

Office of Foreign Assets Control

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Private Relief Efforts in Somalia

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As announced by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), U.S. agencies are working aggressively to provide urgently-needed humanitarian assistance in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, including in areas in Somalia under the de facto control of al-Shabaab, a terrorist organization that is subject to sanctions by the U.S. and the UN. The following frequently asked questions provide guidance to the public regarding making donations toward or undertaking the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Somalia.

For additional Treasury guidance on protecting charitable donations from abuse by terrorist groups, please view [this document](#) or visit [this website](#). Additional questions may be directed to Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) hotline at (800) 540-6322 or (202) 622-2490.

1. Can I make a private donation to a charity that is delivering humanitarian assistance in Somalia?

Yes. Please visit [USAID's website](#) for more information about how you can help.

2. Can my organization provide humanitarian assistance in Somalia?

Yes, non-governmental organizations may provide humanitarian assistance in Somalia without the need for a license from OFAC. Organizations considering entering Somali territory to conduct assistance operations should be aware that areas of Somalia are extremely unstable and dangerous, and should review the State Department's [Travel Warning for Somalia](#). Among the most powerful armed groups operating in Somalia is al-Shabaab, a Specially Designated Global Terrorist and a Foreign Terrorist Organization under U.S. law. U.S. persons should exercise caution not to provide funds or material support to this organization or other designated groups.

3. What if, in delivering humanitarian assistance, my organization unintentionally provides food or medicine to members of al-Shabaab?

Due to the dangerous and highly unstable environment combined with urgent humanitarian needs in south and central Somalia, some food and/or medicine delivered in these areas may end up in the hands of al-Shabaab members. Such incidental benefits are not a focus for OFAC sanctions enforcement.

4. What if, in delivering humanitarian assistance, my organization unintentionally provides cash to members of al-Shabaab?

U.S. persons should be extremely cautious in making cash payments in areas under the control of al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has, in the past, demanded “taxes” and “access” payments from assistance organizations. To the extent that such a payment is made unintentionally by an organization in the conduct of its assistance activities, where the organization did not have reason to know that it was dealing with al-Shabaab, that activity would not be a focus for OFAC sanctions enforcement. To the extent that an organization is facing demands for large or repeated payments in al-Shabaab-controlled areas, it should consult with OFAC prior to proceeding with its operations.

5. I have heard that certain U.S. humanitarian assistance organizations are exempted from the prohibition on making certain cash payments to al-Shabaab. Is that correct?

Under the current extreme circumstances on the ground, the Department of State and USAID and their contractors and grantees are authorized to engage in certain transactions in the conduct of their official assistance activities in Somalia, under rigorous controls aimed at preventing diversion of assistance or cash payments to designated parties.

Humanitarian assistance organizations that wish to apply for a contract or grant with the State Department or USAID should visit [USAID's website](#).

6. I have family members or friends in Somalia and would like to send remittances to them. Can I do that without violating OFAC sanctions?

Yes, you can send remittances to Somalia, as long as the transactions do not involve parties listed on OFAC's [Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List](#).

For additional information on OFAC's Somalia-related sanctions programs, visit [here](#). To request additional information from OFAC, please call the OFAC hotline at (800) 540-6322 or (202) 622-2490.