



Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization

Pastors for Peace

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Gail Walker, Executive Director

IRS Threatens to Revoke IFCO's Tax Exempt Status as Faith-Based Organization for Providing Humanitarian Aid to Cuba

More than five years after the Internal Revenue Service initiated efforts to strip the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) of its status as a non-profit organization, we have learned that the IRS Appeals Office plans to uphold the revenue agent's recommendation to revoke our 501c3 status.

A key reason that the IRS is moving forward on to revoke our tax exempt status is because of our long-standing commitment to act according to the Biblical concerns for the less fortunate and those who are victims of injustice, as set forth years ago by our founder, Rev. Lucius Walker, in his Pastoral Call in response to the Cuban embargo. The focus of our work to deliver humanitarian aid to the children of Cuba, without regard to the US government licensing rules, as those governmental rules cannot impede the expression of our faith. Indeed, our faith and humanity demand that we provide "a cup of cold water" (Matthew 25:35) to our brothers and sisters in need.

To be clear, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, which has the responsibility for administering the rules on contact with Cuba, has taken no action against us. Rather, the IRS is unilaterally assuming the authority to determine whether a violation of the Trading with the Enemy Act has occurred, even though it has no authority or expertise in OFAC rules, and to take punitive action as a result. The IRS has continued their attack on IFCO despite the fact that our work as a faith-based organization is rooted in our commitment to stand with the people of Cuba who for more than 54 years have endured a relentless blockade preventing them from receiving food, medicines and other vital supplies.

Importantly, the IRS enforcement action flies in the face of the provision in the 2014 IRS Appropriations Act that prohibits the IRS from targeting US citizens for the exercise of First Amendment rights, including the exercise of their religious beliefs, and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act that requires that the exercise of religion may only be burdened by the federal government by the "least restrictive means" available to achieve a compelling government interest. If the IRS imposes a revocation of charitable status, the burden on the expression of religious belief by the members of IFCO would be substantial. Ironically, OFAC has a practice of permitting our humanitarian assistance to be delivered to Cuba – a practice that clearly comports with both the letter and the spirit of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

It is all the more striking that the US government would renew its attack on IFCO on the heels of the historic visit of Pope Francis who plead for the nations of the world to work together on behalf of the human family and significant moves of both the Obama and Castro administrations to normalize relations.

We are asking you our supporters to denounce the IRS attack on IFCO – one of the nation’s oldest faith-based civil rights organizations and first ecumenical foundation founded by and for People of Color.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE! WE MUST ACT QUICKLY!!

We know that you have always supported the mission of IFCO. We are now asking that you, your house of worship or your organization kindly take a few minutes to write your members of Congress, IRS Commissioner John Koskinen and Secretary of the Treasury Jacob Lew to demand that the IRS drop its attack on IFCO. We need to act quickly before the ruling becomes final.

Please, stop what you are doing and write the IRS Commissioner and the Secretary of Treasury.

Tell them:

- It is the height of hypocrisy for the US government to renew its attack on IFCO on the heels of the historic visit of Pope Francis who plead for the nations of the world to work together on behalf of the human family.
- This attack by the US government makes no sense in light of the significant moves of both the Obama and Castro administrations to normalize relations.
- Denounce this threat against IFCO – one of the nation’s oldest faith-based civil rights organizations and the first ecumenical foundation founded by and for people of color.
- To stop bullying IFCO for helping the people of Cuba and allow us to continue our life-saving humanitarian work

WRITE or PICK UP THE PHONE NOW: (We're trying to get email addresses, but a 'real' note is worth many many emails!)

- IRS Commissioner John Koskinen
1111 Constitution Avenue NW
Large Business and International Division
Attn: SE:LB
Washington, DC 20224
Phone: (202) 515-4400
Fax: (202) 622-5756

and

- Secretary of Treasury Jacob J. Lew
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220
Phone: (202) 622-2000.
Fax: (202) 622-6415

Please be sure to email a copy of what you send to Commissioner Koskinen and Secretary Lew to IFCO at ifco@ifconews.org.