



Justin Trudeau defends his decision to attend Islamic conference sponsored by organization linked to Hamas

Stewart Bell, *National Post* · Dec. 12, 2012

The Liberals came under fire on Wednesday over Justin Trudeau's participation in an Islamic conference whose sponsor was stripped of its federal charity status last year for supporting Hamas, the outlawed terrorist organization.

The Liberal leadership candidate has defended his scheduled speech at next week's Reviving the Islamic Spirit conference in Toronto, and the Canadian Council on American Islamic Relations condemned attempts to "smear" the gathering.

But in a letter to Liberal Party of Canada president Mike Crawley, Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre CEO Avi Benlolo said Mr. Trudeau's presence at the event would lend credibility to supporters of Hamas.

"Numerous members of FSWC have conveyed their alarm to me; they are wondering if there is a deeper meaning to his participation, and whether the Liberals are aligning themselves with a belief system that is contrary to traditional Liberal values," the letter reads.

On Thursday, the Muslim Canadian Congress said it had sent letters to interim Liberal leader Bob Rae and Irwin Cotler, the party's Justice and Human Rights critic, asking them to encourage Mr. Trudeau to skip the convention.

"At a time when liberal Muslims across the world are fighting rightwing Islamists, it is sad to see the aspiring leader of the Liberal Party of Canada throw his weight behind those who would snuff out liberalism and stifle free speech in the name of Islam," MCC president Salma Siddiqui said.

The conference, the largest of its kind in Canada, has been held annually for a decade but concerns surfaced after a Quebec blogger noted that one of the event's sponsors is IRFAN-Canada, which lost its charity status in 2011 over its ties to Hamas.

Documents obtained Wednesday from the Canada Revenue Agency show that IRFAN, listed as a "diamond sponsor" of the conference, was described by federal charities regulators as "an integral part of an international fundraising effort to support Hamas."

"Our findings indicate that IRFAN-Canada provided \$14.6-million in resources to operating partners that were run by officials of Hamas, openly supported and provided funding to Hamas, or have been listed by various jurisdictions because of their support for Hamas or other terrorist entities," according to a summary of the CRA's findings.

In addition, the CRA said it had found IRFAN videos at the group's Mississauga office that "demonize Israel, characterize the Arab-Israel conflict as a religious war, appeal for all Arab and Muslim nations to join in the struggle against Israel and glorify martyrdom."

IRFAN has denied knowingly funding Hamas and accused the CRA of misinterpreting its relief work. It describes itself as an international humanitarian organization. While no longer a registered charity, it continues to operate in Canada as a non-profit.

Appearing on CBC News Network on Wednesday, Mr. Trudeau said Prime Minister Stephen Harper had sent a congratulatory message to the conference organizers last year. "Every year members of all political parties go but suddenly I'm going and the Conservative government decides to play politics with it," he said.

"It's an opportunity to speak to 20,000 Muslim Canadians about this extraordinary society based on values of openness, of respect that we've managed to build here in Canada. This level of engagement, this level of optimism and hope for the future is a message that absolutely needs to come out. And people trying to quash that kind of dialogue and that kind of discourse through intolerant attacks like we've seen is not what has made this country great."

The Charities Directorate wrote a 27-page letter to IRFAN in December, 2010, that spelled out the reasons why its charity status was being revoked. The letter said regulators did not have to establish any knowledge or intent to break Canada's charity rules.

"Nevertheless, the evidence we have accumulated through our current and previous audits and upon which this letter is based show, in our view, a marked persistence in aiding groups connected to Hamas, the existence of institutional links between IRFAN-Canada and key members within the organization structure of Hamas, and an intent to contribute to the success of Hamas by enhancing its ability to engage in its cause in the manner expressly contemplated by the Hamas Charter."

Hamas is devoted to the destruction of Israel. Public Safety Canada calls Hamas “a radical Islamist-nationalist terrorist organization” and “one of the primary groups involved in suicide bombings aimed at Israelis.”

Below, portions of the CRA report discussing IRFAN-Canada’s links to Hamas:

Hamas by enhancing its ability to engage in its cause in the manner expressly contemplated by the Hamas charter.

2.4 Links to Hamas

Our analysis of the information gathered from the documents acquired during our audit of IRFAN-Canada, along with those retrieved from open sources, our previous audit of IRFAN-Canada and documents filed in relation to JFHS' prior application for registration, has led the CRA to believe that IRFAN-Canada is an integral part of an international fundraising effort to support Hamas. The analysis that has led to CRA's position includes:

1. The clear evidence that, at their earliest inception, HLF and JFHS were in close communication, their identities and operations overlapped, and they were part of the North American network established by the Muslim Brotherhood's Palestine Committees to support Hamas. (See Appendix C – Additional Background Information)
2. Comparisons to the facts given in evidence in the HLF trial in the United States, and in the Al Aqsa Foundation judgement in Germany affirming that key international partners of JFHS and IRFAN-Canada have been found to be part of the worldwide financing structure for Hamas providing funds to many of the same recipient organizations in the West Bank and Gaza, together with the listings by various jurisdictions of these partners as terrorist organizations. (See Appendix G – Tab 3)
3. JFHS and IRFAN-Canada's past pattern (from 1992 to 2002) of funding organizations that have been recognized as having links to Hamas, together with our current audit findings which reveal that – despite its 2004 undertakings – IRFAN-Canada has continued to provide funds to Hamas-controlled Ministries in the West Bank and Gaza as well as to organizations that have ties to Hamas. Our audit findings indicate that, for the period under review, IRFAN-Canada has provided approximately \$14.6 million in resources to organizations with ties to Hamas. (See Appendix G - Tabs 1, 2, 4 and 5)
4. JFHS' status as a founding member in the Union of Good,⁴⁴ and IRFAN-Canada's continued association with and/or resourcing of Union of Good members as its operating partners.⁴⁵ The United States Treasury has designated the Union of Good, identifying it as an "organization created by Hamas leadership to transfer

⁴⁴ <http://www.web.archive.org/web/20021217011104/www.101.days.org>

⁴⁵ Other sources indicate that IRFAN-Canada was also listed as a Union of Good member in 2004. See Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies (C S S), "IRFAN: A Hamas front organization operating in Canada to enlist financial support for Hamas institutions in the Palestinian Authority-administered territories", November 2004
www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_wultimedia/html/final/eng/sub/11_04/irfan.htm

funds to the terrorist organization".⁴⁶ In its designation it describes the Union of Good as an organization that: "acts as a broker for Hamas by facilitating financial transfers between a web of charitable organizations...The primary purpose of this activity is to strengthen Hamas' political and military position in the West Bank and Gaza, including by: (i) diverting charitable donations to support Hamas members and the families of terrorist operatives; and (ii) dispensing social welfare and other charitable services on behalf of Hamas". (See Appendix G – Tab 1, 3 and 5)

5. IRFAN-Canada's listing as an "unlawful association" by the Israeli Government on December 30, 2004.
6. The overall goals, objectives, and principles of Hamas as stated in its charter. (see Appendix F – Links to Hamas)

In addition, we have translated a number of promotional fundraising videos created by IRFAN-Canada that were obtained during the May 2010 visit to IRFAN-Canada's Mississauga office. These videos contain images and commentary which we find to be overwhelmingly political in content, generally inconsistent with the pursuit of charitable objectives, and intended to be supportive of Hamas messaging. Consistent with the central themes of the Hamas Charter, they demonize Israel, characterize the Arab-Israeli conflict as a religious war, appeal for all Arab and Muslim nations to join in the struggle against Israel, and glorify martyrdom. For example:

- The video *gaza ebadh* depicts the bodies of several children shrouded in green flags bearing the logo and slogan of Hamas; commentary in the film characterizes the Israelis as "mass murderers" who deliberately and repeatedly target entire families and attempted to "erase" the people of Gaza through "mass annihilation".
- The video *gaza msajed*, contains commentaries and interviews repeatedly characterizing Israeli actions as being a religiously-motivated attack on the entire Arab nation and Islam itself. Indeed, some of these comments are made during an interview conducted in the making of the video with Dr. Taleb Hammad Abu Shaar, the Minister of Religious Affairs in Gaza's Hamas-controlled government.
- The *gaza.ebadh* video contains interviews that describe the effects of the war on the family of the Zeitoun neighbourhood in Gaza, many of whom were injured or killed during Israeli military activity on January 4, 2008. Later in the film, images of five members of the family are prominently displayed on a 'martyr' poster bearing the logo of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).⁴⁷ Publicly available statements made by PIJ claim that at least one of the family members displayed on the poster, , was involved in militant activities against Israeli forces in the Zeitoun area on the date in question. Other

⁴⁶ www.treasury.gov/offices/enforcement/aei-issues/protecting/union_of_good.shtml

⁴⁷ The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) is listed as a terrorist entity in Canada effective November 20, 2002

videos obtained from IRFAN-Canada, such as *gaza press* and *IRFAN FILM_Arabic* also feature images of martyrs and interviews with their surviving family members.

2.5 Absence of Due Diligence

A registered charity should conduct meaningful due diligence on all aspects of its operations, including its partners in program delivery, in order to prevent the charity's resources from being used in a manner that would contravene Canadian law and the charity's requirements for ongoing registration. This would include ensuring that a charity does not operate in association with individuals or groups that are engaged in terrorist activities or that support terrorist activities.

Due diligence is not merely a question of checking lists. As our audit closure letter of December 21, 2004 commented, "whatever authority is responsible, listings procedures will never keep up with the capacity of terrorist groups to restructure their support networks, nor will they be able to keep track of small local entities associated with terrorist groups."

As our December 21, 2004 letter also points out, we would expect a Canadian organization that carries out operations internationally – particularly in concert with partner agencies in unstable and strife-torn regions of the world – to be in a very good position to be aware, from its own local knowledge and on-the-ground contacts, whether particular NGOs active in the region are aligned or connected with groups that are engaged in terrorist activities as that term is understood in Canadian law.

There are, of course, many resources publicly available to charities, including some produced by the CRA, to help Canadian charities identify vulnerabilities to terrorist abuse.⁴⁸ However, the suggestion in your October 8, 2010 letter that Canada or any other country could mandate an approved set of due diligence procedures for charities that would be effective in combating terrorist financing is overly simplistic and does not fully grasp the dynamics involved in the use of charities in the support networks of terrorist groups. It is for this reason that, as your letter notes, "The U.S. Anti-terrorist Financing Guidelines: Voluntary Best Practices for U.S.-based Charities ... clearly indicates that adherence to these guidelines is insufficient in and of itself to protect charities from abuse by terrorist organizations or terrorist activities."

We have considered IRFAN-Canada's 2004 undertakings and the submissions you made in your letter dated October 8, 2010 concerning the anti-terrorism due diligence procedures carried out by IRFAN-Canada. In this regard, in November 2004,

⁴⁸ See for example, the following CRA publications available on our website www.cra.gc.ca/charities:

- Guidance – Canadian Registered Charities Carrying Out Activities Outside Canada
- Checklist for Charities on Avoiding Terrorist Abuse
- Charities in the International Context