

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 29, 2010

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express deep concern regarding the February 4 and March 12, 2010 announcements that the United States is making contributions of \$40 million and \$55 million, respectively, for 2010 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We believe that these contributions are in contravention of Section 301(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (P.L. 97-195), as amended.

Section 301(c) states that “No contributions by the United States shall be made to [UNRWA] except on the condition that [UNRWA] take all possible measures to assure that no part of the United States contribution shall be used to furnish assistance to any refugee who is receiving military training as a member of the so-called Palestine Liberation Army or any other guerrilla type organization or who has engaged in any act of terrorism.” However, as a study last year by UNRWA’s former general counsel concluded, that agency has continually failed to properly screen staff members and humanitarian aid recipients for links to Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs).

UNRWA does not ask prospective personnel or aid recipients if they are members of FTOs. Even though the U.S. remains the largest single contributor to UNRWA, the agency’s staff and aid recipients are not screened through U.S. watch lists, including that of the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control. UNRWA claims that it has fulfilled its 301(c) obligations by screening personnel through the UN’s Consolidated List pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1267, but the names on that list are mostly members of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban – not Palestinian FTOs such as Hamas, Fatah’s al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, or Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Indeed, UNRWA’s recently-departed former Commissioner-General, Karen AbuZayd, stated that the agency does not consider those Palestinian groups to be FTOs. Her immediate predecessor, Peter Hansen, said in 2004 that “I am sure that there are Hamas members on the UNRWA payroll and I don’t see that as a crime.”

Further, a number of UNRWA personnel have been discovered to be affiliated with FTOs, including Humam Khalil Abu Mulal al-Balawi, who reportedly carried out a suicide bombing that killed seven Americans and one Jordanian at Forward Operating Base Chapman in Afghanistan on December 30, 2009. Al-Balawi reportedly worked as a physician at an UNRWA clinic in Amman, Jordan, and had a long history of ties to violent Islamist extremists.

Making matters worse, UNRWA continues to bank with the Arab Bank and the Commercial Bank of Syria (CBS), financial institutions that the United States Government deems or believes to be complicit in money laundering and Terror Financing.

The Arab Bank is reportedly at the center of U.S. investigation into how tens of millions of dollars have flowed to Palestinian groups that allegedly use some of those funds to pay off suicide bombers and their relatives, and is also reportedly being sued in federal court by American victims of attacks in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, with attorneys for the victims accusing the bank of facilitating Acts of International Terrorism. Further, CBS has been designated by the Department of the Treasury as a financial institution of “primary money laundering concern,” and is controlled by the Syrian regime, a State Sponsor of Terrorism.

This news is no surprise – UNRWA has long failed to perform due diligence in ensuring that U.S. taxpayer dollars do not benefit members or affiliates of FTOs. That is why many of us wrote to you one year ago, on February 6, 2009, asking you to halt a pending disbursement of funds to UNRWA and refrain from obligating further funds to that agency.

Instead, your administration contributed over \$267 million to UNRWA in 2009 – a new single-year record, at a time of extraordinary economic challenges for our nation and skyrocketing budget deficits and national debt.

Leading UNRWA officials have continued to compromise that agency’s strictly humanitarian mandate by engaging in agitation, propaganda, and advocacy on behalf of the Palestinians, displaying public, blatant bias against Israel and in support of Hamas. At least one UNRWA official appeared on Press TV, owned and operated by the Iranian regime, in order to criticize Israel’s defensive operations in the Gaza Strip.

The Government of Canada has recently begun to place restrictions on its funding to UNRWA, demonstrating consequences for that agency’s continued noncompliance and bias. Unfortunately, the U.S. has not followed suit. The bilateral “Framework for Cooperation” that the U.S. concluded with UNRWA for 2010 actually “commends” UNRWA and does not commit that agency to vetting its personnel and aid recipients through U.S. watch lists.

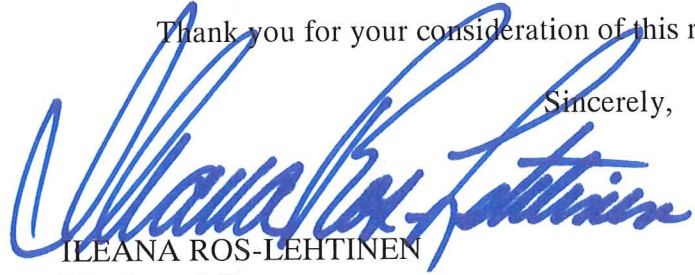
Indeed, U.S. assistance allows UNRWA to claim that criticisms of the agency’s behavior are unfounded. UNRWA spokesman Christopher Guinness has dismissed concerns by stating that “If these baseless allegations were even halfway true, do you really think the U.S. and [European Commission] would give us hundreds of millions of dollars per year?”

Therefore, Mr. President, we believe that U.S. assistance to UNRWA, including the Administration’s announcements of February 4<sup>th</sup> and March 12<sup>th</sup>, would contravene existing law, reward that agency’s intransigent and unacceptable behavior, serve to undermine U.S. interests, and misuse U.S. taxpayer dollars in a challenging time for our economy and bottom line.

