ARK F.Z.C.

ARK has worked with numerous national and local nascent Syrian organisations to build press office function capacity. In 2013, for example, ARK provided three multi-day communications trainings to political figures from the National Coalition (NC) and media offices affiliated to Syrian opposition institutions, including the NC Presidency, Interim Government (IG), Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU), and Free Syrian Army (FSA). These specifically focused on enhancing press office capacity, aiming to:

- Improve cohesion and relationships between media offices;
- Increase the ability to spot media opportunities and mitigate reputational risks;
- Better prepare for press enquiries, draft communication materials and rebut negative stories; and
- Defend political messages across all digital platforms (including TV interviews).

Participant feedback on the training was positive, with several clear examples of impact. The news bulletin the IG later developed was directly structured on formats discussed in the workshop, for example, and soon after the series concluded, the media offices of the NC, Supreme Military Council and ACU were able to coordinate to issue a powerful, united statement in response to an FSA offensive against ISIL – a consequence of the emphasis on cohesion, training modules on ‘reactive’ press office work, and the relationships built through the workshops. Similarly, in late August 2014, ARK provided media office capacity building training to the Aleppo Free Police (AFP) and to the Aleppo and Idlib Civil Defence (CD) teams, which are setting up a joint media office. These trainings covered campaign and crisis communications planning, spokesperson training, press briefing training and the implementation of a digital media strategy. Participants have requested a follow-on workshop in six months to build on the knowledge acquired and to learn new and more advanced media skills. In addition to the areas previously trained on, and depending on the requirements of the institution, ARK would build capacity in several key areas including but not limited to:

**Key Message Development Mentoring.** ARK proposes to provide further planning and support operations through its team of international and Syrian political communications professionals, and through its extensive SME network, including organisations such as Rizk Public Relations (RPR), a Lebanese communications advisory and public relations agency, which also specialises in digital and social media. In particular, ARK would train and mentor media officers and support efforts to develop key long-term and short-term messages, informing a work-plan of communications activities and a grid of core messages specifically targeted towards the audiences identified for Syrian strategic communications (see 2.2.7).

**Media Monitoring.** ARK proposes improving Syrian opposition press office capabilities by developing media monitoring efforts to enable improved responses to breaking news, more effective messaging and counter-messaging, and more targeted media engagements. Acquiring television monitoring software such as Snapstream would allow the creation of a proper monitoring cell, which could be operational 24/7. The cell’s outputs could be shared across opposition media offices, enhancing their shared understanding and foundation for communications. ARK will organise trainings in addition to mentoring production of the daily reports, with follow-up trainings as necessary to recalibrate use of this capability.

**Proactive Media Outreach.** ARK proposes organizing a planned series of engagements including press conferences, background briefings and exclusive interviews to specifically influence perceptions among international journalists. Events could include representatives from nascent institutions, such as the AFP and IG, with the facilitation of ARK’s networks.

**Organisational.** If required, ARK would facilitate the development of organisational mission and vision, and help identify unambiguous press office responsibilities based on the communications functions required. ARK would assist in establishing clear internal working processes and information flow, and mentor the team to utilise a full suite of offline and online media platforms, as well as develop their capability to keep a story in the public eye.