

Aid charity involved in convoys to Syria “seriously mismanaged”, regulator concludes

The trustees of a humanitarian aid charity that failed to account for cash taken to Syria are responsible for misconduct and mismanagement, the charity regulator has found.

[In a report published today](#), the Charity Commission, the regulator of charities in England and Wales, finds several serious failures in the administration of [the charity](#), including failures to properly vet, safeguard and oversee volunteers who represented the charity, and to account for the way in which funds were spent.

The regulator’s inquiry, which launched in 2014, aimed to establish, among other things, whether the charity had been misused for, or had supported unlawful or improper activity, including facilitating military, armed, political activity, and whether the charity’s funds had been misappropriated.

In December 2013, a volunteer who was associated with this and other charities, took part in an aid convoy to Syria. While in Syria, the volunteer was reported to have been abducted and later murdered by ISIL militants.

Concerns about the charity’s involvement in aid convoys to Syria

The Commission had been engaging with the charity since April 2013 over concerns about its participation in and organisation of an aid convoy to Syria. This activity was outside Al-Fatiha Global’s charitable purposes at the time. The regulator had also issued general advice about charities’ participation in aid convoys, which it states carry “inherent risks” and are “not an effective means of delivering humanitarian aid”.

A books and records check at the time uncovered significant weaknesses in the charity’s records, such that the trustees were unable to demonstrate where and how charitable funds had been applied.

The inquiry further finds that the charity’s trustees provided “little to no” oversight of individuals to whom they had delegated responsibility, including those that managed participation in convoys to Syria. The trustees did not, the Commission finds, act reasonably to ensure the charity’s assets, including its name, were used only to support or carry out its purposes.

Cash not properly accounted for

The trustees also failed to ensure appropriate authorisation and documentation around cash carried by individuals travelling on convoys. The Commission found that individuals travelled overseas carrying between £2000-£3000 each, but that there were “insufficient records” as to how cash or aid

were applied in Syria.

Failures to account for charitable funds

The inquiry report criticises the charity's trustees for failures to account properly for donations of goods, leading to the charity's accounts for year ended December 2013 being qualified by the charity's auditor. The charity had undergone a period of growth, after what the Commission notes was 'highly effective' fundraising by the charity's trustees and supporters. The regulator finds that Al-Fatiha Global's internal, financial and governance controls and processes did not keep pace with that change.

Interim Manager

During its investigation, the regulator appointed an interim manager (IM) to manage and administer the charity with the trustees, including by taking full control of the charity's finances. While in post, the IM ensured adequate due diligence, monitoring and risk management procedures were put in place, that the trustee board was expanded, and that risks to charitable assets were adequately managed.

Amy Spiller, Head of Investigation Teams at the Charity Commission, said:

Charity represents the best of human characteristics – that's why the behaviour of charities, and those involved in charities, matters. This is especially the case where charities work to help the most vulnerable or work in areas of inherent risk for staff and volunteers. Sadly, we found that the trustees of Al-Fatiha Global failed in their legal duties and responsibilities. They put their charity – its people, assets and good name – at serious risk. I am pleased that the charity is now on a much more secure footing, with a largely new trustee board, and appropriate policies and processes in place to ensure the charity delivers on its purpose safely. I hope other trustees learn from this case – notably about the very serious risks involved in taking part in aid convoys.

The Commission says the trustees co-operated with the inquiry and that it is satisfied the charity is now operating lawfully.

The full inquiry report is [available on GOV.UK](#).

Ends