



# TRUTH NOT TERROR

**Islamic Relief Worldwide and the  
Appropriations Bill in Congress**

**Islamic Relief Worldwide** (IRW) is a valued international non-governmental organization funded by the US and other governments, as well as a wide range of international aid organizations from a variety of faith and secular backgrounds and numerous United Nations bodies. It has an outstanding track record in responding to natural disasters and conflicts and in alleviating poverty around the world.

IRW is the subject of an unwarranted attack on its vital work. A proposed **amendment** to the annual Appropriations Bill passing through Congress seeks to damage and disadvantage the organization by excluding it from all US federal funding with immediate effect. This attempt to single out and target an effective and widely respected humanitarian group by the back door, without due process or right of reply, is an assault on all civil society organizations that should be vehemently opposed and rejected.

The amendment has been put forward by a Republican congressman from Florida, Ron DeSantis, who alleges that IRW has links with terrorist movements and says that “US tax dollars cannot go to groups involved in funding terrorism”.

This briefing aims to provide a true picture of the work and values of Islamic Relief Worldwide and to refute these baseless and damaging allegations against the organization.

**In 2016**

880,000 people benefited from IRW water and sanitation projects around the world\*

316,000 families in war-torn Yemen received vital food and medical aid through IRW

322,000 people around the world participated in IRW education programs

IRW provided blankets, warm clothing and other supplies to 622,000 refugees and displaced people living in harsh winter conditions

IRW supported 184,000 people to earn a stable income to help lift families out of poverty

\*For a full list of the countries where IRW operates, see [www.islamic-relief.org/where-we-work/](http://www.islamic-relief.org/where-we-work/)

## A purely humanitarian organization that rejects terrorism

Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) is a purely humanitarian organization, established in 1984. It is a respected international aid and development agency based in the United Kingdom, with offices in over 40 countries. It is dedicated to the alleviation of poverty and suffering around the world, and assists those in need regardless of race, religion, political affiliation, gender or sexual orientation.

IRW subscribes to the Red Cross and Crescent Codes of Conduct, enjoys UN consultative status, and is a member agency of the UK Disasters Emergency Committee – the prestigious coalition of leading aid organizations in the UK that work together to respond to major emergencies. It is committed to the basic legal principles of international humanitarian law including those of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, and is recognized by the international humanitarian aid community for upholding humanitarian standards.

IRW abhors and rejects terrorism in all its forms, and categorically denies any terrorist links. The organization has itself lost five members of staff to acts of violence in Syria, Pakistan, Somalia and Kenya – brave humanitarians who paid the ultimate price for helping those in need in some of the world's most difficult and dangerous places. This experience has reinforced IRW's passionate commitment to assisting the victims of conflict as much as it can, and to ensuring that aid reaches those in genuine need and does not fall into the wrong hands.

IRW has been wrongly accused of being an organization involved in terrorism, claims which the organization has challenged legally. Within the legal process, to date there has been no tangible evidence to substantiate any of the allegations made. IRW is determined to do all it can to challenge false and damaging allegations and protect its good name.

## IRW's mission and its major funders and partners

IRW has one sole objective, which is 'the relief of poverty in any part of the world'. It is dedicated to alleviating the poverty and suffering of the world's poorest people. Its approach is based on its mission statement which says:

**We will mobilize resources, build partnerships, and develop local capacity, as we work to:**

- **Enable communities to mitigate the effect of disasters, prepare for their occurrence and respond by providing relief, protection and recovery.**
- **Promote integrated development and environmental custodianship with a focus on sustainable livelihoods.**
- **Support the marginalized and vulnerable to voice their needs and address root causes of poverty.**

IRW has a strong track record in delivering aid in some of the world's hardest-to-reach places. In 2016, for example, it delivered over \$27 million worth of aid to support 3.7 million victims of the Syrian conflict and worked

IRW has distributed medical aid and food to hospitals, makeshift field clinics and millions of displaced people inside Syria – as well as supporting hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.



with the UN's World Food Programme to help feed 192,000 people displaced by conflict in Iraq, including Christian and Yazidi minorities.

As well as disaster relief, IRW carries out sustainable development work to provide water, food, shelter, healthcare and education in the long term. IRW also works to support vulnerable children, to help people get jobs and to build livelihoods to support their families, and to protect vulnerable communities from future disasters, preventing the loss of lives and protecting against the increased poverty that can occur when disaster strikes.

In pursuit of its mission and objectives, IRW runs more than 50 partnerships with well-known and well-respected organizations. These include UN bodies, the World Bank and various government and intra-governmental funders, including the US Government.

IRW is pioneering disaster risk reduction programs to protect communities in countries prone to severe drought and floods. In Bangladesh it is helping poor families living on floodplains to dismantle their homes and rebuild them on earth 'plinths' above the level of seasonal flood waters that threaten lives and livestock.



