State Department Cuts Ties With Islamic Charity Over Anti-Semitism

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The State Department has cut ties with Islamic Relief Worldwide, an international charity that the United States accuses of spreading anti-Semitism. The public accusations represent a wholesale shift in how the United States approaches a global charity that was, until recently, an official partner of the American government and raked in hundreds of thousands in taxpayer dollars.

The State Department is "conducting a full review of the organization and U.S. government funding" due to the "anti-Semitism exhibited repeatedly by IRW’s leadership," Ellie Cohanim, the deputy special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism, told the *Washington* *Free Beacon*.

IRW boasts a budget of more than $100 million annually and has a registered nonprofit arm in the United States. The State Department’s public reproach of the charity means that it will no longer enjoy the legitimacy that comes with a close relationship with the American government or be able to cash in from this stamp of approval.

Anti-Semitism watchdogs have been sounding the alarm on IRW for years. IRW was an official State Department partner in the Obama administration and, for a time, in the Trump administration, despite evidence the group’s senior leadership engaged in persistent anti-Semitism, including social media posts from the organization's senior leaders praising Hamas leaders and calling Jews the "grandchildren of monkeys and pigs." Israel has designated IRW as a supporter of terrorism. The outgoing administration’s decision to publicly chastise the charity sets down a marker for the Biden White House as it assesses U.S. humanitarian priorities abroad. The next administration could restore ties with IRW, though it is unlikely given the current State Department’s rare elevation of anti-Semitism claims against the organization.

"Now that the State Department has issued this warning about the anti-Semitic Islamic Relief, it would be a very worrying step back if the incoming Biden administration, like Trump, rejected European concerns and started to fund this dangerous charitable franchise once more," said Sam Westrop, a Middle East researcher and director of Islamist Watch who has documented IRW’s promotion of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

Westrop described the Trump administration’s last-minute move as a severe blow for IRW, speculating the group stands to lose millions in funding from Western governments, the United Nations, and the European Union—all of which have contributed at least $100 million to the charity in the past decade.

James Richardson, director of the State Department’s Office of Foreign Assistance, confirmed to the *Free Beacon* that IRW is no longer a partner charity. "Given what we know about IRW, the Department and USAID should act with extreme caution and avoid partnering with IRW in the future," Richardson said, explaining the stakes for the Biden administration.

USAID, the American government’s leading charitable organization, will face pressure if it attempts to partner with IRW in the future. The State Department’s warning is also likely to alarm international donors to the charity and prompt them to question further donations to it.

The longstanding allegations against IRW drew congressional scrutiny in 2018, prompting the charity’s U.S. arm to issue a [public letter](http://irusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018.7.19-IRUSA-Congressional-Response-to-MEF-Cover-Letter-FINAL.docx.pdf) to lawmakers refuting the claims and distancing itself from IRW’s more questionable branches outside of the United States.

IRW was founded in the United Kingdom in 1984 and has grown into one of the largest international charities, providing humanitarian services in more than 40 countries. Anti-Semitism charges have dogged the organization for years. Its suspected ties to the Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt also have raised red flags with officials in several European nations and Israel.

"Islamic Relief has worked hard to secure high-level political contacts and make friends in prominent media—all to help build up its benevolent façade and shroud its extremist agenda. With just the slightest of closer glances at Islamic Relief’s actual activities, however, that façade is now quickly crumbling away," said Westrop.

An investigation spearheaded in July 2020 by Lorenzo Vidino, director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, exposed anti-Semitism among IRW’s top directors, trustees, managers, and senior leadership. It included social media postings by Heshmat Khalifa, an IRW trustee and director, calling Jews the "grandchildren of monkeys and pigs." He also praised the terror group Hamas. Vidino’s investigation, published by the *London Times*, prompted Khalifa’s resignation, and later, the en masse resignation of IRW’s senior leadership. The report also played a significant role in the State Department’s decision to cut ties with IRW, officials said.

Subsequent investigations into the group found that IRW trustee Almoutaz Tayara, also the chair of Islamic Relief Germany, had posted several anti-Semitic screeds against the "Zionist enemy" and praising Hamas leaders as "great men." Tayara retained his post with Islamic Relief Germany when the comments were revealed in a 2017 blog post, after he issued a public apology and deleted many of the most questionable posts. When his views resurfaced in 2020, IRW finally fired Tayara and he gave up his position at the German affiliate.

Vidino told the *Free Beacon* that since his report, governments across the globe have been reexamining their longstanding relationships with IRW.

"This was not an isolated episode, a couple of incidents," he said. "The blatant anti-Semitism that large parts of the upper management of IRW have consistently displayed should disqualify them from any partnership with any government agency, irrespective of which administration is in the White House."