Consequently, we respectfully request that you halt disbursement of funds to UNRWA under the announcements of February 4<sup>th</sup> and March 12<sup>th</sup> and refrain from obligating future funds to UNRWA until such time as that agency has conclusively demonstrated that UNRWA and all personnel in any way affiliated with UNRWA are in full compliance with section 301(c).

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN  
Member of Congress



JOHN BOEHNER  
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



MIKE PENCE  
Member of Congress



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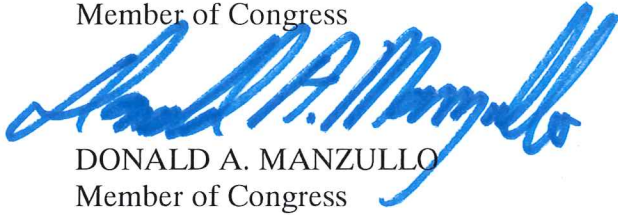
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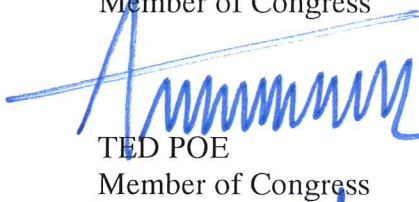
  
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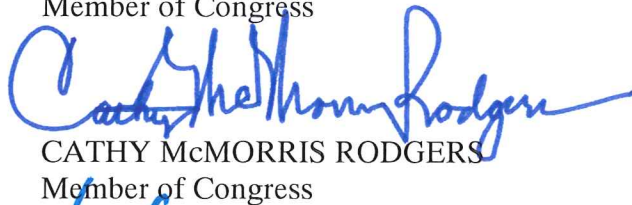
  
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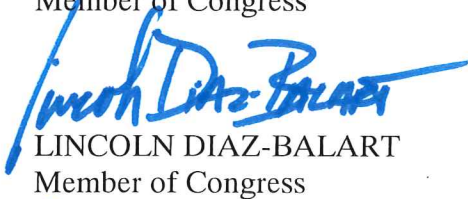
  
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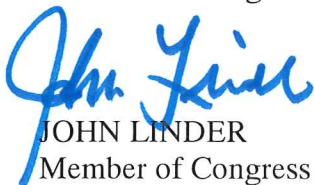
  
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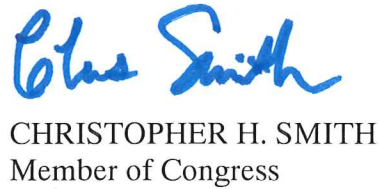
  
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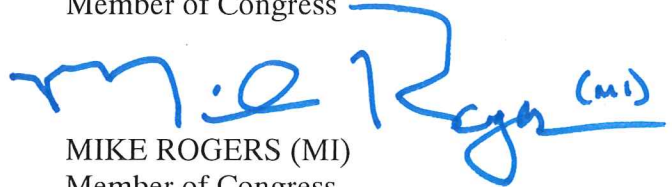
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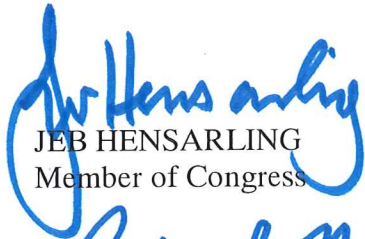
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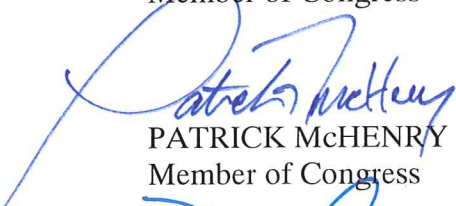
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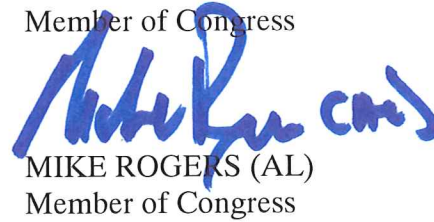
  
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MIKE CONAWAY  
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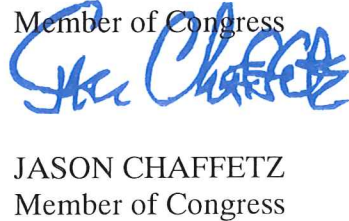
  
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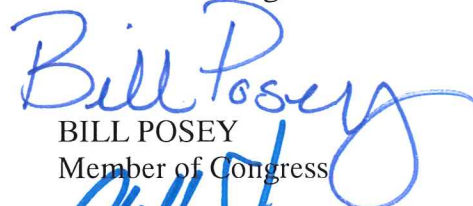
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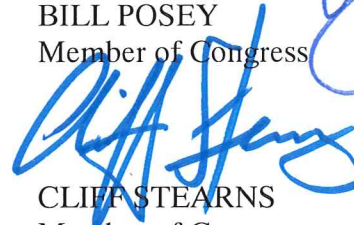
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