

March 23, 2010

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On June 4, 2009, in Cairo, Egypt, you made a historic commitment to the American Muslim community by pledging to ease hurdles to charitable giving – a matter of both religious freedom and civic responsibility for American Muslims.

“Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together. We must always examine the ways in which we protect it. For instance, in the United States, rules on charitable giving have made it harder for Muslims to fulfill their religious obligation. That is why I am committed to working with American Muslims to ensure that they can fulfill zakat.”

President Barack Obama, June 4, 2009

We, the undersigned American Muslim and Arab charitable organizations, welcomed and praised this important commitment. With the one-year anniversary of the Cairo address fast approaching, however, we urge you to ease hurdles to charitable giving through critical, immediate regulatory and administrative action.

Charitable giving is an essential component of our democratic civil society. Charity offers people of faith and goodwill an opportunity to fulfill religious obligations and civic responsibilities. Indeed, helping the least among us is a shared American value.

Yet, for American Muslims, philanthropic activities are complicated by federal laws, policies and practices. Surveillance, investigations and prosecutions of several Muslim charities have created a chill on well-intentioned charitable activities. Many American Muslims have faced federal law enforcement scrutiny of their giving or associations with lawful, U.S. charities and as a result are understandably fearful of giving. Furthermore, ambiguity on the best way to deliver aid abroad while navigating the complex maze of laws has stifled an important resource – the goodwill and largesse of American Muslims needed to build bridges between the United States and Muslim communities around the world.

Charity and community service are integral parts of your administration, as highlighted through the *United We Serve* campaign, and we remain committed to

these ideals as guided and obligated by our faith. From mosque-sponsored food drives, to aiding earthquake victims in Haiti, to running community-based health clinics, American Muslim charities are making contributions that are essential to responding to natural disasters, countering the economic downturn, and bettering our communities.

As the one-year anniversary of your historic commitment to protect religious freedom and charitable giving approaches, it is our sincere hope that you will take concrete steps to remove legal hurdles that have chilled well-intentioned American Muslim charitable activities for far too long.

We thank you for your leadership on this important issue and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
American Pakistan Foundation
American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA)
Center for Arab American Philanthropy
Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago
EMERGE USA (formerly CVA Foundation)
Houston Shifa Services Foundation
Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN)
Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA)
Indian Muslim Relief & Charities
Islamic Networks Group (ING)
Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
Islamic Society of Greater Houston
Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Consultative Network
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
Organization of North American Shia Ithna-asheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO)
UMMA Community Clinic
Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA)