces were able to organize themselves into a form of civil society. The organizations of civil society enjoyed extensive growth and experienced development as well as constraints and spread in various fields so much so that the years 1989-2003 can be called the years of "the establishment of civil society organizations" in post-revolution Iran.

### B. The emergence of a new class of politicians and the infiltration of the military into politics

At the onset of this transitional moment, one of the issues that affected the future of civil society organizations was the 2005 presidential elections (the 2009 elections made these issues more visible and were accompanied by widespread vote rigging). As a result, a new class of politicians took power with a garrison mentality to running state affairs. This led to the return of populism and the re-emergence of ideological discourses as well as marginalization of the educated middle classes. One of the distinguishing features of this new political class was its anti-democratic stance and its view of civil society as a Trojan horse.

During the past five years, a new class of political power strived to act as the only player in politics, society, economics, and culture. It interfered in all areas of Iranian society according to its own beliefs, occupied all civil spaces, and prevented other discourses. This has resulted in a curtailing of the socio-political freedoms and constraints on civil society.

This new political force has used culture as a tool of civic dominance, distorting the identities and the mentalities of individuals and socio-political groups in order to harmonize thought and silence or sideline opposing voices. In recent years, organized attacks on the media and universities have been based on just such strategies.

This emerging political class is pursuing the strategy of controlling and monitoring the flow of information and imposing a hegemonic culture of silence and stagnation on Iranian society. Strategically, the policy of widespread suppression and replacement through encouraging mistrust in social relations and the atomization and disintegration of society are two important objectives of this new political class.

## 3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle aim of this study is to portray the present situation of civil society organizations and activists in Iran. The study evaluates points of strength, weakness, opportunities and threats and offers tactics to combat and sterilize the suppressive policies and replacement strategies of the garrison state. It also endeavors to define strategies in order to prevent the premature death of civil society by identifying factors for transition from a weak civil society to a strong one.

## 4. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

The research is based on the SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) methodology. Using this methodology provides a thorough picture of the internal strengths and weaknesses of civil society organizations and, moreover, identifies opportunities as well as environmental threats. Due to the limitations in the methodology and the environment in which the research was carried out, boundaries are limited and do not cover all areas of civil society. Social movements, for instance, are out of scope. The study only covers non-governmental organizations (NGOs), charities, religious and economic establishments, professional associations, and labour and employers' unions. In other words, the focal point of the analysis in this study is the civil society organization as an active social force and marker of change in Iranian society.

## 5. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Iranian civil society is in the epicenter of an organized invasion by the garrison state and is passing through a hazardous transitional period. It is facing challenges from within and without. From the outside, it is faced with widespread state violence and suppression. From the inside, it moves through light and

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- Transition from a weak civil society to a strong and sustainable one is the most important and effective way to battle the two historical problems of underdevelopment and lack of sustainable democracy.

- The structure and the nature of the government in Iran is anti-civil society. In recent years, the garrison-based state has employed strategies of suppression, limitation, and replacement of civil society.

- To play a decisive role in the development and establishment of democracy and civil rights movement in Iran, civil society must have a defined strategy and plan of action, otherwise it will become a follower of other strategies.

darkness in hope and despair. If it passes through this stage successfully the next stage would "cement and institutionalize" its foundation. It would place the organization of civil society inside the landscape of power, where it can play a decisive role as a component of democracy and development and where other players in the political power will no longer be able to ignore or to suppress it.

In the current situation, the most important issues that determine the future of the Iranian civil society are the ability to manage internal transformations and capabilities and to respond to the complex requirements of combatting policies of suppression and replacement. Civil society needs to employ strategies for transition into democracy and sustainable development in political, social, cultural, and cyber spaces. This is achievable given the following conditions:

- Leaders and activists posses a distinctive and clear analysis of internal and external situations and centers of resistance and a knowledge of the anti-civil society philosophies and discourses outside their circles.

- They can employ specific strategies to gain the support and cooperation of their own members along with those of supporting social forces and networks, regardless of their own special interests.

Civil society activists must learn to identify weaknesses and transform them into strengths, make opportunities out of threats, and come up with new instruments and techniques to encourage an energetic, active, developmental, and democratic society. That will not be possible unless a precise and concrete analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges is defined and a tangible plan of action is employed.

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## A.   Internal Assessment: Strengths

### *Diversity and plurality*

Civil societies give voice to marginalized groups, those who are outside the center of power. The number, the expansion, the variety, and the geographical dispersion of civil society organizations are the key indicators to measure its vitality. In recent years, civil society organizations were able to represent various groups and social forces, responding to their needs in relation to democracy and development, demonstrating that their presence throughout the country was and is vital.

*If civil society can pass through this hazardous period successfully, the next stage would "cement and institutionalize" its foundation. It would place the organization of civil society inside the landscape of power, where it could play a decisive role as a component of democracy and development and where other political players would no longer be able to ignore or to suppress it.*

According to the statistics published by Iran's Statistical Centre, in 2004, out of 6914 non-governmental organizations, 92% were consistently active and 8% did seasonal or interrupted work. Out of this number, 53% were officially registered and 47% were unregistered. 3620 addressed issues such as children, social injuries, human rights, environment, youth, women and charities. The largest number of NGOs were related to work with the youth; 2959 were able to renew their licenses in 2007 and continue their work.

In addition to the officially registered NGOs, unofficial statistics indicate that there are 52,000 religious organizations (religious delegations, Islamic associations, cultural and publicity centers). There are 4600 cultural and artistic associations out of which, 197 are scientific, 136 economic and registered with Iran's Chamber of Commerce, 15,061 unions related to the bazaar, 80,000 charities and 166 university Islamic associations, 2000 scientific associations and 780 student cultural centers

### *Successful experiences and best practices*

In the past two decades of activity, civil society organizations were able to demonstrate successful, transparent and efficient models of management in responding to the nature of work: against poverty,

empowerment, environment, charity, relief work and so on. They played an important role in promoting the standards of living and community participation. These projects include the Shirabad project in Zahedan, the Bam earthquake, construction of Rafahi hospital and welfare complex, Mahak for children with cancer, renovation of Siran Goli Talaab (pond) in the town of Naghadeh, dealing with the hemophilia patients at the hemophilia center, working with single women (Zanjan Ruzbeh centre), working with the disabled (Ghazvin disabled centre).

### Bravery, innovation and creativity

Due to the power of creativity and innovation – especially when it comes to women's issues against gender discrimination, development of local societies, tackling poverty and job creation – Iranian civil society organizations have gained a measure of acceptability. They managed to employ new methods of distribution of resources among social groups and in this way played a major role in the transitional period. The One Million Signature Campaign (based on a similar initiative in Morocco) introduced many innovations into Iranian civil society and gained attention outside Iran. This Campaign targeted equality for men and women and the "method" it used can be utilized in other areas such as social movements, syndicates, students and so on. The Campaign formed its strategy around specific women's rights issues. It did not have a stance on power and worked independently of political parties. It focused on the necessity of an internal transformation of society in order to bring about changes for human rights and citizens' equality. The Campaign was the essence of decades of women's activities which were used to shape it.

Another successful example is the resistance of Iran's Higher Centre of Professional Associations of Employers against its unlawful dissolution by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in 2006. The Centre began an all-out legal battle in defense of freedom of association against the Islamic republic through the Iranian courts and the International Labour Organization (ILO). For three and half years, the Centre pursued its case until in 2010 the court ruled against the Ministry of Labour and the ruling was affirmed by the appeal court. This was a huge success and a model to defend freedoms of associations in Iran.

### The emergence of strong and powerful civil society organizations

In recent years, a number of organizations have emerged with a relatively stable structure and continuity in their activities. These include organizations such as the National Council for Peace, Committee of Human Rights Reporters, Journalists Professional Association, Teachers Professional Association, Higher Centre of Professional Associations of Employers, Syndicate of Iran's Electricity, The syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Drivers (sometimes called The Vahed Syndicate) . These organizations were able to operate and sustain themselves under enormous pressure and limitations.

In June 2009 and on the eve of the presidential elections, a number of the civil society organizations formed an alliance and published a manifesto titles "Iran's Civil Society Demands." The manifesto had a list of minimum demands which included:

- Recognition of civil society as a social force

- Guarantees for freedom of association

- Respect for independence and non-interference in their internal affairs

- Review and reform of all laws and regulations which oversee the work of civil society organizations

- Guarantees for freedom of speech, press freedom and media diversity

- Recognition of the right to the free flow of information

- Capacity building and empowerment of citizens and associations

- Ratification and execution of conventions on labour laws

- Reform and review of Iran's discriminatory civil code

- Membership on the Commission on the Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), respect for gender equality and gender justice

- Response to professional demands

- Protection of the environment.

### The emergence of a new generation of social activists

In recent years, along with the fundamental social transformations, secularization of society, the emergence of an educated middle class, and the marginalization of a number of social groups and forces, a new generation of activists have emerged who can be identified as the third generation in the post-Islamic society. This new generation is distanced from the ideological symbols and meta-narratives and follows the philosophy of "Think globally and act locally; think locally and act globally." They look at civil society as central to the transition into democracy. This generation reflects the ideological erosion of political power which has dominated Iranian society for 30 years. Movements for civil and political rights – such as the Green Movement – represent the emergence of this new generation.

### Resistance and persistence

Despite strategies of suppression and limitations and in comparison to earlier decades, civil society organizations have gained more self confidence in their activities and social battles against the state. They managed to provide platforms of opportunities for those marginalized groups and to put their demands forward and to defend citizens' rights and human rights and carry out campaigns to change general policies.

*At present, the dominance of the anti-civil society discourse and the imposition of limitations and pressures by the government, have provided grounds for solidarity and cooperation among civil society activists. There is general consensus that they have to disregard their differences and work with each other to stop the premature death of civil society.*

The resistance of the Bar Association to threats against its independence, the continued work of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre, the formation of a group to oversee and reform laws which govern the organization of civil society, the Campaign Against Stoning, the Women's Coalition to Demand Women's Rights, the establishment of the Council to Coordinate Civil Society organizations, the continuation of campaigning by the Teachers Professional Association, and the resistance of workers at the Syndicate of workers of Tehran and Suburb Bus Drivers (Vahed) are among such broader campaigns.

