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## Egypt: The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) and whether it is involved in funding terrorist activities

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### Organizational Information

The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) was established by the Islamic World League (Saudi Arabi n.d.) in Saudi Arabia in 1978 "as a humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO) to provide assistance to victims of natural disasters and wars all over the world" (FIELD 2001; Arab States Sub-Regional Resource Facility n.d.). The Islamic World League is Saudi Arabia's "largest charity" and enjoys observer status in the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (UPI 22 Mar. 2002).

The IIRO is a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the Executive Committee of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, the Board of Conference on Non-Governmental Organizations and the International Organization Migrations (*Arab News* n.d.).

The organization is headquartered in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Arab States Sub-Regional Resource Facility n.d.; FIELD 2001), where the majority of the private donations it receives comes from (Arab States Sub-Regional Resource Facility n.d.).

According to the Ar-Riyadh Development Authority in Saudi Arabia, the IIRO has 80 branch offices located throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Caribbean and North America (n.d.). It is the largest Islamic relief organization in Azerbaijan where it has been operating since 1993 (Azernews 11 Apr. 2001).

### Funding Terrorist Activities

Following the 1998 United States embassy bombings, the Kenyan government banned the IIRO (Federal

Document Clearing House Congressional Testimony 1 Aug. 2002).

According to information on the Website of The International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism, "[a]n investigation of [autonomous, independent] terrorist cells brought to light their ties with Islamic Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) such as the 'Muslim World League' (M.W.L.), the 'International Islamic Relief Organization (I.I.R.O.) ...' (6 Nov. 2000).

A year later in August 2001, *Jane's Intelligence Review* reported that during the 1980's, funding of the fighting of Arabs and Muslims, who were recruited by Osama bin Laden, against the Soviet Union, as well as the subsequent relief efforts were assisted by two banks which "channelled funds to 20 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the most famous of which was the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO)" (Aug. 2001).

Following its promise to the United States to cooperate in its war against terrorism, Pakistan ordered 89 Arabs and Muslims who were working for Islamic relief agencies to be deported from the country (AP 6 Oct. 2001). The letter that ordered the deportations identified seven affected organizations, one of which was the IIRO (ibid.).

On 15 August 2002, the families of the victims of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon filed a civil lawsuit in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia (About.com n.d.). In the lawsuit, the relatives accused seven international banks, eight Islamic foundations and charities, the government of Sudan and a number of individuals of helping to fund terrorist activities (*Saudia Online* 19 Aug. 2002). One of the charity defendants named in the suit was the IIRO (ibid.; *The Washington Times* 13 Jan. 2003; About.com n.d.). An outline of the reasons for including the IIRO as a defendant in this lawsuit as stated in *A Guide to the 9-11 Lawsuit* is included as an attachment (ibid.).

Rita Katz, who is the director of the SITE Institute, which has been retained to conduct most of the research for the law suit, located documents that indicate that the IIRO "has played key roles in laundering of funds to the terrorists in the 1998 African embassy bombings" (FreeRepublic.com 2 Dec. 2002).

In September 2002, *The Manila Times* reported that the IIRO has been "identified with the Bin Laden network" (10 Sept. 2002).

Information posted on the website of the South Asia Analysis Group in late 2002 identifies the IIRO and its parent organization, the Muslim World League, as "front organizations" that have "financed terrorist groups" and have "actively facilitated terrorist operations" (31 Oct. 2002).

EastWest Record reported in 2002, that there are "numerous reports" of the IIRO which state "that it provides financial support to Wahhabi groups in the Middle East and Central Asia and North Africa." With reference to IIRO publications posted on its website (which the Research Directorate could not access), EastWest Record states that between 1987 and 1995, the IIRO donated US \$418 million, of which US \$140 million was spent on "special projects" that were not detailed in the publications (2002). This information is corroborated by a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty news report that cites Jonathan Winer, who the report identifies as an "international financial crime expert" (25 Oct. 2002).

