

Former Trustees of Muslim Aid Respond to Charity Commission Inquiry

Responding to the findings of the Charity Commission's Statutory Inquiry into Muslim Aid, the former trustees (known as MA1985 trustees) issued the following joint statement:

"The former trustees take serious issue with a number of the Commission's comments, conclusions and the tone and balance with which those conclusions are reported.

"It will be clear to any reader that the Commission's overall finding of serious mismanagement is entirely out of proportion to the matters upon which it appears to be based. Unfortunately, along with the SORI (Statement of Results of the Inquiry) itself, the Commission's Press Release can be described as unfair and unbalanced.

"We are concerned what effect this Inquiry will have on the overall Muslim charity sector whose only crime, it would seem, is to facilitate the generosity of British Muslims.

"The balance and tone of the Report is made all the more disappointing given that in crucial respects it fully vindicates the former Trustees. Thus, the Report rightly confirms that there has been no illegal funding of proscribed organisations. Importantly, the Report also rightly makes clear that the inquiry found no evidence of irregular or improper use of the charity's funds. This confirmation is important because since 9/11, with a hostile atmosphere against Muslims, Muslim Aid itself was under greater scrutiny and had to deal with false slurs from certain sections of the media that its funds were diverted to extremists rather than aiding the poor. The Report also recognises the "*vital relief work*" carried on by the charity around the world, often in very difficult conditions.

"The former trustees agree that the rapid pace of expansion of the charity created weaknesses in some governance systems of overseas branches in unstable areas of the world. However, as guardians of other people's money, the trustees (many of whom were founding trustees) willingly opened themselves up to greater regulatory scrutiny, fully cooperated with the Charity Commission, appointed forensic experts and implemented procedures suggested by independent external advisors to ensure that its governance controls are kept up with the phenomenal growth of the organisation". To that extent, while they believe the criticisms in the Report to be unbalanced and in many respects inaccurate, they also accept that there are lessons to be learned moving forward.

"The former trustees always put the charity's interests first and sought to bring in new skill sets on the board. They immediately took remedial steps, including the replacement of executive staff; some of them willingly stepped down as trustees to make way for others whose skills were suited to the organisation had become. The former trustees' conduct was praised by the Commission on various occasions during the process, and the Commission has recognised their integrity.

"In some ways it could be said that Muslim Aid has been a victim of its own success. Its ambitious works spread into numerous developing countries including the high risk areas, with hundreds of projects and thousands of employees. This brought challenges to the

board of MA 1985 trustees. We have passionately tried to discharge our duties as trustees with selflessness to cope with the expanded works of the charity.

“We are grateful to the Muslim community for its solid support for Muslim Aid over the decades. We were honoured to oversee an organisation that earned a reputation of channelling millions to the world’s poor. The Charity Commission found shortcomings which we tried to deal with straight away. We hope there are lessons to be learnt for trustees in charities throughout the sector.”

Enquiries to the former Trustees should be addressed to Adam Tudor of Carter-Ruck (adam.tudor@carter-ruck.com)

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