

Ohio charity challenges asset freeze

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- A U.S. court is set to hear a challenge to a law allowing the government to freeze assets of charities suspected of helping terrorists, observers say.

The May 1 hearing in U.S. District Court in Ohio will mark the first legal challenge to a provision of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act that allows the U.S. Treasury to block a charity's operations indefinitely if officials have a "reasonable basis" to suspect it is funding terrorist activities, USA Today reported Monday.

The hearing will center on KindHearts, a relief group based in Toledo, Ohio, that works in the Middle East, whose assets were frozen in 2006 based on what Treasury officials say were reports that it gave support to the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

"The government is saying it can take a U.S. corporation and shut it down indefinitely â€" without any due process," Hina Shamsi, an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer representing KindHearts, told USA Today. "No one's saying 'don't go after terrorist financing' â€" but this has the opposite consequence. It has a tremendously chilling effect on humanitarian aid in areas where the United States has a strong interest in changing public opinion about itself."

Treasury spokeswoman Heather Wong told the newspaper the department could not comment on pending litigation.

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