In his book entitled *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (May 2002), Rohan Gunaratna, an "intelligence expert" from Sri Lanka with whom governments consult on counter-terrorism (*Asia Times* 12 Oct. 2002), writes that al-Qaeda "controls some branches of the IIRO" (May 2002, 68). These include the branch office in the Philippines, which was "unwittingly infiltrated by Osama's brother-in-law, Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, and was used to support two terrorist groups [see below]" (Gunaratna May 2002, 68). Another branch office controlled by al-Qaeda was the one in Tanzania, which "cooperated with Al Qaeda immediately before the bombing of the US embassy in Dar es Salaam in 1998" (ibid.). Gunaratna also writes that the IIRO

branch office in Pankishi Valley, Georgia "funnelled nearly \$10 million raised in Europe to Chechnya, possibly to the Al Ansar *mujahidin*, led by Osama's protégé, Khattab, in 1999/2000" (ibid.).

### **The IIRO and Hamas**

*National Review Online* reported that through investigations that have been conducted by the United States and Israel, "it has become clear that IIRO also funds Hamas" (16 Dec. 2002). According to the news report, "[d]ocuments were discovered in the Palestinian territories earlier [in 2002] that detail an IIRO program devised to financially compensate the families of Hamas suicide bombers" (*National Review Online* 16 Dec. 2002).

In his testimony before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, Matthew Levitt, a Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy stated that "[d]ocuments seized by Israeli forces during recent operations in the West Bank include records from the [Hamas-controlled] Tulkarm zakat committee ... indicating that the IIRO donated at least \$280,000 to the Tulkarm zakat committee and other Palestinian organizations linked to Hamas" (Federal Document Clearing House Congressional Testimony 1 Aug. 2002).

An article which appeared in *Front Page Magazine*, provides similar information: "documents indicate" that the IIRO gave \$280,000 (currency type unknown) to 14 Palestinian groups, including "Hamas-identified committees/bodies" (9 Aug. 2002).

An article in the 9 December 2002 issue of *Newsweek*, reported that during an investigation carried out by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Chicago into "alleged terrorist financing in 1998," the FBI discovered that a local chemical firm that was suspected of laundering money for Hamas, "had received a \$1.2 million cash infusion from the International Relief Organization." Further investigations traced some of the IIRO's money to the Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington (*Newsweek* 9 Dec. 2002).

### **The IIRO in the Philippines**

There are numerous news reports indicating that according to Philippine police and intelligence officials, Muhammad Jamal Khalifa used the IIRO to "funnel money" to terrorists (ABC News 20 Dec. 2001; *The Washington Post* 30 Sept. 2001; *The Business Times* 26 Sept. 2001; Japan Economic Newswire 13 Feb. 1999).

Khalifa, Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law, was a senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon, and a regional director for the IIRO, "which financed the building of mosques and other social work in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and ... Taiwan" (*The Age* 12 Nov. 2002).

According to Rohan Gunaratna, Khalifa posed as an Islamic preacher when he "established" the IIRO and Mercy International in the Philippines (May 2000, 182).

In his testimony, Matthew Levitt stated that Khalifa headed the IIRO's Philippine office from 1986 to 1994, "through which he channelled funds to terrorist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda, including Abu Sayyaf" (Federal Document Clearing House Congressional Testimony 1 Aug. 2002). Levitt also pointed out that one of the four men that were arrested by the Philippine police for their association with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which the Philippine police described as an "al-Qaeda 'sleeper cell,'" was a Palestinian who "worked closely with Khalifa in running the IIRO office" (ibid.).

In November 2002, *The Age* reported that by the mid-1990s, the Philippines government "was becoming highly suspicious of the IIRO's activities" and that "[i]ntelligence reports insisted [that] the charity was being used by foreign extremists as a 'pipeline' for bankrolling local militants, estimating as much as 70 per cent of its funding was being diverted to 'terrorist operations'" (12 Nov. 2002).

