

August 6, 2014

UK Funding for Hamas Terror via Islamic Relief Worldwide?
The Burden of Proof is on Europe

Background

- The Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) is an international organization based in the UK, with offices in Gaza and the West Bank, ostensibly working as an “international relief and development charity.”
- **On June 19, 2014, Israel’s Defense Minister [declared](#) IRW to be [illegal](#), based on its alleged role in funneling money to Hamas**, and banned it from operating in Israel and the West Bank. (Hamas is a designated terror organization by Israel, the U.S., EU, and Canada.)
- [Media sources](#) have reported that the decision was made after “the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), the coordinator for government activities in the territories, and legal authorities provided incriminating information against IRW.”
- According to its financial reports, European governments, including the United Kingdom, are primary funders of IRW.

UK Funding and Evaluation

- In 2012 (the latest available information), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) awarded £1,400,000 to IRW.
- In correspondence with NGO Monitor, DFID claimed, “Information on DFID’s funding provided to IRW in the financial year 2013-14 will be published in the next edition of Statistics on International Development, which will be available on the GOV.UK website in the autumn.”
- DFID also refused to release substantive information on mechanisms used to ensure that it funds did not go to terrorism, citing “public” and “commercial” interests, and alleging that “disclosure of detailed sensitive information about our vetting processes could provide valuable intelligence to the perpetrators of crime.” (The crime was not specified.)
- For the full correspondence between NGO Monitor and the DFID see Appendix A.

Given the serious nature of the allegations, and particularly in light of the current war with Hamas, the British government should immediately conduct a thorough review of Islamic Relief Worldwide, in cooperation with the relevant Israeli and other authorities, to ensure that UK taxpayer funds are not channeled to terrorist organizations.

Questions for DFID

- In light of the serious allegations against IRW and its current status in Israel, is the British government planning to open an investigation into the activities of IRW?
- The diversion of foreign aid to terror activities in Gaza has emerged as a central element in the conflict. How will the British government assure both British and Israeli citizens that funding to IRW has not been channeled to terror groups?
- What steps is the Charity Commission taking in light of the developments in Israel?

European government funding to Islamic Relief Worldwide:

Source	Funding Mechanism	Amounts
UK	DFID	£1,400,000 (2012)
Switzerland	Swiss Foreign Ministry	£52,942 (2012)
EU	European Commission	£2,169,340 (2012)
Sweden	SIDA	SEK 24,000,000 (2013)
Spain	AECID	£243,942 (2012)

Appendix A: Correspondence between NGO Monitor and DFID

NGO Monitor letter to DFID office Jerusalem

Dear Ms. Mackenzie,

On June 19, Israel's Minister of Defense signed a warrant declaring the NGO Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) as illegal, based on information regarding the involvement of this organization in terrorism.

The DFID is reported as a partner/funder (2012) in the reports of the IRW. NGO Monitor is preparing a report on the relationships between the IRW and its governmental donors and partners, and we would appreciate your responses to the following questions:

1. Did the government of the United Kingdom provide any funding to IRW in 2013 or 2014? If so, in what amounts?
2. What mechanisms are used to ensure that funding or cooperation with the IRW is not linked to terrorist activities or incitement to violence? Please provide documentation or links to specific reports or evaluations.
3. In addition to any funding, what other forms of cooperation have taken place between the government of United Kingdom and the IRW between 2012 and 2014?

In order that we can complete our report in a timely manner, the deadline for responses is 26 June.

Sincerely,

NGO Monitor
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Tel: (972) 02-566-1020
Fax: (972) 077-511-7030

DFID response

Freedom of Information Request F2014-260

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request dated 20 June 2014 in which you asked for information relating to Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW).

1. *"Did the government of the United Kingdom provide any funding to IRW in 2013 or 2014? If so, in what amounts?"*

Some information relevant to this part of your request is exempt from disclosure under Section 21 (1) (Information accessible to the applicant by other means) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as it is already reasonably accessible to you. DFID's annual publication '[Statistics on International Development](#)' (SID) includes a table detailing DFID Expenditure through UK Civil Society Organisations (CSO's). You can find information relating to the funding provided to IRW in the financial year 2012-13 in the link given above.

Information on DFID's funding provided to IRW in the financial year 2013-14 will be published in the next edition of Statistics on International Development, which will be available on the GOV.UK website in the autumn. As this information is intended for future publication, it is exempt from disclosure at this point under Section 22 (1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I have set out our analysis of the public interest factors relating to this exemption later in this letter.

2. *"What mechanisms are used to ensure that funding or cooperation with the IRW is not linked to terrorist activities or incitement to violence? Please provide documentation or links to specific reports or evaluations."*

DFID is committed to ensuring that its resources, voted by the UK Parliament on behalf of the UK Taxpayer, will be used only for the purposes intended. Protecting development aid is central to the arrangements in place in providing assistance to developing countries. You can find additional information on how DFID meets its financial audit requirements for the use of aid funds in Section C4 of DFID's [Blue Book: the essential guide to working at DFID](#) and further information on how DFID ensures that UK aid is well spent is [here](#).