### Grounds for cooperation, convergence and solidarity among civil society activists

At present, the dominance of the anti-civil society discourse and the imposition of limitations and pressures by the government, have provided grounds for solidarity and cooperation among civil society activists. There is general consensus that they have to disregard their differences and work with each other to stop the premature death of civil society.

In 2009, in the pre-election period, various groups of women formed a broad coalition around their demands. For the first time they appeared as an independent force to put those demands to the presidential candidates. This was significant because for the first time it brought together women from various trends of thought, from religious to secular, for a common goal. In a similar action in 2007, civil and political activists set up a national council for peace. The 72 founders of this council were civil activists, politicians, artists, women, students, trade unionists, and other activists. The aim of this broad-

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based coalition was the creation and establishment of principles of peace in Iran, cancellation of sanctions, prevention of further tensions, prevention of a possible war against Iran, and an end to the situation of no peace, no war.

*Opportunity for re-thinking, re-examining and reviewing strategies*

In the past few years, the government's limitations and pressures created an opportunity for civil society organizers and activists to re-think and review their past strategies and plans, and learn from their weaknesses and strengths to produce new strategies.

*Emergence and expansion of cooperation networks and membership in the global network*

In the past few years, along with the expansion of civil society organizations, a number of networks in the non-governmental sector were established. These networks can be classified as follows:

1) **Independent networks set up by activists and civil society organizations** such as Friends of Children, Network of Solidarity of Non-Governmental Educational, Supportive and Health Care Institutions (AHAD), Council of Coordination Crisis Management (SHAHAB), Network in Support of Child Laborers and Street Children, and Council for Coordination of Civil Society Organizations

2) **Networks which were set up under the initiative of a number of government institutions.** These include: Network of Communication of Non-Governmental Women's Organizations, Network of Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations, Network of Non-Governmental Youth Organizations, House of Non-Governmental Organizations, House of Industry and Mining, Higher Centre of Professional Employers Associations.

3) **Networks which were established in Iran with the support from the United Nations.** In 2006, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) set up a 4 year program (2005-2009) for NGOs to work on public health, health care, and reproductive services.

Along with cooperation and the establishment of networks in the country, a number of civil society organizations have become affiliates of international networks and organizations Iranian Journalist Association became a member of International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Teachers Professional Association joined Education International (EI); the Syndicate of workers of Tehran and Suburb Bus Drivers (Vahed) became an affiliate of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and The Higher Centre of Professional Employers Association joined the International Organization of Employers (IOE).

*Growth of civil society in cyberspace*

In the past decades, advances in information have provided important tools for activists and organizations. The internet and online networks in Iran have expanded enormously and offered a public space for activists to communicate and transform social and political actions, along with the (virtual) space to reach out and have their voices heard. The internet has transformed Iranian civil society from a pacifist consumer to an active producer.

New information technology has given a fresh shape to the culture of politics. Activists believe that the foundations of civil society in the new millennium and the continuation of civil discourses depend on the internet and other means of communications. Against limitations and censorship they have been able to use the internet as a tool for preparation, organization, and communication in order to challenge the government and the dominant power. Cyber civil society in Iran has grown enormously and the internet users are on the rise. Iranian cyber civil society is now able, to a great extent, to bring about political and

"We cannot have a democratic system without a democratic people. We need to build a democratic society in Iran. That's why I feel that building civil society is so important in Iran. We need to create a more democratic population."

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social transformations for transition to democracy in Iran.

## B. Internal Assessment: Weaknesses

### *Establishment and formation of civil society organizations*

In the past two decades, government institutions and organizations played a major role in the establishment and continuation of civil society organizations In the 1990s, two major international conferences convened, one in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and the other in Beijing (1995). Both these conferences played a major role in raising the consciousness of Iran's statesmen regarding the importance and the role of civil society. Politicians encouraged their relatives and close associates to set up and work in these areas. The wave of civil society activists in the 1990s were related to men in political power. Government funds were the major – or in some cases the only – financial source for these people.

During the years of relative political liberalism (1997-2005), a second wave of non-governmental organizations was supported by government institutions, such as Centre for Women's Participation and National Youth Organization. Very few were independent of such assistance. Even in recent years (2009), Ahmadinejad's government established an office in the Interior Affairs Ministry to support a certain sort of non-government organizations

### *Split and rupture in civil society*

Split and rupture is an important condition of Iran's civil society. It is driven from various gaps in the society: between traditional civil society and modern civil society; between religious and secular civil society; between organizations of civil society in the capital city (Tehran) and those in other cities. As a result of the actual and potential gaps and raptures, civil society has been divided and grouped, all of which cause disputes and conflicts and prevents them from taking action.

### *Limited civil society*

Limited association life is one of the shortcomings of Iran's civil society. Despite growth and expansion in recent decades, civil society has not developed or gained necessary depth when considering Iran's population of 70 million. Traditional civil society, which lacks respect for democratic values, human rights, and gender rights, has occupied an oversized space.

### *Unbalanced civil society*

Another specification of Iran's civil society is its unbalanced and un-harmonious growth. The scattered and uneven distribution of civil society in terms of geography and theme makes its growth a kind of caricature of the actual civil society. This has resulted in the formation of a phenomena recognized as "center" and its "surroundings." Facelessness and identity crisis is another characteristic of civil society in Iran, emptying it of a defined and clear identity.

### *Isolation*

Isolation from the process of development and the drive to participate in power is another specification of civil society in Iran. Most of the time, it chooses to step aside and isolate itself from social developments and rarely challenges the dominant power. At the international level the same strategy prevails. Civil society organizations seldom react to regional or international developments and does not engage in dialogue or expand relations with other international civil societies. For that reason it does not have a presence at the regional or international level.

### Inefficiency and ineffectiveness

Inefficiency and ineffectiveness is another quality of Iran's civil society. In other words, it lacks awareness of its role, place, responsibilities, and duties and therefore, cannot define itself. For this reason, it can neither identify nor represent the needs and demands of the society as a whole and is unable to respond to the requirements of social and local groups.

### Inability to apply change management and management for change

Iranian society is going through rapid and complex changes and civil society organizations are unable to adapt themselves to these organizational and environmental challenges. This is mainly due to the traditional style of management which is incompatible to the needs of the present day society. It is unable to restructure and take a leading role according to the requirements of the changing society. A needs assessment of Iran's civil society demonstrates weaknesses and shortcomings in many areas including its gender based approach, human resource management, organization, volunteer force, project management, utilizing and use of information technology, project development and proposal writing, outreach and social marketing, advocacy and lobbying, resource allocation, budgeting and fundraising, and evaluation.

### Lack of innovation, creativity, and initiative

Organizations of civil society in Iran use the traditional literature and phrases and have been incapable of creating a new language to distinguish themselves from other social and political groups. In response to organizational or environmental challenges, they resort to ready-made prescriptions and lack the courage to take initiative to break boundaries. For these reasons, during the stagnation period of the 9th government, a large number of activists left non-governmental organizations.

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### Lack of efficient and effective leadership

Strong and capable leadership can play a big role in the success of civil society while in transition to democracy. Unfortunately, in the current treacherous situation, Iran's civil society lacks strong and powerful leaders to facilitate its plans and policies. For that reason it is engaged in day-to-day matters, without a concrete strategy and plan of action to execute and work with other interested parties.

### Bad governance

Bad governance is one of the problems and challenges facing Iran's civil society. Some of the problems include:

- A total lack of or weakness of participation of members in agenda making, decision making, and implementation of decisions

- Lack of or weakness of transparency and accountability to the stakeholdersAmbiguity in duties and responsibilities of executive board, director, staff, and volunteer forces

- Lack or weakness of organizational culture and social auditing of activities

The preceding issues all derive from unsuitable traditional methods of utilizing resources, which ultimately result in the erosion and the ruin of organizational resources.

### Communication weaknesses

Iran's civil society organizations suffer from a number of fundamental communication weaknesses, including the lack of independent media to reflect their voices. In the past few years, the press have dealt with the issue of civil society as a marginal matter. Media preference is politics, not civil issues. Civil society suffers from an inability to advocate and negotiate, making it incapable of mobilizing the public in

its favor. Public knowledge of civil society is limited as it is unable to reach out to the people and to target groups.

Another challenge is to make the issue of civil society an essential part of the intellectual and university discourse. Even the lecturers and students of human sciences are unfamiliar with civil society discourse, and it does not have a place in the academic texts.

Due to unfamiliarity with the international environment, the language barrier, and lack of skills to make effective connections, Iran's civil society has not made use of international resources. According to the Islamic Republic's statistics only 15% of NGOs connect to international organizations and agencies. In the past, Iran's civil society had a weak and shadowy presence at international gatherings. Currently, with the exception of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), it is absent from almost all global gatherings. To date, only 15 NGOs have been able to reach to the advisory position in the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Also, and despite common regional problems, civil society in Iran has not been able to open dialogue at the regional level.

### Reduction or cessation of capacity building centers

In recent years (1997-2010), supporting organizations such as Hamyaran Ghada, Noavaran Pars, NGOTC (NGO Training Centre), Institute of Women Studies and ICTRC (Iran Civil Society Organization Training and Research Center) were established by civil society activists along with the Center to Empower Civil Society in the Ministry of Interior Affairs to implement civil society capacity building programs. But lately, Hamyaran GHADA left its capacity building projects and shifted towards implementing community projects on poverty eradication. NOAVARAN Pars and the Institute of Women's Studies, two capacity building institutions, are not fully functional. These never had the concrete strategic programs for capacity building in the past but ran sporadic workshops on education. The two institutes of ICTRC and NGOTC were both closed down in 2006 and their offices were sealed by the order of public prosecutor's office. The Centre to Empower Civil Society Organizations was a 2 year co-project of the Islamic Republic and Development Program of the United Nations for the Empowerment of Civil Society Organizations and was run by the Ministry of Interior Affairs. During the ninth government, when Ahmadinejad took office, the program was transferred to the Organization to Defend the Victims of Violence, which is a human rights NGO related to the Ministry of Intelligence. At the moment this organization coordinates civil society organizations in Iran. It has employed a number of civil society activists and attends international conferences, such as United Nations Human Rights Commission. As Iranian government has limited UN activities in Iran, most of the projects on civil society are carried out by this NGO.