Rohan Gunaratna writes that because the IIRO is "a reputable worldwide organisation" it had provided "the perfect cover" for Khalifa in the development of Al Qaeda's NGO network (May 2002, 144). According to Gunaratna, "[o]n the pretext of offering humanitarian assistance, he attracted vast legitimate donations, especially from the Gulf, but in reality the funds raised assisted both humanitarian and terrorist projects" (ibid.). Gunaratna goes on to state that although Khalifa left the Philippines in June 1994, and ceased to work for the IIRO, he returned in October and maintained "relations with its staff, mostly Hamas members, including its coordinator in the Philippines" (ibid.).

Another connection between the IIRO and terrorist funding in the Philippines involves Wali Khan Amin Shah, a Yousef cell member who was arrested while coming out of a building in Manila, "with explosive devices and two sets of laserscopes" (Gunaratna May 2002, 181). When Shah was 15, he worked "as a trader in Peshawar [Pakistan] and later assisted IIRO, serving food and providing medical help for refugees" (ibid.). According to Gunaratna, Yousef's cell was financed by Khalifa (ibid.).

Khalifa had also "forged ties" with the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and maintained in frequent contact with one of its intelligence officers, Abdul Asmad, who was also the provisional director of IIRO in Tawi-Tawi (Gunaratna May 2002, 182). According to Gunaratna, the financial transactions between ASG, IIRO and Khalifa date back to October 1991 (ibid.).

While working for the IIRO, Gunaratna reveals that:

Khalifa sent dispatched at least one youth to Tripoli, Libya, on an eight-month training course and on his return in 1990 urged him to join ASG. He sent other ASG members for religious training to the Islamic University in Pakistan and for military training with Al Qaeda's International Islamic Brigade in Afghanistan, their visits being financed by IIRO (ibid.).

According to an article in the *International Review*, Abu Anzar, who is a former member of Janjalani, a Muslim extremist group, provided information to Philippine authorities that "an Abu Sayyaf cell in Manila was founded in 1992 with money that had been sent by Bin Laden and his brother-in-law, Mohamed Jamal Khalifia, via the relief agency [IIRO]" (7 Feb. 2002).

The Centre for Defense Information (CDI) states that:

Khalifa's network of Islamic charities and university in Zamboanga were both used to bankroll extremists. His main organization, the International Islamic Relief Organization, has an office in Zamboanga, as does a bin Laden foundation. Abu Sayyaf received training and money funneled through Khalifa's network (5 Mar. 2002).

In an telephone interview in 2000, Khalifa, who is now reportedly in Saudi Arabia, denied that he helped finance terrorist groups and stated that he "'hates and condemns' bin Laden" (*The Washington Post* 30 Sept. 2001).

Rohan Gunaratna writes that Abdul Nasser Nooh, who was based in Makati City, Manila, "facilitated Al Qaeda and Hezbollah operations" (May 2002, 149). Nooh had, according to Gunaratna, worked with various international Islamic organizations, including the IIRO (ibid.).

### **The IIRO and Rabita Trust**

Rabita Trust (RT) was formed in 1988 with "the aim of organising the repatriation and rehabilitation of stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh" (SATP 2001). RT describes itself as "popular, international, Islamic and non-governmental organization, at which Muslims from all over the world are represented" (ibid.).

The secretary-general of RT is Wael Hamza Jalaidan, who is the logistics chief to Osama bin Laden and

fought with bin Laden against Soviet troops in Afghanistan (ibid.; The Press Trust of India 12 Oct. 2001). Jalaidan was also the temporary head of the Saudi Red Crescent Society and the Muslim World League while in Afghanistan (SATP 2001).

According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, RT is "linked" to the Muslim World League and the IIRO, whose secretary-generals are both members of the RT (ibid.).

### **The Official Position of the IIRO**

The secretary-general of the IIRO, Dr. Adnan Bash, denies any relations between Bin Laden and "any other illegal organization" and stated that the financial records of the organization are "well monitored and audited by international experts in cooperation with governments concerned" (*Saudia Online* 19 Aug. 2002). Dr. Bash also indicated that implicating the IIRO in funding terrorism is "yet another part of a series of accusations which started after Sept. 11th against Islamic charities" (*Arab News* 18 Aug. 2002).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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