IRW's US affiliate, Islamic Relief USA, has been commended to donors by Charity Navigator as an effective responder to Hurricane Harvey in Texas.



Governmental and intra-governmental funders include the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

IRW's UN funders and partners include the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Unicef and UN Women. WFP signed a \$37 million multi-year contract with IRW in 2015 to implement food distribution in war-torn Yemen, where IRW operates in 18 out of 22 governorates and assists communities in government areas and those outside of government control.

IRW is leading Muslim representation on the World Bank's 'Moral Imperative' working group to improve the inclusion of faith communities in the Bank's global planning process for Agenda 2030 on poverty reduction.

None of these organizations and donors would support or work with IRW if it had any links to terrorist activity, or if they were not satisfied with the organization's control and compliance systems and processes.

Alongside their contributions to IRW's work in developing countries, affiliate members of the IRW global family – such as Islamic Relief USA, Islamic Relief UK and Islamic Relief Canada – have a growing reputation for responding effectively to emergencies on their own doorsteps. IR Canada has supported the victims of wildfires in British Columbia and Alberta, while IRUK has been [in the forefront of supporting victims of the Grenfell Tower tragedy](#). IRUSA has previously responded to Hurricane Katrina; to tornadoes in Oklahoma, Texas and Alabama; and to the lead contamination water crisis in Flint, Michigan. [It has earned plaudits recently for its energetic and effective response to Hurricane Harvey](#) in Texas – for which it has been highly rated by a respected independent assessor, Charity Navigator.

## US federal funding for IRW – making a positive difference

### TACKLING INFECTIOUS DISEASES AMONG REFUGEES IN KENYA

### REDUCING MALNUTRITION AND RAISING INCOMES IN KENYA'S MANDERA REGION

IRW has been awarded \$704,662 worth of funding from US federal sources so far – \$270,000 from the Department of Health and Human Services for a project in Kenya and \$434,662 from USAID for three projects in Kenya (\$100,000), Ethiopia (\$210,000) and the Central African Republic (\$124,662).

These four grants were all awarded in 2015, for programs to be implemented between 2015 and 2018. The diversity of the four projects reflects the breadth, innovation and community credibility of IRW's work in developing countries, and also the extent to which it operates effectively as part of coalitions of leading civil society organizations. This is the kind of worthwhile and life-changing work that the DeSantis amendment will put in jeopardy.

The US Government would not authorize direct or consortium-linked funding to IRW if it were not satisfied with the organization's systems and processes and financial probity. IRW takes global concern about the risk of diverting funds to terrorist groups extremely seriously, and is scrupulous about obtaining licenses from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) for projects in sensitive countries – even though it is not strictly required to do so.

Project U2GGH001813 (HHS) was a two-year health program aimed at strengthening the capacity of health services to prevent, detect and respond to infectious disease outbreaks in the marginalized Kenyan counties of Turkana and Garissa and the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps. Completed in late 2016, this \$600,000 program was implemented by a consortium of civil society organizations led by the NYC-based International Rescue Committee, with IRW receiving a \$270,000 share for implementation in Garissa and Dadaab.

Together the program partners were successful in helping to prevent the spread of measles and other epidemic-prone diseases among hundreds of thousands of refugees through a robust immunization programme. The project has also helped to improve disease surveillance and enhanced the capacity of refugees to take preventive action themselves to stop infectious diseases taking hold.

Project AID-OAA-F16-00004 (USAID) is a direct grant of \$100,000 over three years towards an innovative irrigation project in the severely drought-prone Mandera region of north-eastern Kenya. Many pastoralists have seen their herds wiped out repeatedly by drought, causing widespread hunger and malnutrition. Islamic Relief Kenya is harnessing drip irrigation from the Daua river, powered by solar technology, to enable former pastoralists to develop new livelihoods growing high-value fruit and vegetables.

Islamic Relief Kenya is supporting families to form 150 group savings and loan associations to help finance the project, as well as production and marketing cooperatives to enable farmers to work together to cultivate their land and sell their produce. This project provided solar irrigation to

## SAVING YOUNG LIVES IN ETHIOPIA'S DROUGHT-STRICKEN SOMALI REGION

618 farmers in 2016 alone, and is enabling farming families to increase yields by 300%, increase revenues by \$8,000 per acre and reduce water use by 80%.

Project AID-OFDA-A-12-00017 (USAID) allocated \$210,000 to IRW through a consortium of aid organizations led by Goal Ethiopia, to identify and treat moderate and severe acute malnutrition among pregnant women, breast-feeding mothers and children under the age of five during a period of intense drought in the Somali region (September 2015-March 2016).

