UN “Grand Bargain” on Aid Tries To Bypass Anti-Terrorism Efforts

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By Susan Yoshihara

Center for Family and Human Rights

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NEW YORK, February 5 (C-Fam) UN staff want to convince the US and European governments to bypass laws aimed at stopping the financing of global terrorism so that donations could flow faster and easier to humanitarian emergencies.

This is part of a “grand bargain” being proposed by UN staff where governments would take away barriers to humanitarian aid and the UN would promise greater transparency and accountability.

“We recognize that the anti-money laundering, counter-terror financing legislations can create some obstacles to the transfer of funds. It is important to seek ways to reduce these barriers so that humanitarian aid workers are able to deliver aid in some of the most volatile and crisis-affected parts of the world,” a panel of experts and UN staff [announced](https://c-fam.org/friday_fax/un-secretariat-releases-grand-plan-global-aid-efforts/) last week.

The barriers governments use to hobble terror financing include earmarking funds, limiting the sums that can be transferred, and tracking them to ensure lawful use. UN staff view these as barriers since they limit and slow down transfers to crisis spots. Money earmarked for one purpose such as fighting a disease can’t be used for an emergent need such as shelter or food.

In their report launching the “grand bargain,” UN staff acknowledged that only two of the four UN agencies that transfer the bulk of all humanitarian aid track funds to their destination. Most of those funds are going to Syria, the occupied Palestinian territories, Sudan and South Sudan according to the report.

Initiatives taken this week by the European Union and Germany provide examples of the types of anti-terror limitations that rankle UN staff. Germany said it plans to limit the amount of cash transfers to around $5000. The EU announced a plan that included limiting the use of pre-paid cards and large bank notes.

UN staff also want to tap into the informal contributions that all Muslims are asked to make. Estimated at $560 billion a year, “Just one percent of zakat [alms] would make an enormous difference to the scale of the global funding deficit for the year 2015,” according to the report.

But, those funds were at the heart of an elaborate drug trafficking and money laundering ring used to fund terrorism in Syria by Hezbollah that US and EU officials just broke this week. According to the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Hezbollah used the informal Islamic money transfer system to make payments to South American drug cartels, which in turn financed terrorists.

The UN staff’s “grand bargain” could also run athwart recent UN Security Council efforts, such as last December’s resolution targeting funding for Da’esh/ISIS, already the world’s wealthiest terror organization at $2 billion.

While anti-terrorism financing plans have taken years to put into place, UN staff want nations to agree to the new humanitarian financing plan, released last week, by May 24th at a meeting in Istanbul.

Last week four of the five top donors to global humanitarian efforts raised concerns at a briefing with UN staff, questioning that any consensus could be reached in such a short time, especially since the UN staff is not allowing any intergovernmental consultation before May.

Japan went farthest, rejecting the “grand bargain” and saying it would have to study it further.