



110 Maryland Ave NE Suite 108
Washington, DC 20036
202 481 6927

Media Contact: Kay Guinane
kguinane@charityandsecurity.org
(202) 481-6927
www.charityandsecurity.org

Religious Groups Urge Sec. Clinton to Use Her Authority to Allow Peacebuilding Activities

Washington, DC- November 29, 2012

A diverse group of faith leaders wrote to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton today asking her to exempt activities aimed at preventing or resolving conflicts from the prohibition on material support of terrorism, thus putting the good works of civil society groups “back in the peacebuilding toolbox.” The letter can be viewed [here](#).

Provisions found in current U.S. law prohibit these efforts. Secretary Clinton has the authority to waive the prohibition for activities that both enhance national security and permit specific types of peacebuilding activities that can only be done by civil society. “It is not in the U.S. interest for legal restrictions to negate civil society’s comparative advantages in mitigating extremism on the ground,” the letter says.

These faith leaders join a coalition of nearly fifty former diplomats, peacebuilders, foreign policy and other experts who wrote to Secretary Clinton in May 2011 calling on her to use her statutory authority to exempt peacebuilding activities from the prohibition. That letter said:

Peacebuilding is designed to reduce or eliminate the frequency and severity of violent conflict or to reduce its impact on noncombatants. We believe that expert advice and assistance, training and provision of personnel provided in the course of such efforts should be exempt from the material support prohibition.

The 2011 letter to Secretary Clinton [contained an appendix](#) documenting cases of successful peacebuilding and identifies several lost opportunities for reducing or preventing violence caused by the overly broad material support prohibition. Among the numerous groups citing examples are -the American Friends Service Committee, the Carter Center, and the United States Institute of Peace. **Paul Alexander**, the President-elect of Evangelicals for Social Action argued for these barriers to be removed, saying, “peace with justice comes through communication and negotiation, not violent coercion.” He added, “we won’t get peacemakers at the table if they are at risk of prosecution.”

Melanie Greenberg, President and CEO of the Alliance for Peacebuilding, said that, “We urge Secretary Clinton, as part of her legacy, to carve out an exemption from the “material support” laws for peacebuilding activity by professionals in the field. The kinds of processes that led to the Oslo Accords and the Good Friday Accords would be impossible in today’s legal climate, and diplomats’ hands are being tied by the lack of a “safety valve” for informal dialogue with armed groups.

###