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MUSLIM ADVOCATES WELCOMES PRESIDENT OBAMA'S COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING HURDLES TO CHARITABLE GIVING

(SAN FRANCISCO) June 4, 2009—In his speech today from Cairo, Egypt, President Barack Obama explicitly acknowledged the difficulty many American Muslim individuals and organizations face when tithing (*zakat*) and committed his powers as President to making it easier. He said:

“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*.”

As the administrator of the nation's first Muslim Charities Accreditation Program, Muslim Advocates welcomes President Obama's commitment. Muslim Advocates agrees with President Obama that freedom of religion, including the freedom to engage in charitable giving, is a foundation of a healthy democracy and a key means of civic engagement for many American Muslims, whether they support humanitarian needs here at home or overseas.

Charitable giving must be an assured, secure and protected right for all Americans. That is why Muslim Advocates initiated the Muslim Charities Accreditation Program (MCAP) in 2008—as a joint initiative with the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance (BBB)—to strengthen Muslim nonprofit institutions and protect the right of American Muslims to fulfill their religious obligation of *zakat*.

Muslim Advocates welcomes the opportunity to work with the Obama Administration to reform policies begun under the Bush Administration that continue to create hurdles to the philanthropic community and, specifically, the Muslim charitable sector, including: the need to rescind the Treasury Department's Voluntary Best Practices Guidelines for U.S.-based Charities; to amend a system where a charity's assets may be frozen indefinitely by federal authorities without the charity being charged of any crime; and to reform policies allowing Customs & Border Protection and other federal law enforcement agents to probe law-abiding American Muslims about their charitable giving and associations with lawful, charitable entities.

Muslim Advocates (www.muslimadvocates.org) is a national legal advocacy and educational organization dedicated to promoting freedom, justice and equality for all, regardless of faith, by providing leadership through legal advocacy, policy engagement, and civic education, and by serving as a legal resource to promote the full and meaningful participation of Muslims in American public life.