Islamic Relief Ethiopia provided nutritional support and supplementary feeding to assist malnourished mothers and children in the severely affected Elkere and Hargele woredas of the Afder zone. This vital and timely intervention benefited 9,447 people, saving lives among the most vulnerable and marginalized segment of the population.

## BUILDING PEACE AND PROSPERITY IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The Central African Republic is a country riven by communal conflict and religious tension in recent years. Project AID-OAA-A-15-00043 (USAID) allocated \$124,662 to IRW to work on a community peace building and livelihoods program in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (the consortium's lead agency), World Vision and the Aegis Trust over a nine-month period (January-September 2016).

This visionary interfaith project helped to build grassroots institutions working across the religious divide to improve community cohesion, with support for small businesses and traders and for youth training to help overcome unemployment and poverty – which too often fuel tension and conflict in divided communities.

In 2014 IRW provided counselling support and activities for children traumatized by conflict in the Central African Republic – a project supported by Islamic Relief USA. In 2016 it followed up by delivering a visionary interfaith peace building and community development program in partnership with Catholic Relief Services, World Vision and the Aegis Trust – funded by USAID.



IRW has been in the forefront of supporting families displaced from Mosul, and now those returning to the rubble of the liberated city to resettle there. The organization is assisting Christian and Yazidi minorities as well as the majority Muslim population in Iraq.



## Assisting people of all faiths and none

IRW provides humanitarian aid all over the globe, regardless of the recipients' belief, race or nationality. Its impartial, neutral approach has proved to be very effective in many disaster-stricken and conflict-riven areas over the years.

Much of the organization's work is in poorer Muslim-majority countries, reflecting not only the extent of the need but also the unique reach and community credibility of IRW in such places and the desire of some donors to support projects there. Wherever it operates, however, IRW's approach is to assist people of all faiths and none – people in need are the people who count.

Some current and recent examples of where IRW has provided or is providing aid to non-Muslim recipients include:

- The Central African Republic (majority Christian population) where IRW has been operating since 2014 and where one of its aid delivery partners is Catholic Relief Services.
- South Sudan (majority Christian), where IRW is responding to the current famine and has had a field office since 1991.
- Iraq (majority Muslim, with Christian and Yazidi minorities), where IRW is assisting displaced Christians and Yazidis as well as the Muslim population – both Sunni and Shia.
- Nepal (majority Hindu), where IRW provided disaster relief following the earthquake in 2015 and is still providing aid. Here IRW is working with a global Christian NGO network, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).
- The Philippines (majority Christian), where IRW provided disaster relief following the typhoon in 2013 and continues to provide aid for poverty alleviation.
- Japan (majority Shinto), where IRW provided disaster relief following the 2012 earthquake.



IRW staff, working in partnership with the Lutheran World Federation and local aid agencies, helped families in remote areas to build temporary homes after the devastating earthquake in 2015, as well as 150 permanent dwellings.



## Comprehensive due diligence and regulation

IRW is subject to full financial scrutiny by each of its institutional and governmental donors, who often use international accounting firms to conduct independent, external financial audits on the projects implemented by IRW. Over 500 such audits have been carried out in the past decade, and not one has found a shred of evidence of terrorist links. The findings of such audits have consistently shown that IRW and its partners have robust systems and processes in place to guard against any kind of criminal abuse or diversion of funds.

IRW operates around the world through independent entities in 31 countries (known as country offices). Each such entity adheres to codes of conduct and follows systems and procedures developed by IRW's international office in the UK – in alignment with global standards. This standardization extends to the financial sphere, with all countries using a common finance manual that specifies controls and procedures and common accounting software. Each country produces its annual statutory accounts in accordance with local legislation and submits these for external audit. The auditors are appointed by IRW's headquarters and are generally internationally recognized firms.

IRW has rigorous internal control and compliance systems in place to ensure that donations entrusted to it come from legitimate sources, and are spent only on those who legitimately require humanitarian assistance. This includes using the leading specialist screening software system known as 'World Check' provided by Thomson Reuters – the same software that is used by the global finance sector. IRW uses World Check to screen every major donor, employee, volunteer, trustee, contractor, supplier, bank, local partner organisation and cash beneficiary against over 540 lists of proscribed entities and individuals published by law enforcement and intelligence agencies and governmental and regulatory bodies worldwide – including OFAC and Israeli lists.

IRW has invested heavily in its due diligence and screening activities, with the aim of meeting legal requirements not only in the UK (its country

of registration), but also with legislation or instruments enacted by counter-terrorism international bodies. This includes the 18 different international counter-terrorism conventions, the most important of which is the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (the ‘Terrorism Financing Convention’), which entered into force in April 2002 and has 187 state parties.

The systems and processes that IRW has established over decades ensure that the global operations and global governance of IRW are protected against undue influence, interference and inappropriate links. These systems and processes have been thoroughly examined, verified and praised in a number of external audits.

