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**More than 40 American Muslim, Arab, Sikh, South Asian Charities to President Obama: Help Local Communities & Counter Foreign Extremists' Aid by Reforming Federal Charity Laws**

(WASHINGTON, DC) August 11, 2010—In a letter sent today—the first day of Ramadan—to President Barack Obama, the national civil rights organization [Muslim Advocates](#), and 42 other national and local American Muslim, Arab, Sikh and South Asian charities and civic organizations expressed their concerns that current federal charitable giving laws & regulations are creating an untenable situation for Americans who wish to help their neighbors here and disaster victims overseas, in nations like Pakistan. These laws instill fear in would-be donors and dissuade them from giving. Restricting donors' ability to give charity abroad may also undermine American efforts to promote itself as a kind and generous nation in parts of the world where its reputation is most in jeopardy.

Muslim Advocates believes that the President and Congress should reform current charitable giving laws and make lawful, generous donations from American Muslims more possible at home and abroad. With so many state and local governments suffering severe budget cutbacks, communities are counting on local charities to fill the gap these days. American Muslim charities—like other faith-based organizations—help fulfill this role, but only if donors can give without fear of federal scrutiny.

Charity given by American Muslims may also help offset any charitable influence by violent extremists in nations like Pakistan. Independent polling research in nations like Pakistan and Indonesia shows that when disaster strikes and Americans give prominently, then public opinion in these regions becomes more favorable towards Americans while favorable attitudes towards violent extremist groups can decline to half their prior levels.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ballen, Kenneth. "Congressional Testimony: Foreign Assistance, Support For Extremism and Public Opinion In Muslim Majority Countries." House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade. Washington, DC. November 18, 2009. Terror Free Tomorrow, The Center for Public Opinion. p. 4.

**American Muslim charities and donors are seeking changes to several hurdles to giving charity:**

- Consolidate the archaic and confusing list-checking system donors must navigate prior to giving.
- Federal freezing of charities' assets *without* charges.
- Questioning by Customs & Border Protection agents of American Muslims returning home from overseas travel about their charitable giving practices.
- Questioning of individuals during citizenship examinations on affiliations with lawful U.S. charities.
- Broad-based FBI investigations in the community of legitimate charitable activities.

Other signatories to the letter include: the American Pakistan Foundation, the Islamic Society of North America; the Inner-City Muslim Action Network; the Sikh Coalition; and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. A full list of signatories is available on request.

**Excerpts from the letter:**

§ “At this time, federal investigations and intelligence-gathering activities continue to interfere with the day-to-day charitable activities of American Muslims and obstruct our ability to build and support strong civic institutions [...]”

§ “These organizations feed the hungry, care for the sick, fulfill spiritual needs, and serve as ambassadors to those abroad,” [...] “Yet, hurdles remain for American Muslim organizations to participate fully and to help advance democracy in the U.S. and throughout the world [...]”

§ “Despite intensive dialogue and the submission of multiple policy proposals by religious, humanitarian and other nonprofit groups, the administration has not yet substantively addressed these problems or changed any policy.”

Muslim Advocates Deputy Director Naheed Qureshi will also be seeking a dialogue on charitable giving reform with President Obama on Friday night, August 13, at the White House Ramadan Dinner.

*To view the complete text of the American Muslim charities letter to President Obama on reforming charitable giving laws, please visit: [www.muslimadvocates.org](http://www.muslimadvocates.org).*

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*[Muslim Advocates](http://www.muslimadvocates.org) ([www.muslimadvocates.org](http://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.*