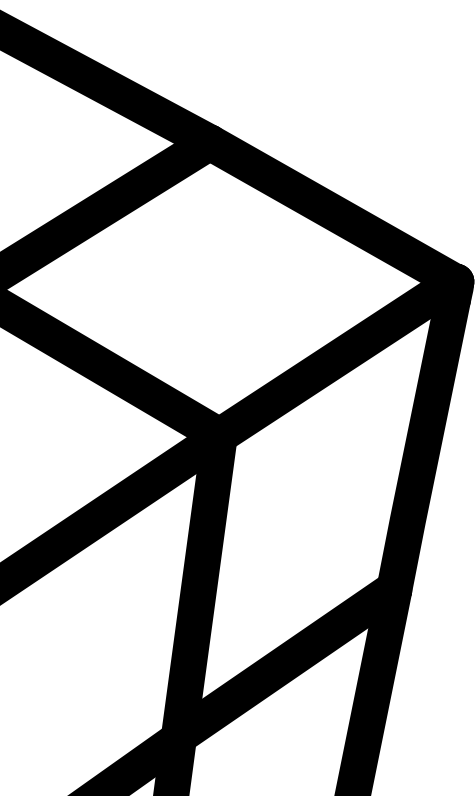


Proposal

# BANGLADESH

v 1.1



# Bangladesh

## Unban Me Policy Proposal:

**Objective:** The Unban Me Project aims to ensure the protection of the online identities, freedom of expression and the physical safety of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and Victims of Human Rights Violations (VHRVs). This is necessary due to the demonstrable connection between digital identities and real-world physical safety.

**Context:** On the 14th of December 2018 the Hague Peace Projects hosted the second annual Hague Hacks Conference. The conference had a number of workshops designed to explore technology related human rights problems and identify possible solutions for these problems. The following key points were identified:

- There is widespread suppression of the online activity of Human Rights Defenders and Victims of Human Right Violations on social media platforms.
- Human Rights Defenders and Victims of Human Rights Violations have immense difficulty securing their digital identities and content from cyber-attacks.
- The reporting tools found on social media platforms when used by Human Rights Defenders and Victims of Human Right Violations are highly ineffective.
- Social networks frequently collaborate with illiberal regimes to curtail the online activities of Human Rights Defenders and Victims of Human Rights Violations, rather than the Human Rights Violators (HRVs) themselves.

When HRDs and VHRVs face these four issues they are deprived of life saving networks and critical national, and international visibility. This lack of visibility and attention emboldens HRVs as it increases their scope to act without repercussion. Furthermore, in many cases the online identities of HRDs and VHRVs are compromised when their physical location, and personal movements are also compromised. In a number of cases this has directly contributed to their deaths.

**Results:** Specifically, the project would have two key sets of results:

1. A network would be created to foster essential linkages between Technology Practioners and Human Rights Defenders. This network would continually disseminate best practises derived from the Technology Practioners. HRDs and VHRVs would both reduce the probability of being banned from social media and be better equipped to protect their online identities from being compromised.

2. The Hauge Hacks (HH) in collaboration with appropriate partners (universities and technology companies) would create a secure database cataloguing the asymmetric treatment of HRDs and VHRVs by social media companies. An evidence-based approach is key to this goal. The core aim would be to collate, translate and systematise evidence of human rights violations. This evidence would then be used strategically to present key evidence in appropriate forums (e.g. government select committees, policy conferences, respectable journalistic organisations etc.) Ultimately, this evidence could pressure social media companies to change their policies.

**Implementation:** It is important to note that these two strategies are not mutually exclusive and are actually interdependent. Therefore, they should be pursued together. The first step would be to identify four types of partners for four different roles:

- Technology Practitioners: Their role would be to provide expert technical advice for the creation and maintenance of best practises. It is key that appropriate pre-existing solutions be drawn upon when they are deemed adequate. This would be much more economical and judicious than engineering unnecessary new solutions.
- Grassroots activists: They would be Human Rights Defenders who take a role in fostering trust and building relationships for channels of information acquisition and dissemination.
- A university or company with expertise in data research and analysis: They would play a critical part in creating the evidence database which would be used to lobby policymakers and influence social media companies.
- The Hague Peace Projects (HPP): Their role would be to create, maintain and coordinate critical linkages between The Hague Hacks and HRDs. Additionally, HPP would be the conduit through which information is disseminated to HRDs and VHRVs and acquired for our other partners. It shall also be the responsibility of HPP to have a holistic view of the overall project and to communicate this to all partners as it concerns them.

Short-term and long-term timelines for these actions will be established in order to meet concrete and feasible goals. Partners would be in communication digitally at frequent scheduled intervals. They would also meet physically as and when it would be deemed appropriate to explore results and adjust strategy accordingly.

**Summary:** Unban Me is a project which seeks to actively disseminate life-saving best practises to HRDs and VHRVs, whilst offering continuous support whenever feasible. Simultaneously it will create a digital database which would demonstrably illustrate the problematic practises of social media companies in order to change them. Ultimately, the aim of this project is to support Human Rights Defenders in facing the key challenges to their activism and personal safety summarized in the context section above.

# How can you help?

## Call for technical assistance

**Context:** Unban.me is a project that aims to collect evidence of accounts of Bangladeshi and Pakistani human rights activists being blocked on Facebook or their posts being flagged as hate speech. For all other information on this, please confer the Unban.me proposal itself.

**Objective:** Preliminary user research will help us understand who exactly the Human Rights Defenders are, and which struggles they empirically face. As a first sample, we will approach Bangladeshi diaspora abroad.

**Implementation:** We will conduct interviews in person or per video call, and ask questions regarding the amount of and kinds of devices people use, their posting habits, whether they have been affected by bans, and what role social media plays in their (political) lives.

**Help needed regarding:** As this is a qualitative study with data, we are bound to the GDPR of the European Union.

Two major issues arise from this:

- If our interviews are conducted online, how can we ensure privacy? What software can be used – is Skype the best option? And if we resort to surveys, what survey program can we use?
- Our storage must be offline. If we want to jointly edit documents, we cannot use google docs. Are there any better mechanisms?

## Discussion Questions

- How likely is it that these plans will lead to the claimed human rights benefits?
- Are we one of many human rights groups that are currently trying to do the same thing? Are we doing double work? Are we competing? Should we cooperate?
- Do these solutions already exist? Are we re-inventing the wheel?
- Are they technically viable?
- Can this proposal be improved?
- How do we acquire funding?
- Can we create a business model?