



NIAC

National Iranian American Council | Community. Democracy. Universal Rights.

December 20, 2018

Stewart Butterfield
CEO
Slack
500 Howard Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Mr. Butterfield:

We are writing on behalf of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC)—the largest Iranian-American grassroots organization in the United States—regarding Slack’s apparent closure of accounts held by persons of Iranian descent who are resident outside of Iran. We are deeply concerned that Slack may be engaged in discrimination against persons of Iranian descent, as U.S. companies—such as Slack—are generally not prohibited from providing services to Iranian persons who are resident outside of Iran under U.S. sanctions laws administered by the United States Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). We strongly urge Slack to take a more scrutinizing look at its own sanctions compliance policies and procedures to ensure that the company is not implementing its policies in an over-inclusive manner so as to discriminate against persons of Iranian descent. We also urge that, in the interim, Slack provide notice and an opportunity for those whose accounts it is considering for closure to provide necessary information and to appeal the decision if necessary so as to guard against unwarranted account closures and the current absence of any channel for remediation.

We fully understand that Slack—as a U.S. entity—is legally obligated to abide by U.S. sanctions laws and regulations administered by OFAC, including the Iranian Transactions and Sanctions Regulations (ITSR), 31 C.F.R. Part 560. The ITSR prohibits U.S. persons from engaging in most transactions or dealings with Iran or the Government of Iran, including transactions or dealings in or related to the import, export, re-export, sale, or supply of goods, technology, or services to, from, or with Iran. Pursuant to the ITSR, Slack would be prohibited from exporting goods or services to Iran absent an applicable exemption or license authorization from OFAC.¹

However, the ITSR does not prohibit U.S. persons from exporting goods or services more generally to Iranian persons if such Iranian persons are not located in Iran and do not intend to re-export the goods or services to Iran. For instance, Slack is not prohibited from permitting an

¹ We note that OFAC does promulgate a general license for the provision to Iran of certain hardware, software, and services incident to personal communications. We make no representation as to whether Slack’s services would fall within the scope of General License D-1, though we urge Slack to undertake an analysis as to whether its provision of services to Iran would do so. If so, Slack is authorized to provide Iranians who are resident in Iran access to its services.

Iranian person resident in the United States or Canada from accessing its services under the ITSR. Slack's U.S. sanctions compliance policies and procedures should take into account this distinction so as to avoid a situation wherein its compliance policies are over-inclusive and effectively discriminate against persons of Iranian descent, wherever located. Such notifications barring individuals outside of Iran from services has caused no insignificant distress to persons who feel as if Slack is discriminating against them as a result of their Iranian heritage.

We welcome a high-level dialogue regarding this matter and are prepared to assist Slack in its efforts at adopting an appropriately tailored sanctions compliance program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamal Abdi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jamal Abdi
President, National Iranian American Council