

Avaaz

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Avaaz is a global civic organization launched in January 2007 that promotes activism on issues such as climate change, human rights, animal rights, corruption, poverty, and conflict; it works to "close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want."^[1] The organization operates in 15 languages and claims over thirty million members in 194 countries,^[1] and *The Guardian* considers it "the globe's largest and most powerful online activist network".^[2]

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Avaaz



Founded	2007
Focus	Progressive NGO
Location	international
Origins	New York
Area served	Worldwide
Method	Petition, demonstrations, supporting independent press in conflict areas
Members	41,591,438+
Key people	Ricken Patel (ED), 100+ employees and several freelancers
Website	www.avaaz.org (http://www.avaaz.org/en/)

Origin of the word

The name "Avaaz", according to the organisation itself, means "voice" in several "European, Middle Eastern and Asian languages".^[3] Wiktionary gives it as a Persian word, cognate to Latin *vox* (from which English *voice*) and Greek *epos*, with descendants in Marathi, Gujarati, Pashto, Hindi, Serbo-Croatian, Sindhi, Tatar, Turkish and Urdu.^[4]



Look up **آواز** (*âvâz*) in Wiktionary, the free dictionary.

Cofounders

Groups

Avaaz.org was co-founded by Res Publica, a "community of public sector professionals dedicated to promoting good governance, civic virtue and deliberative democracy",^[5] and MoveOn.org, an American non-profit progressive public policy advocacy group.^{[6][7]} It was also supported by Service Employees

International Union, a founding partner.

Individuals

Avaaz's individual co-founders include Ricken Patel, Tom Pravda, former Virginia congressman Tom Perriello, MoveOn Executive Director Eli Pariser, Australian progressive entrepreneur David Madden, Jeremy Heimans (co-founders of Purpose.com), and Andrea Woodhouse.^[6] The board consists of Ricken Patel (president), Tom Pravda (secretary), Eli Pariser (board chairman), and Ben Brandzel (treasurer).^[8]

Leadership

Avaaz's founding president and executive director is the Canadian-British Ricken Patel.^[7] He studied PPE (politics, philosophy, economics) at Balliol College, Oxford University. He received a Masters in Public Policy from Harvard University. He worked for the International Crisis Group around the world, including in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan and Afghanistan, where he says "he learnt how to bring rebel forces to the negotiation table, to monitor elections (covertly), to restore public faith in once corrupt political systems and to spot when foreign forces were being manipulated." He returned to the US and volunteered for MoveOn.org, where he learned how to use online tools for activism.^[9]

Funding, campaigns selection process and management

"Since 2009, Avaaz has not taken donations from foundations or corporations, nor has it accepted payments of more than \$5,000 (£3,100)," *The Guardian* reports. "Instead, it relies simply on the generosity of individual members, who have now raised over \$20m (£12.4m)."^[10]

Global campaigns selection process

Avaaz global campaigns are managed by a team of campaigners working from over 30 countries, including the UK, India, Lebanon and Brazil. They communicate with members via email, and employ campaigning tactics including online public petitions, videos, and email-your-leader tools. In some cases Avaaz also uses advertisements and commissions legal advice to clarify how best to take a campaign forward,^[10] and stages "sit-ins, rallies, phone-ins and media friendly stunts".^[9] Examples of stunts include "taking a herd of cardboard pigs to the doors of the World Health Organisation to demand an investigation into the link between swine flu and giant pig farms and creating a three-mile human chain handshake from the Dalai Lama to the doors of the Chinese Embassy in London to request dialogue between the parties".^[9]

Suggestions for campaigns come from members, supplemented by guidance from teams of specialists. Once a suggestion has been taken up as having potential, tester email are polled to 10,000 Avaaz members; if the emails receive a sufficient response, the campaign is opened up to all Avaaz members.^[10] In 2010 *The Economist* suggested that "the way Avaaz bunches unlikely causes together may be an asset in a world where campaigns, like race and class, can still segregate people, not reconcile them."^[11]

Local campaigns platform

In 2012 the group launched a distributed organizing platform allowing any of its millions of members to launch their own petitions in minutes.^[12] Within months the community campaigning site has been put to use in a number of important causes with over 8,000 people starting their own campaigns in its first few months: from defending New Zealand's critically endangered Maui's dolphins^[13] to helping repatriate 100 Indian migrant workers who were held by a construction company in Bahrain.^[14]

Ideology

Avaaz has united practical idealists from around the world.^[9] Director Ricken Patel said in 2011 "We have no ideology per se. Our mission is to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want. Idealists of the world unite!"^[15]

Criticism

In 2008, Canadian conservative minister John Baird labeled Avaaz a "shadowy foreign organization" tied to billionaire George Soros.^[16]

Another conservative Canadian, Ezra Levant,^[17] tried to make a link between Soros and Avaaz.org as an indirect supporter through MoveOn, but the article was later retracted as baseless and an apology was offered to Soros.^{[18][19][20][21]}

Some question whether Avaaz's focus on online petitions and email campaigns may encourage laziness, transforming potential activism into clicktivism.^{[10][22]} A New Republic article accuses them of false claims regarding Paul Conroy's escape from Syria.^[23] Jillian York has accused Avaaz of lack of transparency and arrogance.^[24] The *Defensor Da Natureza*'s blog has accused Avaaz of taking credit for the success of the Ficha Limpa anti-corruption bill in Brazil, which Luis Nassif reposted.^{[25][26]} The Art of Annihilation blog have also published an investigative report.^[27]

See also

- MoveOn.org
- 38 Degrees
- GetUp!
- Internet activism
- Slacktivism
- Change.org
- CitizenGo

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External links

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- Avaaz's channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/avaazorg>) on YouTube
- "Avaaz.org's Ricken Patel on BBC World's HARDtalk" (<http://www.vimeo.com/369614>). 3 November 2007.

Retrieved from "<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Avaaz&oldid=667031714>"

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| International nongovernmental organizations | Left-wing advocacy groups | Online petitions

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