### Weak theoretical knowledge

Most civil society activists in Iran lack an interest in theory. The production of knowledge and literature on civil society has been unsuccessful and minimal. In addition, there persists an inability to learn from the experiences of others. A number of the activists refrain from learning and see it as unnecessary. In the past few years at the Open Islamic University, the subject of "Management of Non-governmental Organizations" was introduced at the Masters level but due to the theoretical weakness and lack of experienced lecturers it was not able to fill the gap in theory and meet the students' expectations.

### Weakness in effective capacity-building and lack of investment

Iranian civil society organizations don't properly understand organizational capacity building which requires regular and systematic investment in the development of national and foreign relations in order to achieve goals and have a more effective impact. They believe organizational capacity building is an expensive project, and, for that reason, most of them lack programs to tackle the issue despite the fact that every organization needs to have efficient employers and strong management in order to be effective and establish good relations with stockholders and financial supporters.

**Due to unfamiliarity with the international environment, the language barrier, and lack of skills to make effective connections, Iran's civil society has not made use of international resources. According to the Islamic Republic's statistics only 15% of NGOs connect to international organizations and agencies. In the past, Iran's civil society had a weak presence at international gatherings. Currently, with the exception of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), it is absent from almost all global gatherings. To date, only 15 NGOs have been able to reach to the advisory position in the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Also, and despite common regional problems, it has not been able to open dialogue at the regional level.**

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*Inefficiency of networks of cooperation*

At present, the networks which were established by the government institutions and organizations have ceased activity and have no presence in the civil society. The only network that still functions to some extent is the Network of Communication of Women's NGOs. In 2005, this network split and a group of NGOs who had reformist ideas established a separate network, which is currently facing serious problems. Other networks are also in crisis and not influential in the civil society arena.

Important factors affecting the inefficiency of the networks in the civil society include:

- Lack of coordination between members' expectations and realities

- Lack of a clear vision and transparent mission statement

- The predominance of bad governance among the networks

- Lack of transparency and accountability

- Lack of respect for team work, discipline and democratic relations among members

- Lack of representation

- Lack of free flow of information among networks

- Intervention by the government institutions

- Connections among the networks to political parties, groups, military and para-military institutions

- Absence of any supportive institution or self-regulatory body to defend civil society activists or organizations against government interference.

*Lack of ethical codes and self-regulation mechanisms*

Iranian civil society lacks ethics. It is infested with patriarchal, over-protective behavior. Civil society in Iran suffers from mistrust, slander, personality-assassination and elimination, egoism, self-centered, monopolizing, and a sense of superiority. It lacks a commitment to team work and has other negative factors which create serious problems for its proper function. Moreover, the lack of self regulating mechanisms to ensure accountability to stakeholders is a serious weakness. This is true despite the fact that over the past decades, the incorporation of systems of volunteering and measures to promote transparency and accountability have had considerable growth. According to statistics self-regulatory programs are implemented in more than 40 countries.

*Fear and conservatism*

There is considerable fear, conservatism, and self-censorship in civil society organizations This manifests itself in plans of action and mission statements. Many are unprepared to stand up to governmental pressures and threats and, as a result, pay for that lack of preparation. In the post-presidential elections of 2009 the majority of civil society organizations followed a policy of silence instead of support for the movement for civil and political rights. This has led to passivity and has cost a specific group of civil society activists dearly.

## C.   External Assessment: Demands and Opportunities

### *Political*

### *Government and Tehran's city council policies and programs*

In recent years, the government has taken some steps towards civil society. In 2005, a proposal was put forth by the National Youth Organization and approved by the Organization of Encyclopedias of Persian Language and Literature, to replace the English abbreviated term NGOs with "Sazeman Mardom Nehad-SAMAN."

In 2006, the interior ministry set up an organization to organize and regulate the non-governmental organizations. The main responsibilities and work of this organization were:

1.  To establish a website for the public to access information about SAMAN.

2.  To regulate the registration and licensing and disseminate information on the website.

3.  To set up mechanisms of control and supervision in the cities and towns in order to evaluate the functions of the SAMAN organizations and review grievances against SAMANs.

4.  To prepare a draft bill regarding the establishment and regulations of SAMANs and get its approval.

5.   To provide rules and standards to improve and promote the quality and quantity of SAMANs.

6.  To study and initiate methods of encouragement and promotion the function of SAMANs by providing social opportunities and allocating government resources based on rules and regulations.

7.  To provide educational leaflets and programs in order to transfer the experiences of successful SAMANs.

8.  To develop empowerment programs and define SAMANs' roles in the society and prepare provisions to legalize their activities.

9.  To proceed with applications for setting up a SAMAN and to facilitate the process of licensing.

10. To coordinate and cooperate with provinces and governors to develop and increase social participation of the SAMANs in the provinces and to establish methods suitable to the relevant organization.

In 2009, the Ministry of Interior Affairs set up a section called "Center to Support the SAMANs."

In 2005, Tehran's city council set up "Center of Cultural Organizations of Tehran City Council."

According to endorsement number 160/1057/702 of 2008, the Islamic council of Tehran's city council set up a "division to coordinate SAMANs functions" and provide necessary grounds for use of capacity, participation, and cooperation among Tehran SAMANs. These two organizations did not have much activity until 2010 when they executed a number of schemes for NGOs capacity building.

### *The arrival of new political forces to the civil society arena*

The end of the relative political liberalism of 1983-1997 along with the rise of populism and authoritarianism and the emergence of a new class of politicians, shifted some former political insiders/forces into the field of civil society. These forces realized that without a strong civil society, Iran would not be able to overcome the two major historical obstacles of under-development and lack of sustainable democracy. In other words, if politics did not have some roots in a civil source, it would get nowhere. This new force is able to transfer its valuable political experiences into the field of civil society.

*Emergence of a strong opposition*

The formation of a strong opposition from within the regime, its connection with other social groups, and with marginalized opposition groups, along with its challenge of the regime's credibility has provided a great opportunity for civil society as a whole. In the past, the Islamic Republic had the capacity to consistently drive the opposition into the margins through ideological institutions and suppressive measures under the discourse of preserving public morale and the revolution. At present, and for the first time, an opposition has emerged from within the regime which none of the suppressive measures are able to drive into the margins. This opposition is getting increasingly stronger and has created splits among Iranians society, the clerical establishment, the government, and the people.

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*Legal*

*The capacity of the Islamic Republic Constitution*

Despite limitations and barriers in the constitution and the establishment of autocratic rule, a number of articles in the constitution emphasize the principle rights of people. Civil society activists can utilize these articles to argue their case and strengthen civil society. Civil and political rights of people are recognized and mentioned in the constitution in various ways:

**1-Political and social rights of citizens are confirmed in the constitution** and mentioned in Article 6 which states "Elimination of all forms of despotism and autocracy and all attempts to monopolize power" and Article 7 which "Ensures political and social freedoms within the framework of the law." Therefore, it is the duty of the lawmaker to incorporate these principles in the law.

**The abolition of all forms of undesirable discrimination and the provision of equitable opportunities** for all in both the material and intellectual spheres is clearly stipulated in Article 9 of the constitution. Therefore freedoms cannot be curtailed even in the name of preserving the country's integrity and independence. In addition, in Article 8 it calls for the participation of the people in determining their political, economic, social, and cultural destiny. The state and the people have mutual rights and responsibilities to each other.

People's rights are stipulated in other articles as well. Article 19 states that all people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege. Also Article 20 states that all citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria. In Article 23 the investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief.

As with freedom of press, publications and freedom of expression are stipulated in Article 24. Article 25 states "inspection of letters and disclosure of telephone conversations and other communications, censorship and eavesdropping are banned."

The formation of parties, societies, political or professional associations, as well as religious societies, whether Islamic or pertaining to one of the recognized religious minorities, is permitted under Article 26 which states that associations are permitted provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic republic. No one may be prevented from participating in the aforementioned groups, or be compelled to participate in them. Public gatherings

and marches may be freely held, provided arms are not carried and that they are not detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam according to Article 27.

**2- The right to economic and social welfare, jobs and residence** are set in Article 28 which states that everyone has the right to choose any occupation he wishes, if it is not contrary to Islam and the public interests, and does not infringe the rights of others. The government has the duty, with due consideration of the need of society for different kinds of employment, to provide every citizen with the opportunity to work, and to create equal conditions for obtaining it. Other economic benefits such as social security with respect to retirement, unemployment, old age, disability, absence of a guardian, and benefits relating to being stranded, accidents, health services, and medical care and treatment, provided through insurance or other means, is accepted as a universal right are stipulated in Article 29 of the constitution. The government must provide the foregoing services and financial support for every individual citizen by drawing, in accordance with the law, on the national revenues and funds obtained through public contributions.

**3- Legal rights of citizens are confirmed in articles 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38 and 39.** A person is presumed innocence and no one is to be held guilty of a charge unless his or her guilt has been established by a competent court. The aim of the legal rights is providing legal security for all citizens. In Article 14 these rights are clearly mentioned for all citizens: men and women. Article 37 stipulates legal security. And Article 32 use of lawyer in the court of law. Article 38 stipulates that all forms of torture for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information are forbidden. **Compulsion of individuals to testify, confess, or take an oath is not permissible; and any testimony, confession, or oath obtained under duress is devoid of value and credence.** Violation of this article is liable to punishment in accordance with the law.

**4- Cultural rights are set in article 20** of the constitution with regards to the Islamic principles but these had not been verified in detail. For example, the right of ethnic minorities to use their languages in the media, schools and literature, alongside the national language which is Persian is mentioned. Also, free and public education and physical education are emphasized in Article 30 of the constitution.

## Cultural

### *Expansion of democratic idea and the discourse on democracy, human rights and peace*

*Democracy is a "right" and precondition for development, therefore civil activists have reached the conclusion that to achieve democratic aims they have to use democratic means.*

In recent decades the philosophies of the left and religious fundamentalism have moved to the margins and secularist tendencies have increased in Iranian society. This has contributed to the expansion of the discourse of democracy, human rights, and peace among many civil society activists. These democratic discourses existed in the intellectual and socio-political circles for the past hundred years, but in recent decades, advocates and activists of political civil society have been able to move them from the margins to the text.

