



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

February 21, 2012

General David Petraeus  
Director  
Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, DC 20505

Dear General Petraeus:

On behalf of InterAction's alliance of nearly 200 U.S.-based international non-government organizations (U.S. NGOs), many with humanitarian operations in Pakistan, I am writing to formally express our deep concern about the vaccination campaign carried out last year by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to collect intelligence information. As you know, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta publicly acknowledged the campaign for the first time in his CBS *60 Minutes* interview which aired on Sunday, January 29.

The CIA's use of the cover of humanitarian activity for this purpose casts doubt on the intentions and integrity of all humanitarian actors in Pakistan, thereby undermining the international humanitarian community's efforts to eradicate polio, provide critical health services, and extend life-saving assistance during times of crisis like the floods seen in Pakistan over the last two years. Since reports of the CIA campaign first surfaced last summer we have seen a continued erosion of U.S. NGOs' ability to deliver critical humanitarian programs in Pakistan as well as an uptick in targeted violence against humanitarian workers. I fear the CIA's activities in Pakistan and the perception that U.S. NGOs have ties with intelligence efforts may have contributed to these alarming developments.

I understand that the CIA has a critical national security mandate but any attempt to use impartial international public health efforts for counter-terrorism purposes chips away at the fragile and hard-earned trust that is essential to vaccination and humanitarian efforts. Pakistan is one of only three countries where polio remains endemic; in 2011 it had the highest polio caseload. Among other factors, international public health officials point to the distrust of vaccines and immunization campaigns as contributing to the lack of progress in eradicating the disease in Pakistan. This distrust is only increasing in light of reports about the CIA campaign.

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The international humanitarian community – including the members of the InterAction alliance – work hard to maintain an identity that is independent from official U.S. action. In many countries, this independence is what allows us to reach those most in need. It also can increase a population's acceptance of foreign goodwill. Distrust of the U.S. government runs high in parts of Pakistan and NGOs must take great care to avoid overt association with the U.S. government. By doing so, they are able to reach populations that might otherwise be inaccessible. The CIA-led immunization campaign compromises the perception of U.S. NGOs as independent actors focused on a common good and casts suspicion on their humanitarian workers.

The CIA's actions may also jeopardize the lives of humanitarian aid workers in Pakistan. Unfortunately, we have seen an uptick in recent months of security incidents targeting aid workers, with five abductions of humanitarian workers in January of this year alone. Furthermore, international NGOs report increased surveillance by Pakistani intelligence entities and many fear that they will soon be faced with a much more restrictive and invasive bureaucratic framework governing their operations.

I urge you and your counterparts in the U.S. government to avoid adopting tactics that erode the ability of humanitarian actors in Pakistan and the rest of the world to work on behalf of the poorest and most vulnerable. It is imperative that independent, impartial humanitarian action be kept clearly distinct from intelligence-gathering activities. Any blurring of the two risks causing setbacks in decades-long global health and humanitarian efforts and endangers the lives of those working to make those advances on the behalf of the global community.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and/or your staff to discuss these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Samuel A. Worthington".

Samuel A. Worthington  
President and CEO

CC: Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development