

USAID Should Require Students to Renounce Terrorism before Receiving Taxpayer-Funded Scholarships

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Congressman Rothman Presses USAID to Require Foreign Students to Renounce Terrorism before Receiving Taxpayer-Funded Scholarships

Pictured: Congressman Rothman questions USAID Administrator Fore during a February 27, 2008 appropriations hearing on the FY09 budget for USAID.

(Washington, DC)—Today, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) pressed the Bush Administration to step up its efforts to prevent U.S. tax dollars from directly or indirectly supporting terrorism on university campuses in the Middle East. A recent audit by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Inspector General found that hundreds of USAID scholarships—supported by U.S. taxpayers—have been given to Palestinian students who attended universities with student chapters of terrorist organizations.

"Student chapters of terrorist organizations exist at all Palestinian universities that receive USAID assistance and many members of these student chapters have gone on to plan or carry out suicide attacks. At a bare minimum, USAID should require students who receive U.S. taxpayer-funded scholarships to pledge not to join student chapters of terrorist organizations on campus," said Rothman, a member of the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, State, and Related Programs.

Rothman's questioning comes on the heels of a December 2007 audit by USAID's independent Inspector General, Donald Gambatesa. In the report, Gambatesa states that "USAID's policies, procedures, and controls are not adequate to reasonably ensure against providing assistance to terrorists."

The Inspector General also concluded that USAID "did not always follow federal laws" when approving aid to a Hamas-controlled university in Gaza, and noted that USAID had funded terrorist-linked groups on at least two other occasions between 2003 and 2005.

The Inspector General initiated his review after an article appeared in the Washington Times last March that outlined instances of USAID dollars being provided to a university controlled by Hamas, a designated terrorist organization. USAID funded the university despite language in various foreign operations spending bills that prevents USAID from giving money to "any individual, entity, or educational institution which [the Secretary of State] has determined to be involved in or advocating terrorist activity."

Rothman raised his concerns this morning during a hearing about USAID's budget with USAID Administrator and Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance, Henrietta Fore. An anti-terrorism pledge is not currently required by USAID. While Fore said Rothman's proposal 'seemed reasonable,' she would not commit to the requirement.

"The Inspector General essentially gave USAID a failing grade on the matter of preventing U.S. taxpayer dollars from being funneled to terrorists. Asking USAID student scholarship beneficiaries to pledge not to join a terrorist organization is completely reasonable and I will continue to follow-up on this matter with the Administration," said Rothman.

Since joining the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Foreign Operations in 2001, Rothman has made responsible foreign aid a top priority. Among many other areas, he works to ensure that U.S. tax dollars do not directly or indirectly benefit terrorists who seek to harm America and her allies in the Middle East.

Last year, Congressman Rothman used his position on the State-Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee to have the funding cut for Alhurra, the U.S.-taxpayer funded Arabic language TV network in the Middle East, after he learned that News Director Larry Register had approved live broadcasts of terrorists. Following Rothman's funding cut, Register was forced to resign, and Alhurra pledged to provide more transparency and accountability in their broadcasting decisions.

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