Two great experiences of the constitutional revolution in 1905 and the Islamic revolution of 1979 have taught activists that Iran's problems stem from the structure of power and mechanisms of control and distribution of it. The way forward is to democratize society and not merely transfer the power from one to the other. Therefore, control and distribution of power must take priority and that cannot be achieved through the language of violence. Rather, implementation of such methods will contribute to the growth of power structure. Control of power through the use of non-violent and peaceful methods, expansion the culture of democratic discourse, human rights and peace are major requirements of the present Iranian society. Democracy is a "right" and precondition for development, therefore civil activists have reached the conclusion that to achieve democratic aims they have to use democratic means.

### Discourse of post-Islamic intellectuals

The discourse of post-Islamic intellectuals took shape after the end of Iran-Iraq war and corresponded with receding revolutionary fervor and the increasing secularization of society. It was influenced by the paradigm of neo-liberal modernity in Iranian society and provided a golden opportunity for the expansion of democracy. The discourse of the post-Islamic intellectuals was the result of the hesitations and non-hegemonic discourse of the Islamic revolution in relation to the individual and the society. The critical stage of this discourse is breaking the boundaries of the Islamic discourse and the negation of religious fundamentalism and its failure to meet the aspirations of the society.

*Post-Islamic intellectuals make their presence felt in various groups without any prior plan or concrete ideology. The participants in this discourse are not a homogenous group nor do they believe in a homogenous and "popular" society under the leadership of a vanguard group. They do not carry the message of a new revolution or a utopia, or believe in liberation philosophies.*

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Post-Islamist intellectuals deny any philosophy that does not consider Iranian society's specific conditions. They emphasize the non-homogenous nature of societies, instead of the analysis of place-time "everywhere," "anytime." They have placed their analysis on "here," "now" and the multiplicity of "cultures."

Based on these definitions, post-Islamist intellectuals question the Islamic discourse of deconstruction, decentralization, demystification, de-totalitarianism, and decomposition. As a result, they are preparing the grounds for growth and expansion of democracy and civil society.

Post-Islamic intellectuals look neither to the West nor to Iran's past. They are pragmatic, not theoretical. Many have concluded that "critique of the fundamentals of religion is a pre-requisite to any other critique." Without serious critique, law and political philosophy will not reflect the concepts of "rights" and "new politics" and modern government and civil society will not be achieved.

### Expansion of cyber space and access to information

In the past decades, expansion of information technology and cyber space has moved so fast that it can rightly be named the "new era of information." In this new era, information is considered a dominant element of production, not one alongside others. The technological revolution has provided a unique opportunity for civil society, as it has the private sector and other players, to access information and utilize it in the service of democratization and the development of society.

### Social

### Emergence of the Green movement

In the past year, Iranian society witnessed the emergence of a widespread social movement called the Green Movement. This movement was born out of a wider movement, one for political and civil rights. This movement took shape in reaction to a style of governance that imposed a specific way of life, engaged in widespread abuse of human and social rights, corruption, and led to crisis in the society. It was formed out of a coalition of various homogenous and heterogeneous social groups. In other words, the movement saw the rise of marginalized groups and those who had been driven out of political, social, cultural, and economic arena in opposition to "the government of lies." The movement for political and civil rights is a reflection of despair and hopelessness especially among the educated middle classes against the structure

of political power, dominant ideology, and political processes in Iran. Its platform of action is the rule of law, expansion of democratic relations, respect for human rights, and peace. After the 12 June 2009, Iranian society entered a new era which cannot be compared to the past. Despite crackdowns, extensive violence, and the detention of many activists, the Green Movement demonstrated its power in various settings and continued its existence, gathering large numbers of social forces and organizing them as we have witnessed so far.

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### *Expansion of a cultural middle class*

After the revolution and due to population growth, educational centers and centers of higher education expanded throughout the country and the literacy rate increased. As a result a class of educated, cultured people emerged which is still on the rise. The expansion of middle classes brought about consciousness to the role and action of civil society and the relative power to citizens. The participants and main players of the current Green movement are from the cultural middle class. The cultural middle class in moved by a mission to play a role in the transformation of Iranian society.

In past decades, the cultural middle class occupied an important place in the structure of social, political, and cultural power. Civil society expanded along the path that the middle classes have made. Current social movements of women, students, and intellectuals have their roots in the middle classes. This class is more prepared than other classes to embrace democracy, human rights, and peace. Access to the media makes it possible to produce dialogue and behavior paradigms in society. Its extensive participation in the protests in support of civil rights contributes to the foundation of civil society and the spread of democracy and human rights. The culture that it produces or has produced is the main rival to the imposed dominant ideology and because of that the Islamic regime has systematically humiliated this class of citizens. Yet, in the past 30 years, this class has been the source of the biggest erosion in the foundation of the culture of Islamic ideology.

### *Tradition of volunteer actions and charity work in Iranian society*

Iranian society has a long tradition of volunteer work and networks of participation and cooperation. In the rural areas various forms of "partnership," "self-help," "cooperation," and "traditional co-ops" exist. In the cities there are many forms of charity work. Charities are the most common form and are well organized with more than 80,000 operational all over the country. *Vaghf*, or leaving capital to a charity or a cause is an ancient tradition whose main aim is better standard of living for people. *Vaghf* covers many areas including, building schools, educational centers, books, library, health, treatment, religious affairs, water irrigation, building caravanserai, taking care of animals and the needy. Another tradition in Iran is voluntary funds (Gharz al- Hassaneh fund) to cover the needs of the society. These funds are set up by groups or social forces to help the people in times of hardship. There are more than 4500 Gharz al-Hassaneh funds operating all over the country.

### *Economy*

### *Privatization; implementation of Article 44 of the constitution*

In 2006, the principles mentioned in Article 44 of the constitution were approved by the Expediency Council and sent to the heads of the country's three ruling bodies by the supreme leader. This was a great step towards privatization and free economy and the change of government role from direct ownership and management to policy-making, directing, and supervision. It provided the civil society organizations with a unique opportunity to expand.

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In the past, the Islamic Republic had the capacity to consistently drive the opposition into the margins through ideological institutions and suppressive measures under the discourse of preserving public morale and the revolution. At present, and for the first time, an opposition has emerged from within the regime which none of the suppressive measures are able to drive into the margins. This opposition is getting increasingly stronger and has created splits among Iranian society, the clerical establishment, the government, and the people.

Objectives of the economic macro-policies:

1.  Government change of role from ownership and direct management to policy-making, setting strategy, and supervision.

2.  Empowerment of private and cooperative sectors and support of national production to compete in international markets.

3.  Preparing national companies to learn global trade in a gradual process.

4.  Development of human resources, expertise, and knowledge.

5.  Development of national standards and their compatibility in the international market.

6.  Direction towards privatization to increase efficiency and competition and the expansion of public ownership. According to this policy, the state should not engage in new economic ventures outside those specified in Article 44 of the constitution. The state has to transfer all economic activities (including previous ventures) that fall outside Article 44 to the private and cooperative sector. The deadline for this decision is the end of the fifth four-year economic plan (20% decrease annually). The implementation of Article 44 minimizes the state's role and provides a valuable opportunity for activists and organizations to expand civil society.

## *International*

### *Role of international organizations and United Nation's agencies*

At the international level, agencies and organizations play a major role in civil society building. In recent years, international agencies and organizations have increasingly shown interest to cooperate with Iranian civil society. They have executed a number of projects for capacity-building and empowerment. One such example was the project of capacity building for the promotion and protection of human rights and greater access to justice. This project was carried out through the United Nations Program of Good Governance and under the direction of Development Programs for a period of 5 years (2005-2009).

The project was carried out with cooperation from universities, human rights centers, national institutions, non-government organizations, and government institutions. The Center for Human rights of Tehran University, the branch of human rights, peace, and democracy of Beheshti University, Center for Human Right Studies at Mofid University, the under-secretary of the justice department, Islamic Commission for Human Rights, the Bar Association, the Association of Journalists, and the Organization to Defend Victims of Violence were the initial participants of this program. In the second year, the Association of Journalists was dismissed from the project. The main, long-term objectives were the promotion of human rights and access to justice, empowerment and capacity-building of human rights institutions. Other objectives were the expansion of justice and rejecting all forms of violence, promotion of freedoms of speech and thought and cooperation with the Islamic republic to fulfill its international obligations.

The budget for this program was $2,811,756, out of which, the Dutch government paid $795,756, European Commission, $1,324,000, Norway, $42,000 and the United Nations Development Program paid $650,000.

### *Globalization and Democracy*

The process of globalization, expansion of democracy, disintegration of totalitarian, dynastic and autocratic regimes in central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Southern Africa, and Asia played a great role in the emergence and establishment of civil society. Civil society in the aforementioned countries was

the outcome of such democratic processes in past decades. The societies did not go through this transition spontaneously: organizations of civil society were the vanguard of transition to democracy.

## Domination of civil society discourse in the global society

In recent decades, civil societies have enjoyed rapid growth and development throughout the world. Some experts identify this process as the "global revolution of guild." If the last years of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century were the eras of government and nations; the beginning of the 21st century is the era of civil society organizations. These organizations are the main players and carriers of development in the social battle to transform the definition of traditional power and create a new landscape of power.

The change in the paradigm of development is transition from nation-building to civil society-building which is the result of the power and the dominance of civil society discourse.

## A.    External Assessment: Threats and Constraints

### Political

### Nature of government in Iran

The Iranian government is Behemoth-like and autocratic. One of the tragedies of social life in contemporary Iran is the hegemony of government over all areas of human and social life. In contemporary Iran, apart from short, passing periods of transition, the cancerous growth of government has been coupled with a decrease in people's power. To adopt Antonio Gramsci's philosophy, it can be said that civil society in Iran has perished; the government has a monopoly over all resources and instruments and occupies all civil spaces, leaving no breathing space for other players. The government is relatively independent of most social groups and not accountable.

