

July 19, 2018

Dear Member of Congress:

I am writing to provide you with important information in response to several inaccurate and misleading attacks against Islamic Relief USA and Islamic Relief Worldwide. Most recently, these politically-motivated attacks were raised during a July 11, 2018, House Oversight and Government Committee's National Security Subcommittee hearing. While the topic of the hearing was the Muslim Brotherhood, numerous false allegations were made against Islamic Relief USA and Islamic Relief Worldwide during testimony and dialogue. Similar allegations were also raised in a highly erroneous report recently released by the Middle East Forum on the organizations.

As an initial matter, it is important to recognize that Islamic Relief USA¹ and Islamic Relief Worldwide² are legally distinct entities that are autonomously governed by independent and separate boards. Nevertheless, Islamic Relief USA regularly partners with Islamic Relief Worldwide to implement its numerous overseas humanitarian programs. Islamic Relief USA's activities are subject to routine audits and its records are publicly available to ensure compliance with rigorous local, state and federal laws and regulations. In addition, Islamic Relief USA has been consistently recognized as a top-rated U.S. charity by institutions such as Charity Navigator, the Better Business Bureau, GuideStar Exchange, and GreatNonprofits.³ Similarly, Islamic Relief Worldwide meets the strict standards of and has a close working relationship with the UK charities' regulator, while also being subject to full financial scrutiny by each of its institutional and governmental donors, including the United States government. In the last ten years alone, Islamic Relief Worldwide has undergone over 500 audits, all of which have demonstrated that the organization and its partners maintain robust systems and processes to safeguard against unauthorized diversion of funds. Islamic Relief Worldwide is also a member of the UK Disasters Emergency Committee, a grouping of the 13 largest humanitarian organizations in the UK which collectively receive UK government funding and has recently become the first Muslim organization and only the tenth organization in the world to attain the Core Humanitarian Standards certification in recognition of its dedication and commitment to the highest standards in delivering its aid projects.⁴ Furthermore, both Islamic Relief USA and Islamic Relief Worldwide are signatories to the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which requires that "aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind... on the basis of need alone" and that aid is not "used to further a particular political or religious standpoint."⁵

¹ Islamic Relief USA is a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable organization, registered in California and headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, that was established in 1993 to deliver humanitarian relief and development in a non-discriminatory and dignified manner to the most vulnerable individuals both at home and abroad.

² Islamic Relief Worldwide is an international humanitarian organization that was founded in 1984, is registered with the UK Charity Commission, and operates in over 40 countries to alleviate poverty and suffering around the world.

³ <https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=search.summary&orgid=3908>; <https://www.bbb.org/charity-reviews/public/Accredited.aspx?bureauID=9999>; <http://give.org/charity-reviews/national/relief-and-development/islamic-relief-usa-in-alexandria-va-1265>; <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/95-4453134>; <https://greatnonprofits.org/org/islamic-relief-usa>

⁴ <https://www.islamic-relief.org/islamic-relief-becomes-first-muslim-organisation-to-be-awarded-core-humanitarian-standard-certification/>

⁵ *List of Signatories, Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, available at: <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/Copy%20of%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20UPDATED%20January%202017.pdf>; *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental (NGOs) in Disaster Relief*, available at: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf>

Contrary to the allegations made by the Middle East Forum and during the recent subcommittee hearing, any claims that Islamic Relief USA, Islamic Relief Worldwide, or their respective partners are affiliated with any terrorist or extremist entities are categorically and unequivocally false. In the remainder of this letter, Islamic Relief USA refutes the erroneous allegations recently made against it and Islamic Relief Worldwide.

ALLEGATIONS AND RESPONSES:

- **ALLEGATION:** *“Islamic Relief branches work closely with violent Islamist organizations in the Middle East. In Gaza, Islamic Relief donates large sums to the Gaza Zakat Committee, an organization run by a senior Hamas cleric. In Yemen, Islamic Relief takes money from the Charitable Society for Social Welfare, founded by Al-Qaeda leader.”*
 - **RESPONSE:** Islamic Relief USA does not donate any sums to any entity named “Gaza Zakat Committee.” Islamic Relief Worldwide partners with the “Islamic Zakat Society - Gaza Zakat Committee”, which is a bona fide community-based organization that has been working in Gaza for nearly 30 years, to implement projects primarily in the areas of food security and health. It is one of many small civil society organizations that Islamic Relief Worldwide partners with globally to deliver humanitarian relief and development aid. Islamic Relief Worldwide implements extensive due diligence and screening checks in relation to all of its partners, including partners’ board members and senior staff, without exception, to ensure that its donations are spent only on those who legitimately require humanitarian assistance. The Islamic Zakat Society – Gaza Zakat Committee is widely known for its apolitical stance, and its board members and senior staff have no known affiliation with Hamas. In addition, neither Islamic Relief USA nor Islamic Relief Worldwide maintain any relationship with the “Charitable Society for Social Welfare” in Yemen.

