



12 February 2016

Stephen Twigg MP
Chair
International Development Select Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Stephen,

Following the recent visit by the Rt Hon Clare Short and I to the Syria Turkey border we are writing to identify an issue which may well be of as much concern to members of the Select Committee as it is to us. We would like to suggest that you use your authority to investigate it and to make recommendations.

Our visit was conducted by and through the Muslim Charities Forum which is led by Dr Hany. In particular we were able to see at first hand the work of Islamic Relief and Human Appeal. We were also able to join the send-off across the Syria border some 90 heavily loaded trucks with flour, food, medicine, tents and heating stoves for internally displaced people in the North Western parts of Syria. This convoy was entirely funded by the British Muslim community who have already themselves raised nearly £300million from amongst British Muslims.

There are three areas about which Clare and I are deeply concerned.

The first about which we have had discussions with officials at Downing Street is that for whatever reason the flow of British taxpayer funding does appear to be discriminating against Muslim charities. There are clearly advantages in terms of getting aid through to vulnerable and besieged displaced communities in Syria from using Muslim Charities and personnel. In addition, domestically, it does send a negative signal to the British Muslim community about the esteem in which they are held by the British Government. Both Clare Short and I when we held the position of Secretary of State for International Development made particular efforts to tackle discriminations of this kind and we believe the Government should do more now in the teeth of the Syria refugee catastrophe.

Secondly, we have seen clear evidence that the relief effort in Syria is hampered both by fears of anti-terrorist legislation and the effect it could have on the charities themselves. Also the reluctance of banks in Britain to transfer funds on the grounds that they themselves could fall foul of this legislation. This is a complex and difficult issue. We are concerned that it may be frustrating legitimate British Government policy and the relief effort inadvertently.

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Thirdly, there is concern among Muslim Relief workers who are in some cases, with extraordinary bravery, putting their lives on the line for their fellow human beings about the "Guantanamo" effect - exemplified by the case of Shaker Aamer detained by the Americans for 14 years without trial or even charge because he was effectively in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Muslim aid workers fear that they could be photographed or recorded in places where terrorists are in control or deployed but also where they themselves are trying to help desperate people. Both Clare Short and I feel that it is detrimental for the legitimate work of very brave people who are greatly respected in Britain for the work which they are carrying out - especially amongst the Muslim community. Both Clare Short and I hope that your Committee will look into this important matter and take evidence to see what it may be necessary to do to help address these complex but very important issues.

*With every good wish to you and
your committee*

Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP

*Yours ever
Andrew & Clare*