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### Attitude of Iran's ninth and tenth government towards civil society

The ninth term presidential elections in 2005 followed eight years of relative political liberalization (1997-2005) and brought a new class of politicians to power who were backed by the military. In the tenth presidential elections they consolidated their power through massive vote rigging. This new class of politicians are civil society phobic, anti-democratic and not at all committed to human rights measures. They see civil society as an intrusive element which destroys the government's relations with the people. They want direct access to people in order to push them in any direction and for any purpose. The new political class has pursued a policy of strengthening its power base through suppression, limitation and replacement of independent civil society activities, along with the destruction and sterilization of the real and online networks of independent civil society. It sees civil society as a Western project, especially on the part of the United States, to overthrow the government through a velvet revolution and are pessimistic of it and its activities. The new class believes that in the absence of political forces, social forces will decide the future of the society. It sees Iranian civil society as a centre of resistance against the established order. Since civil society is the only setting for social renovation and creativity and represents and reflects the people's voices and those of marginalized groups, the government endeavors to occupy and control all its spaces, including universities, professional institutions, and voluntary organizations It also attempts to allocate resources to civil society organizations in order to rob them of their independence. For that reason, many institutions have lost their creativity.

*Hegemony and dominance of intelligence approach*

The emergence of a garrison-state government and its stabilization during the tenth presidential elections, has increased the surveillance on Iranian society. The strategy of enforcing suppression was further developed, with the replacement of independent organizations in order to manufacture a tamed and obedient civil society.

To neutralize the so-called velvet revolution, the following strategies were implemented:

1.  **Closing all windows to civil and political freedoms and civil society organizations** by creating limitations, canceling work permits, closing down activities, and interfering in the affairs of professional associations such as the Association of Journalists, political parties (i.e., Islamic Participation Party, Etemad Meli Party, Iran Freedom Movement), and civil society organizations (i.e., ICTRC, Lawyers Bar Association, Defenders of Human Rights Centre, Association to Defend Prisoners' Rights, Association for Freedom of Press, etc).

2.  **Successfully creating fear and terror through widespread detention and harassment of activists.** Many left civil society activities, transferred to other areas, or left the country altogether. A number of activists moved into the shadows and some adjusted to the new situation and followed the government's orders. A large number of activists were sentenced to prison by the judiciary or freed on bail. At present, about 800 civil society activists are either in prison or banned from travel abroad.

3.  **Interference in internal affairs and rescinding the independence of a number of professional associations** (i.e., lawyers, engineers, and construction architects associations); creating bogus civil society organizations and enforcing the policy of replacement. The creation and development of religious institutions and expansion of the Basij militia are all parts of this initiative. At present, there are 40,000 Basiji militia bases active throughout the country and, according to the new plan (2009), another 7,000 are due to be established.

4.  **Encouraging and directing civil society organizations towards charity and relief work** through relief committees and youth organizations along with the creation of dependent organizations as opposed to independent ones.

5.  **Cutting ties between domestic and international civil society.** In 2010, a list of banned international organizations and centers (60 centers) was published. Connection to them is now considered a felony. Under the same pretext, a number of human rights activists were detained or their activities limited and their offices closed down and they were banned from traveling abroad to attend seminars and conferences. Even the United Nations offices in Tehran were ordered to work with organizations and individuals approved by the government and are not permitted to work with independent civil society organizations.

6.  **Destruction and sterilization of cooperation among civil society organizations** is another policy as any accumulation of power is considered a security threat. Dissolution of the Network of Non-Governmental Houses in more than 30 provinces in the past year has been one result of this power phobia. The right to assembly even for environmental issues is denied for the same reason.

7.  **Narrowing cyber space and the prevention of the flow of information** is another strategy which has been vigorously pursued. This is carried out through filtering, hacking, and shutting down websites and mobile phone networks. Reducing internet speed in sensitive moments and interference in the network of communications serves the same purpose, arguably more effectively than filtering. Iran has one of the lowest rates of internet speed in the world and ranks at 187 among the 204 countries. The government claims that restrictions of 128 kpbs for domestic internet users are due to insufficient methods for filtering web content! Interestingly, the capital city Tehran is not among the 10 cities which enjoy relatively faster internet access!

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During the 2009-2010 upheavals, networks such as facebook, twitter and Youtube were not accessible for days. Even filter-circumvention devices had problems opening emails. The government also filtered hundreds of sites. The IRGC organized a group of hackers called "the Cyber Army" with the main task of attacking websites and creating insecurity and waging psychological warfare in cyber space. Since the government owns the communications company which is the main internet provider in Iran, it can close down access to information and free circulation of information whenever it decides. Last year,the IRGC bought Iran's telecommunications company and allocated a large budget to combat soft war and occupy cyber space.

### Military in politics and economy

In the past two decades, the military entered into various fields of Iranian society and expanded its influence and presence, creating serious obstacles to the development of the civil society and the private sector. The ascendance of the military into the power structure created fundamental transformations in the politics and economics of the Islamic Republic and gave it a new character which can be called a "Military oligarchy."

In the first few years after the revolution, the IRGC carried a political-ideological dimension. The start of the Iran-Iraq war expanded its military-intelligence character. With the establishment of the Ministry of Intelligence and the redirection of the security function, the IRGC was banned from politics by the leader of the Islamic Revolution. During the war years, the Guard's military dimension dominated its function.

By the end of Iran-Iraq war and in the 1990s, the second generation of the IRGC came to power and, with the government's encouragement and under the pretext of reconstruction, the military entered the economic sphere. The Guards used Article 147 of the constitution which stipulates for "use of the army in peace times" and established sections for reconstruction such as "Ghorb" and "Khatam al-Anbia," registering a number of companies and preparing the ground for its arrival into the economy.

The IRGC's activities continued and increased throughout the past decades. After two decades of work in the economy the IRGC has taken over vital and important sectors including oil, communications, transportation, financial and credit establishments.

In the 1990s, an attempt was made for the entrance of the IRGC into politics but social and political grounds were not prepared. The most important action taken by influential elements in the IRGC was a letter sent to then president Khatami, regarding the 8 July 2001 incidents (Appendix no 1). This letter was signed by 24 top high ranking commanders and had a threatening and critical tone, portraying the IRGC as victims. The letter spoke of the IRGC's concerns of disrespect towards the supreme leader and their ability to answer and mentioned that their patience was running out.

In 2005, the military engineered the presidential elections that brought a new class of politicians to power. These were golden years for the Revolutionary Guards. They consolidated their power in the 2009 elections and played a major role in the suppression following the June 2010 elections.

However, the involvement of the military in the economy in the 1990s and politics in the new century is the result of the weak and bloodless private and civil sector of Iran. With the developments of the past year, it makes it even harder for civil society to expand and pass through such a barrier.

### Civil society as an instrument in the hand of political and social groups

In recent years, several political groups have established strategies on the development of civil society in order to achieve their political goals. Others claim that the political arena has shifted into the civil sphere and because of that they want to be more involved in civil activities. In practice they have not taken any steps to strengthen civil society nor has there been any change in their behavior towards civil matters. To

view the matter from a pessimistic perspective, one could say that this represents the same old politics of creating confusion between the boundaries of civil society and using that confusion as a ladder to reach the center of political power. Optimistically speaking, one must say that they are careless in promoting their demands. Either way, such approaches by political groups have cost civil society dearly.

## *Legal*

### *Lack of transparent and powerful legal structure*

A lack of a transparent legal structure which guarantees the rights to free association and free flow of information, along with allowing the establishment of new organizations while guarding the right to work for those involved in civil society are major obstacles for growth and development.

The primary problem of Iranian civil society is the lack of transparency combined with the incorporation of multiple legislations governing its activities. Existing holes in the legislation and multiplicity of regulations governing the setting up and registration of an organization, along with controls and limitations on information and discriminatory practices, are the principle practical legal barriers.

 At present, the following rules and regulations deal with civil society:

1. Legislation which dates back to 1910 and the reform Articles of 584 and 585 of 1938 make up Iran's law of commerce which deal with non-profit and voluntary organizations. The importance of this legislation lies in its history as marking the beginning of contemporary civil society and secondly, for dealing with non-commercial institutions. It can be referred to in courts of law as the original legislation.

2. Legislation governing the activities of political parties, professional associations, and Islamic associations was approved by the government in 1981. Its detailed articles were approved by the cabinet in 1989. According to this legislation, associations, professional syndicates and unions can be established to defend their rights and must work within the law. According to article 10 of this legislation, a commission comprising representatives of the offices of the general prosecutor, judiciary, ministry of internal affairs, along with two appointees from the Islamic parliament oversee the application, licensing, and activities of such organizations

3. Chamber of Commerce, Mining, and Industry regulates licensing and activities of export companies and the Chamber supervises their performance.

4. The legislation relating to the aims and responsibilities of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance passed in 1986, supervises the issue of culture in the country. According to Article 2, sections 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22, the ministry is the institution that oversees the work of cultural and artistic organizations. Based on this article, in 1996 the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution set out regulations and criteria governing this legislation.

5. The labor law, passed by Council of the Consultative Assembly in 1990, and its regulations were approved in 1992. According to article 131 of this legislation and its executive directives, all workers and employers in any profession and guild are allowed to work within the framework of this legislation and its directives.

    According to the labor law, three labor organizations have been recognized in Islamic Republic of Iran:

    - Islamic Labour Councils which are neither councils nor professional associations/syndicates but have the responsibility of both.

    - Islamic labour associations.

- Professional associations.

6. Legislation for professional guilds passed in 1983. This legislation oversees all activities of professional unions and the country's higher council of guilds.

7. Legislation regarding the responsibilities and organization of the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology was approved in 1984. Articles 1 & 2 and its executive directives set the code of practice.

8. The Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology is one of the important institutions to issue permission for students unions, associations, and university scientists along with other higher education and civil society institutions which work in the educational fields.

9. Legislation for the establishment and operation of NGOs passed in 1985, based on article 130 of the constitution. According to section B, of article 1 of this legislation, a commission comprising of representatives of the Ministry of Interior Affairs (the Deputy of Social Affairs), Higher Council of the Provinces, and a representative of the NGOs convene either in the Ministry of Interior Affairs or the office of the governor to issue licenses.

## Cultural

### Discourse of ideological traditionalism

Despite cultural transformations in Iranian society, traditional and ideological discourses backed by the ideological machinery dominate. These discourses contain various elements of political Shi'ism, patriarchy, and populism. The discourse views the modern world and democratic way of life as the primary enemy. Liberalism is seen as a dangerous ideology. Supporters of this discourse have an enmity towards pluralism, civil society, and the tradition of Western intellectualism. They emphasize leadership, social and moral discipline, traditional values, political elitism, and the control of culture. This discourse is one of the important barriers to the development of civil society in Iran. The weakness of urban culture, the lack of both a democratic mentality and democratic forces are other restraining factors.

> *The Iranian government can sustain itself through the sale of natural resources, namely: oil. Therefore, it does not meet the needs and demands of the people and imposes its own policies on them. Relative independence from social forces combined with a monopoly on resources and instruments of power, means that the government does not need to permit the formation of either an independent and strong civil society or a thriving private sector.*

Alongside these restrictive factors, intellectuals and the university establishment are not interested in civil society and this issue has not been transformed into a public discussion in such institutions.

### Lack of civic religion and ethics

A lack of civic religion and ethics marks the other restraining factors for the growth of civil society in Iran. Civic religion stands opposed to traditional religion by accepting pluralism, tolerance, and civic responsibility, and reinforcing these principles. It is the religion of those intertwined with the world. At present, traditional morality does not empower people to become better citizens. The lack of ethics to regulate human relations has turned Iranian society into a society without civility. This factor prevents it from acquiring and developing a sense of civic responsibility which is the basis of ethics.

## *Economy*

### *Rentier-economy*

The structure of the Iranian economy prevents the formation of a strong civil society and makes the government unaccountable to the people. The government can continue its existence despite opposition from social forces and individuals. Iran's economy is a rentier economy. The character of such an economy reduces the government's dependency on taxes. It can sustain itself through the sale of natural resources, namely: oil. Therefore, the government does not meet the needs and demands of the people and imposes its own policies on them. Relative independence from social forces combined with a monopoly on resources and instruments of power, means that the government does not need to permit the formation of either an independent and strong civil society or a thriving private sector. As a result, these sectors remain weak and sidelined. The private sector does not invest in industry due to insecurity and delayed return. Its biggest investment is concentrated in commerce and trade, and it is reluctant to invest in social ventures, feeling no responsibility towards society and the people.

### *Poverty*

Expansion of poverty among social groups is another problem. According to the head of Iran's Statistics Center, "Despite the country's huge resources, unemployment, inflation, and an unpredictable cash flow have driven 10 million Iranians under the poverty line and more than 30 million relatively near to that line." The concept of "voluntary work" has lost its importance because many social groups use all their efforts to meet their basic needs, leaving little space to respond to other needs and to engage in volunteerism.

### *Lack of strong private sector*

One of the reasons for the under-development of civil society in Iran is the lack of a strong private sector. Apart from rare occasions, the private sector has never been independent of power and has always acted as an indicator of the Behemoth government's demands. In the past two decades, the private sector experienced growth and gained some power.  Yet in comparison with that of the government, its power is minimal.

The private sector has a 12-15% in banking 15% in insurance, and less than 10% in major industries. Companies which enter contracting tenders for industries such as gas, oil and petrochemical, and public works primarily belong to the government or are semi-government institutions. Iran's private sector has no participation in the naval, rail, or air transport sectors. The size of private shares in these sectors is small scale and scattered. The private sector's influence in the structure of government is as small as it is in the economy.

In culture, art, social affairs, and the media, the private sector lacks power. The biggest selling newspapers belong to the government and the private sector's share is limited to buying commercial advertisements in these papers.

The private sector owns hundreds of professional, commercial, and industrial establishments but their power of influence is minimal even among their own members. They have no influence even in the middle or lower structure of political power.

In recent years, the government has allocated a number of industrial and economic establishments to the private sector in order to execute Article 44 of the constitution but this has not led to a strengthened sector. Rather, a new phenomenon of unidentified ownership in the economy has emerged which will ultimately reproduce government domination over the economy.

## Social

### Weakness of the middle classes

In the social arena, Iranian society faces numerous challenges which, if continued, will seriously threaten civil society.

The first challenge is the weakness of the middle class due to historical factors and the existence of the Behemoth and rentier government. In the past two decades the educated middle class was able to emerge in the society and reach an important social, political, and cultural status. The relation between the middle class and the dominant power is not an ultimate conflict. The overlap between the society and the government sometimes demonstrates itself in cooperation between the middle classes and the government. Many of the agent-employers and engineers, without whom the government would not be able to function, come from the middle classes.

*The problem of the educated middle class stems from its dependence on the regime, not its connection to the ideology. At present, this class is divided, dependent, incapable of even organizing a strike.*

The second challenge is the ideological influence of the dominant power among the middle classes. The problem of the educated middle class stems from its dependence on the regime, not its connection to the ideology. At present, this class is divided, dependent, incapable of even organizing a strike. A universal strike is a manifestation of conflict and struggle.

### Reduction and erosion of social capital

The erosion and reduction of social capital in the previous years is a huge challenge. Mistrust among groups and social forces and their inability to form networks and volunteer cooperation is a major indicator of the erosion of social capital. Another challenge is the expansion of clientelism (protectorate relations) due to political under-development. As a result, individuals and groups engage in deals with centers of power, and gangs and clubs have become the main players in the socio-political life of Iranians. The lack of transparency, secrecy, and unaccountability are the main indicators of clientelism and corruption. Favoritism and sectarian relations are the results of the expansion of such relations.

### Expansion of "Hobbesian" situation

The expansion of the "Hobbesian" situation in the country is another challenge of the civil society in Iran. Lack of political, social, and economic security is an indicator of this. In a Hobbesian situation people feel unsafe in their private and public lives. Fear, hopelessness, and mistrust are major indicators of a Hobbesian situation. This will cause the biggest obstacle to growth of civil society.

## International

### Change in the policies of United Nations agencies

At the international level, Iranian civil society is facing many challenges. The first challenge is the pressure by the government on UN agencies to operate all their programs through official government agencies and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. To comply with these policies, UN agencies have abandoned their cooperation with independent organizations and only work with the government and civil society organizations created by the government or its agencies. During the events that followed the disputed presidential elections, UN agencies put pressure on some of their local personnel and dismissed some of them for their connections with the protests. The consequences of the work of UN agencies in Iran is further promotion of organizations connected to the government as opposed to independent civil society.

### Nuclear issue and sanctions

The nuclear issue and sanctions by the UN Council trumps issues such as human rights and moves society towards an emergency situation, sidelining the issue of civil liberties. Meanwhile, the IRGC and their relatives are benefiting from the sanctions and are accumulating wealth.

### The shadow of war in the region

The shadow of war in the region is another challenge facing the civil society in Iran. the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq resulted in increased militarism, anti-democratic traditions, and the growth of fundamentalism and expansion of terrorism. Civil society needs a calm and stable environment to bloom. The shadow of war over the region provides a suitable environment for the growth of anti-civil society and anti-democratic sentiments and the dominance of the authoritarian forces and military in the political sphere of society.

*UN agencies have abandoned their cooperation with independent organizations and only work with the government and civil society organizations created by the government or its agencies. During the events that followed the disputed presidential elections, UN agencies put pressure on some of their local personnel and dismissed some of them for their connections with the protests. The consequences of the work of UN agencies in Iran is further promotion of organizations connected to the government as opposed to independent civil society.*

### Receding third wave of democracy

The process of the downfall of the third wave of democracy in the world is another challenge. Since 1974, more than 90 countries moved towards democracy. At the beginning of the 21$^{st}$ century about 60% of the world's countries were independent with democratic governments. Democratization of Mexico and Indonesia at the end of the 1990s and the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine represent some of these democratic developments.

The ecstasy over such victories did not last long. In recent years this wave has receded and autocratic governments have emerged here and there. Democracy has gone into recession. Of such countries, Nigeria, Russia, Ukraine, Thailand, Venezuela Bangladesh, Philippines, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are going backwards. Kenya is in chaos. Many countries in the democracy club have not had much success. Even countries which are called model of the third wave democracy such as Chile and South Africa, Poland and Ghana, are facing management problems and corruption. This downfall in democracy is a challenge for the development of civil society and the movement for democracy in Iran.

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*CSOs Internal and External Assessment Outline*

| *STRENGTHS* | *WEAKNESSES* |
|---|---|
| 1. Diversity and plurality | 1. Establishment and formation of civil society organizations |
| 2. Successful experiences and best practices | 2. Split and rupture in the civil society |
| 3. Bravery, innovation, and creativity | 3. Limited civil society |
| 4. The emergence of strong and powerful civil society organization | 4. Unbalanced civil society |
| 5. The emergence of a new generation of social activists | 5. Isolation |
| 6. Resistance and persistence | 6. Inefficiency and ineffectiveness |
| 7. Grounds for cooperation, convergence and solidarity among civil society activists | 7. Inability to apply change management and management for change |
| 8. Opportunity for re-thinking, re-examining and reviewing strategies | 8. Lack of innovation, creativity and initiative |
| 9. Emergence and expansion of cooperation networks and membership in global networks | 9. Lack of efficient and effective leadership |
| 10. Growth of civil society in cyber space | 10. Bad governance |
| | 11. Communication weakness |
| | 12. Reduction or cessation of capacity building centers |
| | 13. Weak theoretical knowledge |
| | 14. Weakness in the effective capacity-building and lack of investment |
| | 15. Inefficiency of networks of cooperation |
| | 16. Lack of ethical codes and self-regulation mechanisms |
| | 17. Fear and conservatism |

| *OPPORTUNITIES* | *THREATS* |
|---|---|
| Political environment:<br><br>- Government and Tehran' s city council policies and programs<br>- The arrival of new political forces into the civil society arena<br>- Emergence of strong opposition<br><br>Legal structure:<br><br>- The capacity of the constitution of the Islamic Republic<br><br>Cultural environment:<br><br>- Expansion of democratic idea and the discourse on democracy, human rights and peace<br>- Discourse of post-Islamic intellectuals<br>- Expansion of cyberspace and increased access to information<br><br>Social environment:<br><br>- Emergence of the Green movement<br>- Expansion of the cultural middle class<br>- Tradition of volunteer actions and charity work in Iranian society<br><br>Economy<br><br>- Privatization, implementation of Article of the constitution<br><br>International environment:<br><br>- Role of international organizations and UN agencies<br>- Globalization and democracy<br>- Domination of civil society discourse in global society | Political environment:<br><br>- Nature of government in Iran<br>- Attitude of Iran's ninth and tenth government towards civil society<br>- Hegemony and dominance of the intelligence approach<br>- Military in politics and economy<br>- Civil society as an instrument in the hand of political and social groups<br><br>Legal structure:<br><br>- Lack of transparent and powerful legal structure<br><br>Cultural environment:<br><br>- Discourse of ideological traditionalism<br>- Lack of civil religion and ethics<br><br>Economy environment:<br><br>- Rentier-economy<br>- Poverty<br>- Lack of a strong private sector<br><br>Social environment:<br><br>- Weakness of the middle classes<br>- Reduction and erosion of social capital<br>- Expansion of "Hobbesian" situation<br><br>International environment:<br><br>- Change in the policies of UN agencies<br>- Nuclear issue and the sanctions<br>- The shadow of war in the region and Iran<br>- Receding third wave of democracy |