- **ALLEGATION:** *“Islamic Relief branches are run by officials involved with prominent extremist networks. These officials promote violent hatreds [sic] against minorities, especially Jews and members of the LGBT community.”*
 - **RESPONSE:** Both Islamic Relief USA and Islamic Relief Worldwide categorically condemn discrimination and violence manifested in any and all forms. As international humanitarian organizations, both they and their respective officers endeavor to uphold the highest standards of neutrality, impartiality and independence in the implementation of its programming and delivery of aid and development. Islamic Relief USA and Islamic Relief Worldwide maintain robust relationships with a wide scope of interfaith and secular organizations and implement humanitarian programs to diverse groups without regard to religious, political, ethnic or sexual identity. For example, Islamic Relief USA has partnered with prominent Jewish organizations on various humanitarian initiatives, including providing legal services to vulnerable refugee populations overseas and alleviating poverty.⁶ In addition, Islamic Relief USA was on the ground to assist victims and their families in the aftermath of the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, where members of the LGBT community were brutally targeted.⁷ Finally, Islamic Relief USA has invested \$1 million towards alleviating social divides in the United States by specifically reaching out to Americans of all religious, racial and political backgrounds and provide funding for projects that promote community cohesion.⁸

- **ALLEGATION:** *“Egyptian prosecutors accused Islamic Relief co-founder Essam El-Haddad of “financing terrorism by using global charities such as Islamic Relief.”*
 - **RESPONSE:** In his most recent role with Islamic Relief Worldwide, Essam El-Haddad served as the Chair of Islamic Relief Worldwide’s Board of Trustees from 2011 to 2012. In 2012, El-Haddad was invited by then-democratically elected President of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi, to serve as an advisor for the government. In accordance with Islamic Relief Worldwide’s policies and political neutral policies, El-Haddad immediately resigned from his position as Chair and Trustee with the organization upon assuming his advisory position in the Egyptian government. El-Haddad had no further involvement with Islamic Relief Worldwide or any of its partners subsequent to his resignation. Islamic Relief Worldwide funds have never been used to fund terrorism or any political purpose in Egypt or elsewhere.

⁶ <https://www.hias.org/blog/hias-islamic-relief-usa-partner-protect-refugees-greece>; http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/blog/video-interfaith-leaders-push-pope-franciss-poverty-agenda/?utm_source=pbsinthenews&utm_medium=islamicreliefusapost; <http://irusa.org/islamic-relief-usa-ceo-reappointed-to-u-s-state-department-religion-and-foreign-policy-working-group>

⁷ <http://irusa.org/tag/pulse-nightclub/>

⁸ <http://cmsny.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/IRUSA-Community-Investment-Project-LOI-Invite.pdf>

- **ALLEGATION:** *“Islamic Relief events have hosted such speakers as Abdullah Hakim Quick, who claims that the Islamic position on homosexuality is “death;” Haitham Al-Haddad, who describes Jews as “pigs and apes;” and Abdul Nasir Jangda, who defends sex slavery and advocates killing apostates.”*
 - **RESPONSE:** Islamic Relief USA is an independent, purely humanitarian organization and therefore neither engages in religious proselytization nor furthers any political or religious standpoint. Occasionally, Islamic Relief USA invites mainstream American Muslim public figures and religious leaders at fundraising events across the country to promote its humanitarian goals. The individuals mentioned in the recent report are neither Islamic Relief USA officials nor employees, and do not represent the organization. Statements made in their personal capacities (over which the organization has no control) do not reflect the views or beliefs of Islamic Relief USA or its partners, who *unequivocally* condemn all forms of discrimination and intolerance.

- **ALLEGATION:** *“Islamic Relief USA Chairman Khaled Lamada praised “jihad” by the “Mujahidin of Egypt” for “causing the Jews many defeats; “Yousef Abdallah, a senior Islamic Relief official has promoted stories glorifying the murder of Jews.”*
RESPONSE: The allegations against the specific individuals named by the Middle East Forum, Islamic Relief USA Chairman Khaled Lamada and employee Yousef Abdallah, are largely the result of inaccurate translations of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, any alleged statements made by individuals that are anti-Semitic, political, discriminatory, or derogatory in nature do not reflect the sentiments of Islamic Relief USA. Islamic Relief USA will neither condone nor defend any statement made by any of its personnel that advocates discrimination or violence of any kind. Where, in very limited instances, individuals associated with Islamic Relief USA may have made or circulated regrettable posts on their personal social media platforms, these individuals have been counseled in accordance with Islamic Relief USA’s strict non-discrimination policies and standards of impartiality. Islamic Relief USA does not tolerate any discriminatory behavior whatsoever, and personnel who do not adhere to the organization’s strict non-discrimination policies are subject to immediate termination of employment.

- **ALLEGATION:** *“Hany El Banna OBE, the Islamic Relief founder and one of the most high-profile, esteemed figures in Western charitable circles, openly urged charities in Gaza to work with Hamas, while giving an interview to Hamas’s official radio station in 2016.”*
 - **RESPONSE:** Dr. Hany El-Banna, an individual who has been awarded Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Queen Elizabeth II for his humanitarian service, regularly gives wide-ranging public interviews. The main focus of this particular interview was on building a strong civil society in the context of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, during which he discussed the experiences of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank, the history of Islamic Relief, and encouraged youth to make the most of their educational opportunities. At no point during this interview did Dr. El-Banna mention Hamas.

Islamic Relief USA categorically rejects the erroneous and deeply flawed report and claims made by the Middle East Forum and in the recent congressional subcommittee hearing. The core mission of both Islamic Relief USA and Islamic Relief Worldwide is the provision of assistance to those in need, regardless of religious, political or ethnic affiliation. We welcome the opportunity to have an open and candid dialogue with you and your office to discuss the essential work of Islamic Relief USA and Islamic Relief Worldwide, and to dismiss, once and for all, the biased and unfair claims made against us. For additional inquiries or information, please contact Christina Tobias Nahi, Director of Public Affairs at Islamic Relief USA, at: cnahi@irusa.org or (703) 370-7246.

Sincerely,



Sharif Aly
Chief Executive Officer