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Letter Asks Obama to Put Humanitarian Imperative First in Fixing Problems for Charities

Letter available at http://www.charityandsecurity.org/system/files/May14_press_release.pdf

Washington, DC – May 13, 2010

On May 12, 2010 a group of thirty charities and experts wrote to President Barack Obama asking him to fulfill the commitment made in his June 2009 speech in Cairo to address problems current national security laws create for charitable giving. The organizations represent a broad cross section of the charitable community, including grantmakers, humanitarian aid and development groups, peacebuilding programs, human rights advocates and more.

The letter opens by saying, “Restrictions by the U. S. Government on charitable giving practices continue to do irreparable harm to the work of our organizations and to our nation’s image abroad.” This harm affects individual donors, grantmaking foundations, operational charities and other legitimate organizations. To address the issue, the groups asked Obama to issue “a White House directive to all federal agencies mandating revision of their current policies and practices to conform to basic humanitarian principles.”

The letter goes on to note that, “Since the Reagan administration’s declaration in 1984 that “a hungry child knows no politics,” U.S. policy has been to provide humanitarian assistance on the basis of need, without regard to political affiliation, creed, race or the international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs. It is the Golden Rule of the American nonprofit sector as it provides humanitarian assistance all over the world. We urge your administration to uphold this cherished American principle.”

The groups asked the administration to address the following specific problems:

- Absence of clear standards for designating charities as terrorist organizations
- Inadequate humanitarian exemptions to the laws banning material support to terrorists
- No protections for acting in good faith
- Absence of due process rights
- Indefinite freezing of assets
- Harassment of donors and consequent chilling effect

The letter concluded by suggesting, “The best way to mark the anniversary of your Cairo speech is to initiate a meaningful and sustained engagement effort with the U.S. charitable community focused on finding solutions that draw on the expertise of charitable organizations.”

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