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# 5.  CONCLUSION

Considering the strength, opportunities, weakness and breaking points of the civil society in Iran and the existing struggles and developments in the society, 5 scenarios can be predicted:

1. Suppression and the premature death of the civil society. The government suppresses the civil-political movement through purging the political system and the dominance of the garrison-state in the Iranian society.

2. Despair and disappointment drives the civil society into isolation and engagement in relief and charity work and away from politics and the responsibilities it brings.

3.  A weak and limited civil society, which plays little role in socio-political transformations, alongside a bureaucratic and autocratic government.

4. Erosion of the social battles. Neither the garrison-state nor civil society will be able to drive out the other, resulting in a stalemate.

5. Expansion of an independent, vigorous, democratic, and developmental civil society that will bring democracy to Iran as the best-case scenario.

These scenarios depend on the creativity, ability, resources, opportunities, and capabilities of the social forces. Internal as well as international conditions for capacity building and empowerment of civil activists, effective strategies, plans and programs for civil society building all depend on the power and determination of suppression of the garrison state.

# 6.   RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

In the present treacherous situation, considering possible scenarios to prevent the premature death of civil society and its successful transition to a strong and sustained sphere, the following strategies and action plans are suggested:

*Strategy 1: Civil society resistance against widespread suppression and replacement policies.*

Measures:

1. Establish an umbrella network to defend civil society organizations and activists at the domestic and international level.

2. Mobilize the public against suppressive strategies through campaigns for the defense of civil society and freedom of association at the domestic and international level.

3. Utilize the strategy of repair and restructuring social networks and the expansion of virtual civil society alongside physical civil society.

4. Establish a joint fund to guarantee the financial stability of civil society organizations and to support their activists.

5. Implement transparent and refined policies in approaching the government or semi-government civil society, particularly in the non-governmental field.

6. Make use of a strategy of rejection and marginalization of dependent civil societies (GOCSOs) and prevent them from occupying civil spaces at the national and international level.

7. Use a strategy of alliance and cooperation among civil society organizations in order to create a strong, united, and influential front against suppression and replacement strategies.

*Strategy 2: Expansion and development of the discourse on democracy, civil society, human rights, and peace in Iranian civil society.*

Measures:

1. Establishment of centers for production, publication, and spread of civil and democratic philosophies, values, ethics, and actions of a civil society.

2. Establishment of virtual as well as real schools to educate and train activists and defenders of civil society and human rights.

3. Development of peace-making skills, publicity and advocacy, leadership, civil disobedience, and democratization.

4. Facilitate access, exchange, and transition of information and knowledge among activists and civil society organizations.


*Strategy 3: Establishment and restructuring energetic, vigorous, democratic and developmental civil society organizations and associations.*

Measures:

1. Expansion and development of online capacity building as well as face-to-face programs for civil society organizations and activists. Capacity building in this strategy requires investment in the internal systems through organizational development, strong and skilful management and manpower, facilities on the ground, technology, advocacy, public relations, external relations with financial supporters and volunteer workforce and interested parties. In addition, utilizing opportunities, resources, and coordination in the battle for social transformation.

2. Implementing capacity building strategies to increase theoretical knowledge and the level of operations of the centers and institutions responsible for promoting capacity building of civil society organizations.

3. Employing strategies of expansion and operation and sound management of civil society organizations such as participation of all members and volunteer forces in shaping agendas, decision-making, and executing decisions. Developing gender-related attitudes and democratic relations among activists and organizations. Taking unambiguous and transparent approaches in responding to interested parties by using self-discipline and taking responsibility through programs of qualitative licensing operations (self-regulation).

4. Development and expansion of social base and power of representation through the creation of close relations with local societies and social groups and responding to their needs.

5. Utilizing variable methods of investment, resource variation, encouragement of investment from the private sector and from multinationals. Creating a financial fund to guarantee the stability of civil society organizations

6. Implementing strategies of expansion and variability of activities to influence the public.

7. Implementing strategies of media variability through setting up television and radio networks and other means of communications in order to reflect voices of the civil society.

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*Strategy 4: Empowerment of political, social, and cultural environment and cyber space for the expansion and development of civil society.*

Measures:

1. Programs of publicity and advocacy for culture-building and instituting civic culture. Transforming vision, practice, and behavior towards civil society amongst policy-makers, agent-employers, political-social activists and intellectuals. Turning the issue of civil society into a public issue at the public level.

2. Implementing citizen empowerment projects in order to play a role in the landscape of power in the transition to democracy and development. This can be achieved through expansion of the culture of citizenship, civil disobedience, awareness-raising, and educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities and the expansion of association life.

3. Implementing strategies of constructive dialogue among civil society organizations aimed at reducing existing splits and ruptures in transition to a consistent and operational civil society.

4. Seeking strategic alliances among groups, social, and political forces, especially in the private sector and encouraging the private sector to invest in these areas, while in transition from a weak civil society to a strong one.

5. Expansion of cooperation with the media in order to access free flow of information and development of democratic and civic ideas by educating civic journalists.

6. Employing strategies of dialogue with the private sector, political society, and UN agencies in order to play an effective role in the process of development and democracy and to break away from the existing hazardous situation.

7. Strengthening relations and cooperation with universities, scientific, and religious centers in order to exchange and produce knowledge and literature on democracy, civil society, peace and human rights.

*Strategy 5: Expansion and development of communications with international civil societies and organizations.*

Measures:

1. Expansion, development and exchange of knowledge, experiences and technical cooperation between Iranian and international civil society organizations

2. Expansion of regional and international cooperation and communications and exchange of experiences and dialogue on common issues. Attending international gatherings and membership in the international networks.

3. Identifying and utilizing existing resources and possibilities in the UN agencies and international organizations for the empowerment and capacity building of activists and organizations

4. Forming coalitions among the Iranian civil society activists and organizations and the international organizations aimed at peace-making activities and elimination of violence and discrimination among all social groups. Advocacy and support for the Iranian movement for political-civil rights and to further projects of democracy and civil society building in Iran and the region.

# 7.  GLOSSARY

Civil society:

An area in the society where independent and self-structured movements, groups, and social forces work to control political power, defend human and civil rights, and their professional interests.

Strong civil society:

A strong, consistent, extensive and efficient society, with the power to act and enjoy widespread popular support; representing social groups and forces at different times and settings and aware of its role and responsibilities in the landscape of power. A civil society for itself and capable of limiting and exposing political power and governments and making them accountable.

Weak civil society:

An inconsistent, ruptured, inefficient, and loose society which lacks determination to act and does not enjoy a wide-spread popular base or representation; unaware of its role and responsibilities in the landscape of power. A civil society in itself which lacks the capability to limit political power and make the government accountable to the people.

Garrison state:

A state in which real power lays in the hands of a network of not-so-organized military men, disguised as civil representatives who work in close cooperation with the non-military political elite. They possess modern scientific and technological instruments and tend to resort to violence to combat internal challenges and conflicts. In a garrison-state, all political and social activities are controlled and organized through the government. The state occupies all civil spaces, and the role of the civil society organizations, except those connected to the state are minimized. In other words, there is no economic, social, political or cultural life outside the limits of the official state.

Political society:

An area of social life, where groups and political forces compete over control of government machinery.

Non-governmental organizations:

Establishments which are set up by independent groups or individuals and work voluntarily for non-profitable, non-commercial, non-political goals. Non-governmental organizations work for humanistic purposes such as women's issues, human rights, civil rights, environment, charity, social injuries, advocacy, health and hygiene, empowerment, development, scientific, cultural, social and similar activities.

Mass-society:

A homogenous society, in which the concept of grouping and association life is discolored and individuals lack the defense mechanisms of civil society groups in order to be protected against the direct and indirect pressures of those who are in control of political and economic power. Populism is the ideology of a mass-society.

