



United States Department of State

*Washington, D.C. 20520*

AUG 20 2008

Dear Senator Coburn:

Thank you for your letter of July 30 regarding the Department's Muslim outreach programs. As President Bush has repeatedly emphasized, the war on terror is not directed against any religion, ethnicity, or nationality. Rather, it is directed against those who seek to advance political, religious, ideological or other goals through terrorism and other acts of violent extremism. Our battle against terrorism is directed at those who would pervert any religion, including Islam, and use it as a force for evil.

Consistent with this focus, the President and the Department of State, with the support of the Congress, have initiated programs aimed at challenging extremism and fostering educational and cultural exchanges that demonstrate American values and promote international understanding with nations and populations, including those that follow Islam, around the world. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) has been particularly active in this area ever since the events of 9/11.

The Department takes very seriously its responsibility to ensure that no Department funding goes to terrorist-related organizations or activities. Deputy Secretary Negroponte issued guidance on February 26, 2008, to all Under Secretaries and Department senior management. This guidance both formalizes practices already in place to mitigate the risk that Department funding will provide an inadvertent benefit to terrorists or their supporters, and instructs responsible officers to review and make adjustments to existing practices and procedures in this area, where necessary. To assist in implementing this guidance, the Department established a Department-wide working group to review and recommend best practices among bureaus. This group has begun its work, and ECA is participating.

The Honorable  
Tom Coburn,  
United States Senate.

You also expressed concerns about the Department's association with a number of entities and/or individuals. The Department has not established a blacklist of Islamic organizations that are barred from seeking grants or fellowships from the Department, nor whose existing funding would be terminated. Rather, the Department evaluates grant and fellowship applicants on a case-by-case basis.

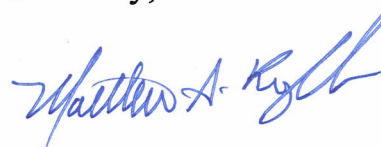
You expressed specific concerns about the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), stating that, "...sometime after Ms. Ameri was confirmed, ISNA announced new sub-grant funding from [ECA] to carry out a new Muslim outreach program." Approval and obligation of Fiscal Year 2006 and 2007 funds to the National Peace Foundation, of which ISNA is a sub-grantee, took place prior to Ms. Ameri's confirmation.

The Department has the discretion and flexibility to choose to work with organizations which further the goal of mutual understanding and whose work, in promoting mutual understanding, contributes to our foreign policy and national security. However, in order to curtail funding to an organization with which the Department has already entered into a binding relationship, or to instruct that organization to undo an existing partnership, the Secretary would need to have sufficient legal justification. We are consulting with the Department of Justice in order to determine when such justification exists.

The Secretary shares your commitment to prevent the Department's activities from improperly benefiting those whom we mean to counter or marginalize: terrorist groups, their members, or their supporters.

We hope this information is helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Matthew A. Reynolds  
Acting Assistant Secretary  
Legislative Affairs