



The largest alliance of U.S.-based international nongovernmental organizations focused on the world's poor and most vulnerable people.

October 21, 2015

Dear President Obama,

As the CEOs of 35 U.S. NGOs, we are writing to express alarm over the events of October 3, 2015 in which Médecins Sans Frontière's hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan was repeatedly hit by U.S. airstrikes. We extend our deepest sympathies to our colleagues and their patients who were killed in this tragic incident. At the same time, the broader consequences for humanitarian operations globally have struck a deep chord of concern in the U.S. NGO community.

Much remains to be understood about these events and the measures that must be taken to avoid a recurrence. To accomplish this we urge you to establish U.S. government cooperation with an impartial independent body to establish the facts of what transpired in Kunduz on October 3rd, for example by making use of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC).

U.S., NATO and Afghan forces will and should conduct their own internal inquiries to adopt both immediate and longer term corrective measures as necessary. Internal investigations cannot, however, substitute for the role of an independent body to establish an impartial and authoritative account of events. The release of the main findings and conclusions of an independent body can additionally serve to inform the future policies and operations of all concerned parties globally.

As international NGOs actively responding to human suffering in numerous armed conflicts worldwide, we depend on respect by all State and non-State parties to conflict for the protected status of civilians and impartial relief operations. Independent fact-finding is critical to enhance compliance with these norms and increase accountability under international humanitarian law worldwide. Given the pressure international humanitarian law is under in many of those conflicts, U.S. cooperation with an independent investigation could be a helpful precedent to rebuild that critical respect and reduce attacks on civilians and civilian facilities, including hospitals and schools.

The United States was instrumental in conceiving and implementing the fundamental norms of humanity during times of war as now enshrined in international law. A world where these fundamental norms of humanity are not respected is unthinkable. It is in the interest of the United States to continue to set the standard of adherence to these norms that it would have other parties follow.

Respectfully,

Sam Worthington
President and CEO, InterAction

Andrea Tamburini
CEO, Action Against Hunger

Melanie Greenberg
President and CEO, Alliance for
Peacebuilding

Shan Cretin
General Secretary, American
Friends Service Committee

Daniel Wordsworth
President and CEO, American
Refugee Committee

Susan Davis
President and CEO, BRAC USA

Michelle Nunn
President and CEO, CARE USA

Carolyn Woo
President and CEO, Catholic
Relief Services

Serra Sippel
President, Center for Health and
Gender Equity (CHANGE)

Rev. John L. McCullough
President and CEO, Church World
Service, Inc.

Joseph M. Cahalan
CEO, Concern Worldwide (U.S.)

Miranda Sissons
Executive Director, Doctors of the
World USA

Steve Hollingworth
President, Freedom from Hunger

Kathleen Hower
CEO, Global Links

Jeff Meer
Executive Director, Handicap
International

James P. Mitchum
CEO, Heart to Heart International

Mark Hetfield
President and CEO, HIAS

Nancy A. Aossey
President and CEO, International
Medical Corps

David Miliband
President and CEO, International
Rescue Committee

Anwar Khan
CEO, Islamic Relief USA

J Ron Byler
Executive Director, Mennonite
Central Committee U.S.

Neal Keny-Guyer
CEO, Mercy Corps

Richard M. Walden
President and CEO, Operation
USA

Ray Offenheiser
President, Oxfam America

Steve Davis
President and CEO, PATH

Ester Neltrup
President and CEO, Planet Aid

Tessie San Martin
President and CEO, Plan
International USA

Carolyn Miles
President and CEO, Save the
Children

Jack Blanks
Executive Director, Seva
Foundation

Shawna Bader-Blau
Executive Director, Solidarity
Center

Cindy Kaplan
Executive Director, SPOON
Foundation

The Rev. William F. Schulz
President, Unitarian Universalist
Service Committee

Sarah Costa
Executive Director, Women's
Refugee Commission

Jacinta Tegman
President, World Concern

Richard Stearns
President, World Vision U.S.

cc:

Honorable Ashton Carter, United States Secretary of Defense
General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs