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Intelligence Report

DCI Counterterrorist Center

9 April 1999

Islamic Terrorists: Using Nongovernmental Organizations Extensively (U)

Many Islamic terrorist and extremist groups

[redacted] rely on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for funding, and their exploitation of these organizations is likely to grow.

- *NGOs also provide an easily exploitable international network for logistics support, which for many terrorists is more valuable than the funds they may receive through NGOs.*

Although there are more than 6,000 Islamic NGOs and charities, only a few dozen support terrorists. Those that do generally fall into three basic categories:

- *Large, internationally active organizations headquartered in the Persian Gulf countries, which provide official support to the NGOs. These organizations most often are exploited by individual employees sympathetic to terrorist causes without the knowledge of the organization's leadership. The illicit activity tends to take place at local branch offices rather than at headquarters locations.*
- *Private NGOs, some of which are headquartered outside the traditional Muslim world. Several offices of these NGOs exist solely to support a militant cause, [redacted] making them somewhat more susceptible to extremist penetration.*
- *NGOs closely affiliated with a state sponsor of terrorism*

The availability of funds, cover, and logistics networks makes NGOs an appealing resource for terrorist groups. NGOs typically are awash in money

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logistical support NGOs offer includes cover employment, false documentation, travel facilitation, training, and, in some cases, weapons.

Terrorists typically penetrate NGOs by finding individual sympathizers who divert resources in support of the group, but in a few instances, entire NGO offices, including senior management positions, are staffed by extremists.

Most efforts by Persian Gulf states to curb terrorist use of NGOs by restricting the collection of funds within their borders have been ineffective, largely because the steps taken do not address the diversion of resources at the branch offices.

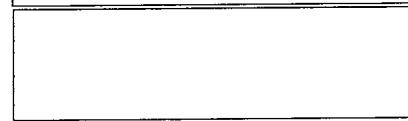
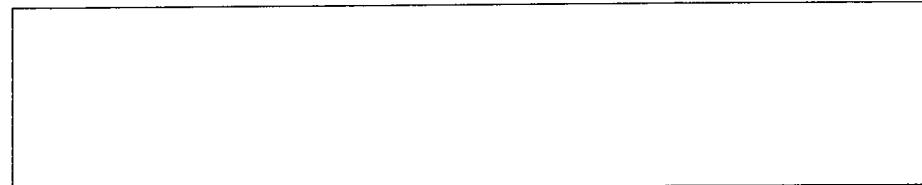
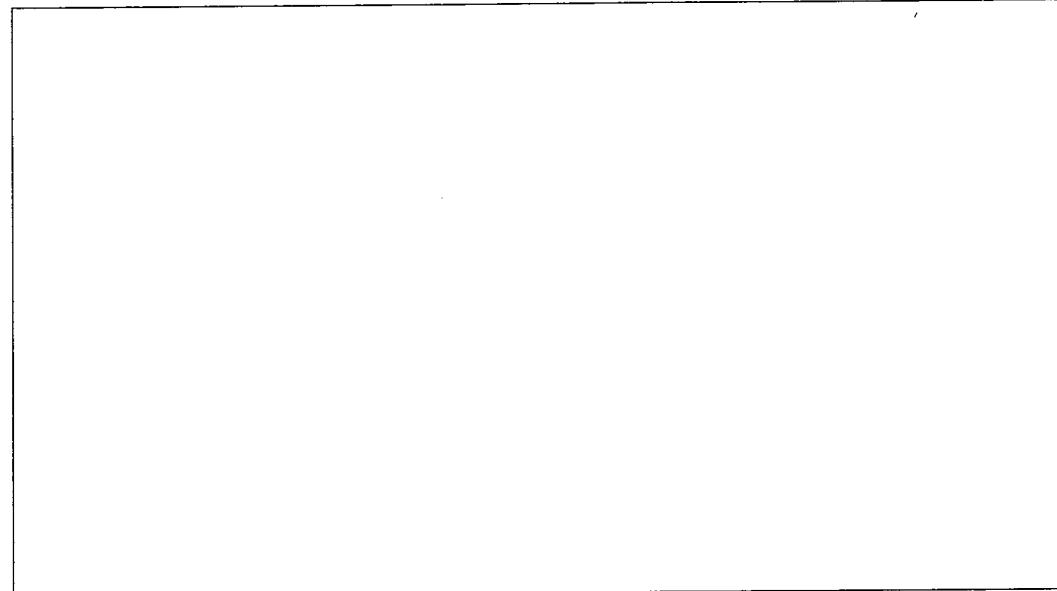
Domestic popular support in the Gulf states for the work of Islamic NGOs often outweighs pressure on these governments to improve NGO accountability. Donors may be reluctant to contribute to an NGO publicly linked to terrorism in the aftermath of a specific terrorist incident, but over time these donors tend to believe such cases are rare and that their contributions are going toward the NGO's legitimate work.