# 8. APPENDICES

## A. Appendix 1: Number of NGOs and their Branches in Different Provinces (2004)

| Province | NGO | NGO Branch |
|---|---|---|
| E. Azerbaijan | 240 | 17 |
| W. Azerbaijan | 177 | 49 |
| Ardebil | 109 | 24 |
| Isfahan | 948 | 174 |
| Ilam | 124 | 26 |
| Booshehr | 154 | 4 |
| Tehran | 1114 | 111 |
| Charmahal Bakhtiari | 166 | 25 |
| Khorasan | 460 | 51 |
| Khuzestan | 220 | 20 |
| Zanjan | 90 | 14 |
| Semnan | 149 | 14 |
| Sistan Baloochestan | 106 | 13 |
| Fars | 496 | 86 |
| Ghazvin | 103 | 17 |
| Ghom | 129 | 8 |
| Kordestan | 124 | 14 |
| Kerman | 87 | 56 |
| Kermanshah | 153 | 26 |
| Kohkiluyeh Boyerahmad | 59 | 6 |
| Golestan | 261 | 29 |
| Gilan | 118 | 26 |
| Lorestan | 120 | 11 |
| Mazandaran | 494 | 151 |
| Markazi | 169 | 4 |
| Hormozgan | 129 | 8 |
| Hamedan | 138 | 27 |
| Yazd | 277 | 18 |
| Total (across country) | 6914 | 1039 |

http://amar.sci.org.ir/PlanList.aspx

## B.    Appendix 2: Excerpts from an analytical report on the performance of the representatives of the first NGOs to the Central Supervisory Board

*Excerpts from an analytical report on the performance of the representatives of the first NGOs to the Central Supervisory Board (6 March 2008)*

... In 2005, the reform government was replaced by Ahmadinejad administration and changes occurred at the managerial levels in the Ministry of Interior Affair. Under Dr. Majidi and while Mr. Amini was the Director General, a sudden recession took over—a sign of fundamental change and an absolute different approach compared to the past. Subsequently, all the licenses issued towards the end of the last administration came under review. Most of these licenses were invalidated because it was alleged they have violated the rule. The approaches of the previous managers were examined with suspicion and a security-oriented approach to their administration persuaded the newly arrival officials to take measures in compiling new set of rules that best served their own plans and trend of thought.

...Within a year of the new administration, 90 licenses which were already approved and issued but not delivered to the SAMAN applicants were cancelled. Efforts to review the files which had minor shortcomings were ignored. More over, what is damaging is the lack of proper understanding of the functions of SAMANs (voluntary organizations) or in other words volunteer work. The new administration which has successfully conducted an intelligence oriented management style has little understanding of the essence and spirit of volunteer work. To them, it is implausible that a group of people dedicate their financial assets and their time into a cause and request assistance from the authorities without expecting any return. It is hard for them to understand that clients who resort to the voluntary organizations are not ordinary people. They go there to heal the pains and sufferings of other people.

However, the first term of the Supervisory Delegation is nearing its end while problems of coordination among organizations for licensing, the ever-lasting NAJA differences with the interior ministry still exist. Other obstacles such as disregard for circulars and approvals, even the ruling of administrative court of justice, multiple and scattered function of the Company's House and non-coordination with the SAMANs, lack of clear definition and directive on charities has caused discrepancies. Lack of proper definition of boundaries of responsibilities at the national, regional and town's level and lack of guarantees to implement directives, lack of directive on the use of international financial resources, confusion between social and political realm still exists. SAMANs are accused of political activity and the widespread interference of government in this realm which is against the structure of volunteer organizations; lack of proper internal education on the culture and role of the elite and the those in charge in the organizations alongside the birth of government-sponsored SAMANs and negative publicity against independent SAMANs have all caused extensive problems for the honest and hardworking people in the SAMANs.

These organizations have gathered a contingent of concerned people who work to identify and deal with people's problems and instead they face obstacles at every step and are branded, agents of America, and Zionists who want to create a velvet revolution by a group of shallow people. However, they will not be driven out, nor frightened of such accusations and are determined to concentrate on their goals and take some burden off the society.

http://samanha.net/index.php?option=view&id=41&itemid=46

## C.    Appendix 3: Letter of IRGC Commanders to President Khatami (1999)

*Complete Text of the Letter of IRGC Commanders to Khatami after the attack by the Basij and the IRGC on Tehran university dormitories in July of 1999.*

Esteemed President of the Republic Hojjatoleslam Mr.Seyyed Mohammad Khatami

With wishes of peace and hope for your continued health, we present to you:

Following the recent events, as a group of public servants from the Holy Defense [Iran Iraq War] who defended the esteemed people of Iran, we considered it our duty to present this document to His Excellency the esteemed scholar. We hope that with great tolerance and valuable slogans, coupled with the message that you are advocating (we are willing to listen to every opposition speech and idea) you can address this issue. This issue represents, perhaps, the pain of thousands who have sacrificed for the Revolution, who nowadays – far away from any political line or party – see the problems and events of the Revolution with anxious eyes. And they are astonished and surprised at the silence, negligence, and simplistic views of Iranian officials, who are sitting on their seats with the blessing of the blood of thousands of martyrs.

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, certainly all of us have considered and do consider His Excellency pious, revolutionary, faithful, and possessing deep religious roots in the field of commitment to the Revolution. But your response to the events that we all have witnessed, which brought about the happiness and rejoicing of the enemy, and the priority you give to following up on some of the mistakes and transgressions, making them worse than they really are, compared with the lack of attention and downplaying the significance of other mistakes, such as law-breaking, desecration of Islam, and other pressures, have caused currents that hate the Revolution to become more confident. In contrast, they have caused defendants of the Revolution to become more conservative, with their apathy coupled with despair. Every day they have been humiliated, and because of this, they have seen blood, and with regret and sorrow, they bite their own fingers.

Esteemed Mr. President, the attack on the University dorms was, just as the honorable and innocent Leader of the Revolution said, an abominable, ugly, and bad event. Despite the fact that the harshest and most critical retaliatory measures were taken against those responsible, the Iranian people, because of the abominable actions that took place, not only accepted these confrontations but endorsed them as well. Yet an important question, remains unclear: in your opinion, was that the only catastrophe?

Only this issue is worth following up, paying attention to, opposing, and taking corrective measures against, such that a few Ministers resigned and the National Security Council organized a meeting and created a Special Research Group. But doesn't the desecration and disparagement of the foundations of the system call for regret and following up? Do you think the sanctity of the Velayat-e Faqih [Guardianship of the Jurisprudent] is less than that of the Tehran University dorms? Is the sanctity of the Imam, that rarefied individual, worth less than effrontery towards one student? Do you think that disrupting the security of the nation for a few days, attacking every faithful and religious Iranian, and starting public fires is not a catastrophe?

Do you think bringing the entire Islamic Republic under question, the very legacy of tens of thousands of martyrs, and shouting slogans against it does not constitute a catastrophe?

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, when it was said a few nights ago that a minority were shouting slogans against the Supreme Leader, moving towards the "ShahidMottahari Collection," our small children looked us in the eyes. It was as if they were asking us where our bravery had gone.

Esteemed Mr. President, today when we saw the face of the Supreme Leader, we wished for God to put us out of our misery. It is because our shoulders have locked up, and with itching eyes and lumps in our

throats, we must observe the withering away of the product of 14 centuries of the torment and persecution of Shi'ism and Islam.

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, you know well, despite all of our power, we are rendered incapable because of our friends' Reform-mindedness. Who is the person who does not know that today the hypocrites and opponents are gathering in regiments in the name of the "Students," and joining this line of battle? And vindictive, short-sighted, and profit-seeking insiders are adding fuel to the fire. They will not refrain from any form of speech or writing in order to incite more [chaos]!

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, how long should we watch with tears and regurgitate our own blood while we practice "democracy," laden with chaos and insults, and have Revolutionary patience at the cost of our own system?

Esteemed Mr. President, thousands of families of martyrs and soldiers and militants gave their votes to you, and their votes represent the (Presidential) medal upon your chest. They have the expectation that you will confront these problems judiciously. And today we see the footprint of the enemy in these recent events and hear them drunkenly laughing. Seize control of today for tomorrow will be much too late and your regret will be impossible to eliminate.

Honorable Seyyed, listen to the speech of those who appear to be friends and insiders in the Student movement, do not all of their sayings approve and promote chaos and law breaking?

Was this supposed to be the meaning of the Year of the Imam [1999, the 20th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution]? Do you think that this was the proper way to preserve his grandeur and legacy? And do you think that the inattention of a small group called "Hezbollah" constitutes permission for [the opposition] to break the head of every religious Iranian and destroying the respect of religion?

Esteemed Mr. Khatami, listen to the periodicals and radio stations of the world, does not the sound of the foreigners' Daf and Dohol [two particularly upbeat Iranian musical instruments] come to mind?

Esteemed President, if you do not make a Revolutionary decision today and do not fulfill your Islamic and national mission, tomorrow will be so late, and the problems so unsolvable, that it will be unimaginable.

In conclusion, with complete respect and endearment towards His Excellency, we declare that our patience has come to an end, and we will not permit ourselves any more tolerance in the face of your inaction.

Commanders and public servants of the respected people of Iran during the Holy Defense (Iran Iraq War): Gholamali Rashid, Aziz Jafari, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Ghasem Soleymani, Jafar Asadi, Ahmad Kazemi, Mohammad Kowsari, Asadollah Naseh, Mohammad Bagheri, Gholamreza Mehrabi, Abdolhamid Riufinejad, Noor Ali Shushtari, Dr. Ali Ahmadian, Ahmad Gholampour, Yaghoub Zahedi, Nabiollah Roodaki, Ali Fadavi, Gholamreza Jalali, Amin Shariati, Hossein Hamedani, Esmail Gha'ani, Ali Fazli, Ali Zahedi, Morteza Ghorbani.

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Due to the power of creativity and innovation – especially when it comes to women's issues against gender discrimination, development of local societies, tackling poverty, and job creation – Iranian civil society organizations have gained a measure of acceptability. They managed to employ new methods of distribution of resources among social groups and in this way played a major role in the transitional period. The One Million Signature Campaign (based on a similar initiative in Morocco) introduced many innovations into Iranian civil society and gained attention outside Iran. This Campaign targeted equality for men and women and the "method" it used can be utilized in other areas such as social movements, syndicates, students and so on. The Campaign formed its strategy around specific women's rights issues. It did not have a stance on power and worked independently of political parties. It focused on the necessity of an internal transformation of society in order to bring about changes for human rights and citizens' equality. The Campaign represented the essence of the decades of women's activities which were used to shape it.

Another successful example is the resistance of Iran's Higher Centre of Professional Associations of Employers against its unlawful dissolution by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in 2006. The Centre began an all-out legal battle in defense of freedom of association against the Islamic republic through the Iranian courts and the International Labour Organization (ILO). For three and half years, the Centre pursued its case until in 2010 the court ruled against the Ministry of Labour and the ruling was affirmed by the appeal court. This was a huge success and a model to defend freedoms of associations in Iran.