DFID arrange for pre-grant due diligence to be conducted on all civil society organisations (CSOs) selected to receive funding through the Programme Partnership Arrangements. Details can be found on the [GOV.UK website](#).

DFID holds further information relevant to this part of your request which we are withholding in full under Sections 31 (1) (a) (Law enforcement), Section 35 (1) (a) (Formulation of government policy etc.) and Section 43 (2) (Commercial interests) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I have set out an explanation of our use of these exemptions, including our analysis of the public interest factors relating to the qualified exemptions below.

3. *"In addition to any funding, what other forms of cooperation have taken place between the government of United Kingdom and the IRW between 2012 and 2014?"*

DFID Ministers and staff have regular contact with a range of CSOs on a range of development topics. DFID routinely publishes information on meetings between external organisations and DFID Ministers [here](#) and the Permanent Secretary [here](#) on the GOV.UK website.

Section 22 (1) (a) (b) and (c) Information Intended for Future Publication

Section 22 (1) (a) (b) and (c) provides that information is exempt information if it is held by a public authority with a view to publication, by the authority or any other person, at some future date.

In applying this exemption, we have had to balance the public interest in disclosing the information against the public interest in withholding it.

Factors in favour of disclosure include the general public interest in transparency and openness around the amount and use of public money spent by the UK government on international development. There is a strong public interest in ensuring that this information is available for public scrutiny.

Factors against disclosure include the strong public interest in making the best use of public resources by pulling the information together; ensuring that it is accurate and publishing it in a consistent and comprehensive format as planned. The information we intend to publish in the 2013-14 edition of 'Statistics for International Development' has not yet been finalised. As we have a well-established annual reporting process already in place we have concluded that the public interest in withholding this information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it at this point in time.

Section 31 (1) (a) (Law enforcement)

Some information has been withheld under Section 31 (1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which provides that information is exempt if its disclosure under the Act would, or would be likely to prejudice the prevention and detection of crime.

In applying this exemption we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing it.

Factors in favour of disclosure include the general public interest in openness, transparency and accountability. There is also a clear public interest in raising awareness and understanding of how the UK government works with development partners.

Factors against disclosure include the strong public interest in ensuring that disclosure of information does not expose DFID or any of our partners to criminal acts. We believe that disclosure of detailed sensitive information about our vetting processes could provide valuable intelligence to the perpetrators of crime. This would be very much against the public interest.

We have, therefore, decided that in this case the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in providing it.

Section 35 (1) (a) (Formulation of government policy, etc.)

Section 35 (1) (a) of the Act provides that information is exempt information if it relates to the formulation or development of government policy. This section is statutory recognition of the public interest in allowing government to have a clear space, immune from exposure to public view, in which it can take advice and debate matters with candour.

Factors in favour of disclosure include the general public interest in transparency and openness around government decision making. This helps to ensure accountability within government and increases knowledge and understanding of how government works. There is also a significant public interest in improving public access to the information and options on which government bases decisions and on which significant amounts of public money are spent.

Factors against disclosure include the very strong public interest in officials being able to discuss and communicate freely and efficiently to develop sound policy decisions. There is a very real public interest in allowing officials to have a clear and confidential space, immune from exposure to public view, in which they can give and take advice and debate matters with candour, free from the pressures of public debate. We believe that disclosure is likely to inhibit the free and frank exchange of views and so prejudice the policy development process. It would seriously compromise the opportunity for officials and partners to consider policy implications and operational options. This would undermine the very strong public interest in government policy decisions being based on the most candid sharing of information and views. We believe that disclosure would have the effect of limiting the future candour of discussions across a wide range of policy areas.

When balancing against the benefits derived from increased transparency, we consider that the public interest in safeguarding the integrity of the policy process and private thinking space that is widely recognised as essential for the proper functioning of the UK Government to be greater in this particular instance. Overall the balance of the public interest is against releasing the information.

Section 43 (2) (Commercial interests)

Section 43 (2) provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person including the public authority holding it.

In applying this exemption, we have had to determine whether the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Factors in favour of disclosing this information include the general public interest in transparency in ensuring that dealings with commercial organisations are conducted in an open and honest way. Disclosure could also help to improve public awareness and understanding of the Government's dealings with the partner organisations and governments and the development of business at an international level.

Factors against disclosure are the strong public interest in protecting the legitimate commercial interests of those who share information with DFID. Disclosure of sensitive information and opinions, including information about the workings of commercial organisations, could make it less likely that DFID would be provided with commercially sensitive information in the future as our disclosure of this information would be likely to damage their reputation and their commercial interests. Disclosure could also damage DFID's reputation in the international community and could consequently undermine the department's ability to fulfil its role and to achieve value for money in the use of public funds.

We have concluded that the balance of public interest in this case favours withholding the information requested.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me, quoting reference number F2014-260.

If you are unhappy with the service we have provided and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, you should write to the Information Rights and Public Enquiries Team at the address shown in the footnote below or email foi@dfid.gov.uk within two months of the date of this letter.

If you do make a complaint and are not content with the outcome, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted DFID's complaints procedure. You can contact the Information Commissioner at the following address:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely,

Christine Mackintosh
DFID Information Rights and Public Enquiries Team