

Call for Congressional Investigation into Restrictions on Humanitarian Assistance During Somali Famine

WASHINGTON, DC- On May 2, 2013 USAID and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization published the first scientific study of the casualty rate from the 2011 famine in Somalia. It shows the death rate to be much higher than previously known. Significantly, it also makes it clear that legal restrictions on humanitarian assistance played a role in the tragedy.

Congress must hold hearings to determine how U.S. law restricted humanitarian assistance to starving people in Somalia, especially the innocent children, who made up 52 percent of all fatalities. It must also look at how the licensing process at the Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control failed to effectively work with U.S. charities that wanted to help civilians trapped in areas controlled by al-Shabaab.

The famine was the result of drought and avoidable human causes including instability from armed conflict, al-Shabaab's banning of western aid agencies, and restrictions on humanitarian assistance, including U.S. counterterrorism policy. After al-Shabaab was put on the U.S. terrorist list in 2008, the U.S. drastically cut back its aid to Somalia, going from \$237 million in 2008 to \$20 million in 2011; an 88 percent reduction. This included the U.S. government's suspension of funding to the UN World Food Program (WFP) in December 2009 despite the UN estimating over three million people were at risk of food shortages. The U.S. refused to issue a General License for charities to provide aid in al-Shabaab controlled areas of Somalia in early 2011, and only partially relaxed restrictions in August of that year, after famine had been declared and many deaths had already occurred.

Kay Guinane, Director of the Charity & Security Network, said, "The barriers created by the law, and the hard line taken by the Treasury Dept. when it was clear the famine was on the way, is something that should not be allowed to go unnoticed now. It certainly should not be allowed to ever be repeated. This death toll is a scandal. The fact that al-Shabaab, the drought, war lords and others are also at fault in no way absolves the U.S. government from its role in this tragedy."

The study is available online at

http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/Somalia_Mortality_Estimates_Final_Report_1May2013_upload.pdf

For more background on the Somali famine and humanitarian restrictions see the Charity & Security Network report [Deadly Combination: Disaster, Conflict and the U.S. Material Support Law](#)

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