Measures

adopted by NGOs to provide greater headquarters oversight of local branches could deter abuse where it is growing the fastest.

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Islamic Terrorists: Using Nongovernmental Organizations Extensively (U)



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Most nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide are accredited with the United Nations, and many work with the United Nations High Commission for Relief following natural disasters or other humanitarian crises, providing food, clothing, shelter, immediate medical care, and other social services. The majority of Islamic nongovernmental organizations are educational or charitable non-profit organizations established by Sunni Islamic activists and typically pursue a double agenda—to provide humanitarian relief to needy communities and to spread the Islamic faith as they interpret it. Islamic NGOs also consider the defense of Muslims involved in armed conflicts part of their "humanitarian" duties—explaining why many Islamic NGOs provided support, including weapons, to the Afghan and Bosnian *mujahedin* forces in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively.

- Despite their nongovernmental status, many Islamic NGOs receive substantial financial support from traditional Muslim government institutions.

Three Types of NGOs Used by Terrorists

Of the more than 6,000 Islamic NGOs and charities, only a few dozen—which fall into three basic categories—support terrorists.

The first group includes the large, internationally active NGOs based in Saudi Arabia or one of the Persian Gulf states that are exploited by individual employees with ties to extremists. These NGOs receive the political—and sometimes financial—support of their host governments. Terrorist abuse of such NGOs takes place at the local branch office rather than at the organizations' headquarters. Senior NGO leaders usually are unwitting of the activity and willing to take corrective action when apprised of the abuse.

sympathizers

have provided terrorists with
funding and cover employment, documentation, and training

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[Redacted]

The second type of NGO terrorists use are the private organizations—some also are headquartered in the Persian Gulf countries—that either have opened offices in areas of military conflict involving Muslims or have grown out of such conflicts. The outbreak of the Balkans conflict in the mid-1990s increased significantly the number of these organizations, as Islamic activists opened Europe-based NGOs to aid Bosnian Muslims.

- The Pakistan-based Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK) is the premier example of this type of NGO. Established in Peshawar in 1984 by Usama Bin Ladin and Palestinian Abdallah Azzam to facilitate the travel and training of Arab volunteers to fight with the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan. [Redacted] the NGO has opened new offices in at least 20 countries since the mid-1980s.

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[redacted] was investigating [redacted]
[redacted] an NGO [redacted] for
providing legal documentation to [redacted] extremists [redacted]

Finally, the third type of NGO terrorists use is one that maintains a close affiliation with a state sponsor of terrorism and often acts more as a foreign policy or intelligence tool of the state sponsors, particularly Iran, Sudan, and Libya.²

Funding and Logistics Drive NGO Use [redacted]

Many Islamic terrorist and extremist organizations use NGOs to fund their activities. For many terrorists, NGOs represent a dependable, and seemingly endless, resource base. The popularity of the legitimate charitable work performed by most NGOs ensures their staying power and ability to raise money.

² The US Department of State reviews states suspected of sponsoring terrorism and provides an official list of these annually. Currently, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Syria, North Korea, and Cuba are on that list. (U)

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Using a number of NGOs affords terrorist groups protection from potential financial disruptions, such as from the closure of any one NGO.

NGOs also have provided terrorist and extremist groups with logistical support, which in many cases may be more valuable than outright funding. Several Islamic NGOs offer terrorists cover employment, false documentation, travel facilitation, training, and in some cases, weapons.

~~Top Secret~~**Case Study: Bin Ladin Use of al-Haramayn**

Usama Bin Ladin has established close relationships with employees in several al-Haramayn offices [redacted] and has used these ties to divert resources to support his terrorist agenda [redacted]

[redacted] members of Bin Ladin's organization, either planted or coopted by Bin Ladin after they began working for the NGO.

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Extremists have capitalized on the international status of many NGOs to maintain cells and secure safehavens in several countries. Most Islamic charitable NGOs are accredited with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which gives them credentials terrorists can use to travel more freely across borders and to establish cells in new areas under the guise of pursuing a humanitarian mission.

Various Methods of Infiltrating NGOs

Terrorist groups typically exploit NGOs by establishing a close relationship with an NGO employee who sympathizes with their cause. The sympathizer then diverts NGO funds or logistics support to the terrorist group, usually in small amounts to avoid detection by NGO management.