IRW is a charitable organization and as such it is registered with the government-appointed charity regulator for England and Wales, the Charity Commission; with the Scottish charity regulator, Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR); and with the registrar of companies in the UK, Companies House. Accordingly, the organization must meet the strict standards of Britain’s charity and company laws. The fundamental condition placed before a registered charity by the Charity Commission is that its activities should conform with its goals, whether its work is carried out in the UK or abroad. Companies House requires that the organization’s annual accounts be produced according to Financial Reporting Standards and be subject to independent audit.

IRW uses only the mainstream banking system for all of its fund transfers to implementing field offices, partners and suppliers. All payments to sanctioned or high-risk jurisdictions are subject to ‘pre-notification’ to the banks, and this covers both incoming payments from donors and outgoing humanitarian expenditure. Such pre-notification allows the banks to undertake their own strict scrutiny before effecting such transactions. Since IRW utilizes the mainstream banking system, the banks and intermediary banks through which the funds pass undertake their own appropriate due diligence across all transactions – whether or not these involve high-risk jurisdictions. Any concern on the banks’ part will result in the transaction being halted.

In June 2014 the Government of Israel [designated IRW as an ‘unauthorized association’ in the West Bank, alleging links with Hamas](#). When no evidence was provided to substantiate such a serious allegation, IRW took the step of commissioning an independent investigation of its operations in the Palestinian Territories by one of the world’s leading audit firms.

That investigation examined IRW projects, partnerships, finances and staffing. It looked in detail at the thorough systems and processes that the organization has developed over many years to ensure that its work benefits those in genuine need and that no money gets into the wrong hands. It found that those systems and processes were working well,

## Refuting allegations by Israel

## Refuting allegations by the United Arab Emirates

and [there was absolutely no evidence of links with terrorism](#). The audit included a comprehensive investigation of all IRW's employees in the West Bank and Gaza. This did not reveal any evidence of criminal activity or involvement with organizations declared as unlawful associations in relation to any of IRW's employees in the Occupied Territories.

These findings accord with those of dozens of other independent audits conducted each year in more than 40 countries where IRW has offices or aid and development programs – including a previous rigorous audit of operations in Gaza in 2013. Not one of these many audits over many years has found evidence that Islamic Relief funds terrorism or has terrorist links anywhere in the world.

Previously, in 2006, Israel alleged that IRW was supporting the infrastructure of Hamas. No credible evidence was provided to substantiate this claim; [IRW's spending and programs in Gaza](#) are purely humanitarian in nature. In the same year Israel alleged that Ayaz Ali, an IRW project coordinator in Gaza, was channelling funds to Hamas. Mr Ali, who no longer works for IRW, was detained by the Israeli authorities for three weeks, and then released without charge. His release came after he was brought before a military judge who said there was insufficient evidence to justify his detention. At the time [the UK Department for International Development said it had no reason to believe there was any truth in the allegations](#) against Mr Ali or IRW.

In November 2014 the United Arab Emirates [designated IRW and over 80 other organizations across the world as terrorist groups](#). IRW is described in the list of entities attached to the UAE Resolution as 'Islamic Relief Worldwide of the Global Muslim Brotherhood', alleging that the organization is a Muslim Brotherhood member or affiliate. This is an untrue and unfounded allegation that is categorically denied. Again no evidence has been provided to substantiate the allegation.

No external organization unduly influences, let alone controls, Islamic Relief Worldwide. Not one of IRW's staff members, managing executive and board of trustees may use IRW's projects or its donor funds to pursue their own personal or political interests or agenda. To ensure no abuse of the organization of this kind occurs, IRW employs comprehensive control mechanisms – summarized above – that preclude any individual from making use of IRW's projects and/or funds for extraneous purposes.

IRW has spent over two years pursuing first a formal petition and then a number of subsequent appeals through the courts in the UAE, with a view to overturning the wrongful and harmful designation against it. So far, these efforts have been dismissed on flimsy and erroneous legal technicalities by the courts on three occasions in 2015 and 2016 without IRW's case even being heard. This has denied IRW the opportunity to challenge any evidence against it or to present the organization and its work and humanitarian credentials in a true light.



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## **Conclusion**

Islamic Relief Worldwide's work across the world is done in accordance with the highest humanitarian standards, with scrupulous due diligence and controls to avoid any diversion of funds. It is to be hoped that this document gives a true insight into the scale, scope and value of the work of IRW; important and purely humanitarian work with significant community and government support.

The amendment put forward by Rep. Ron DeSantis seeks to denigrate and undermine this widely respected civil society organization. If passed it could cause substantial material damage to IRW's life-saving work around the world. Lives and livelihoods in some of the world's poorest and most disadvantaged countries are at stake. This malicious and misguided amendment should be opposed and rejected.

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