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In a few cases, NGO offices are staffed almost entirely by extremists, probably the result of sympathizers convincing their colleagues to engage in the illicit activity or senior managers directing their subordinates.

State sponsors increasingly have turned to private NGOs to hide their involvement in terrorism.

Bin Laden apparently has created his own NGOs and planted members of his organization, al-Qa'ida, in others.

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Mixed Results in Curbing Terrorist Use of NGOs

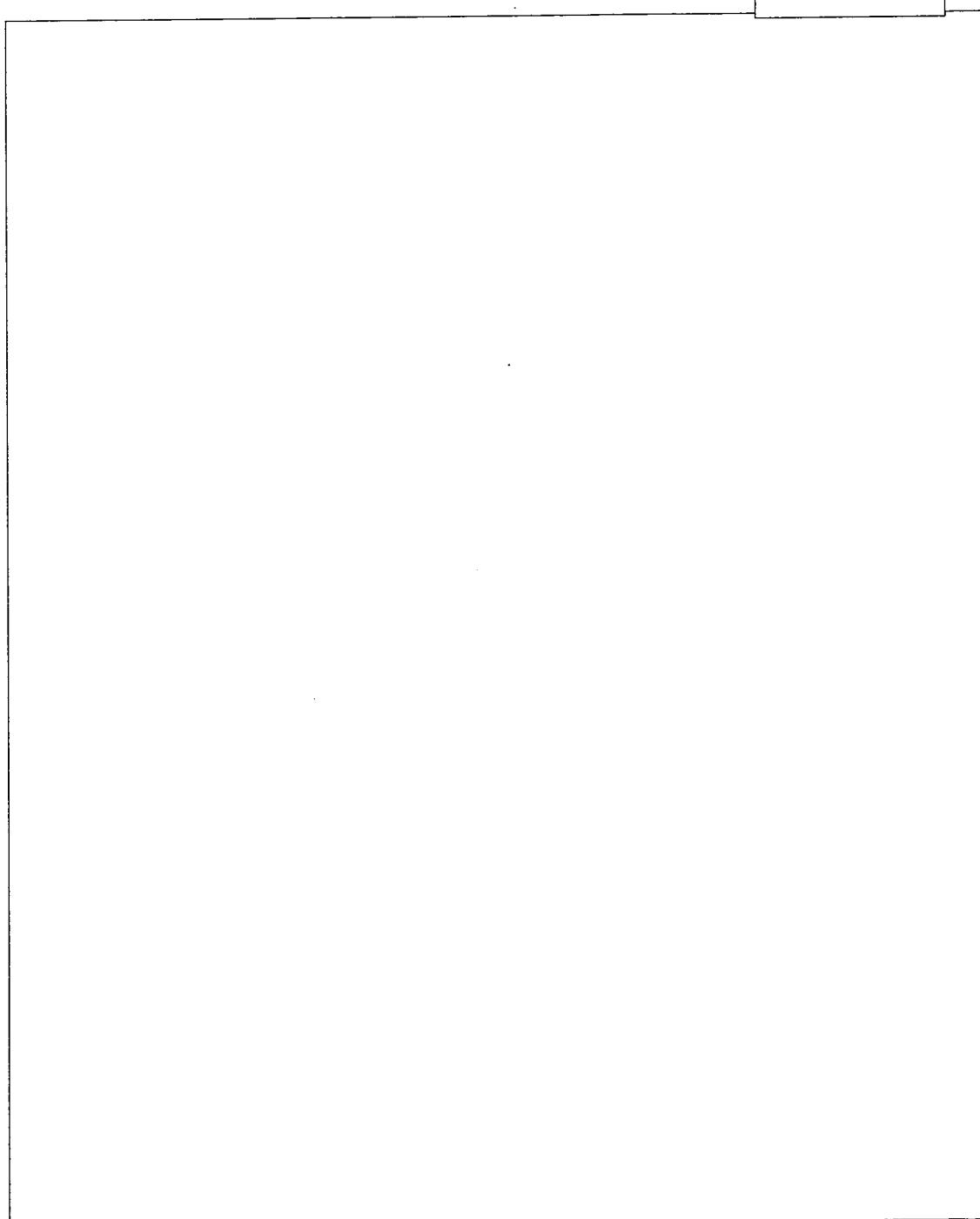
Minimal Efforts by Donor States. Efforts by Persian Gulf states to curb NGO support to terrorists have had limited impact and are only partially enforced. Control measures adopted in the past few years

whose citizens are the major source of funding for Islamic NGOs—focus on the collection of funds within their countries only, offering no oversight of the finances once the money reaches branch offices or recipients abroad.

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Several factors work against a stronger response from host countries.

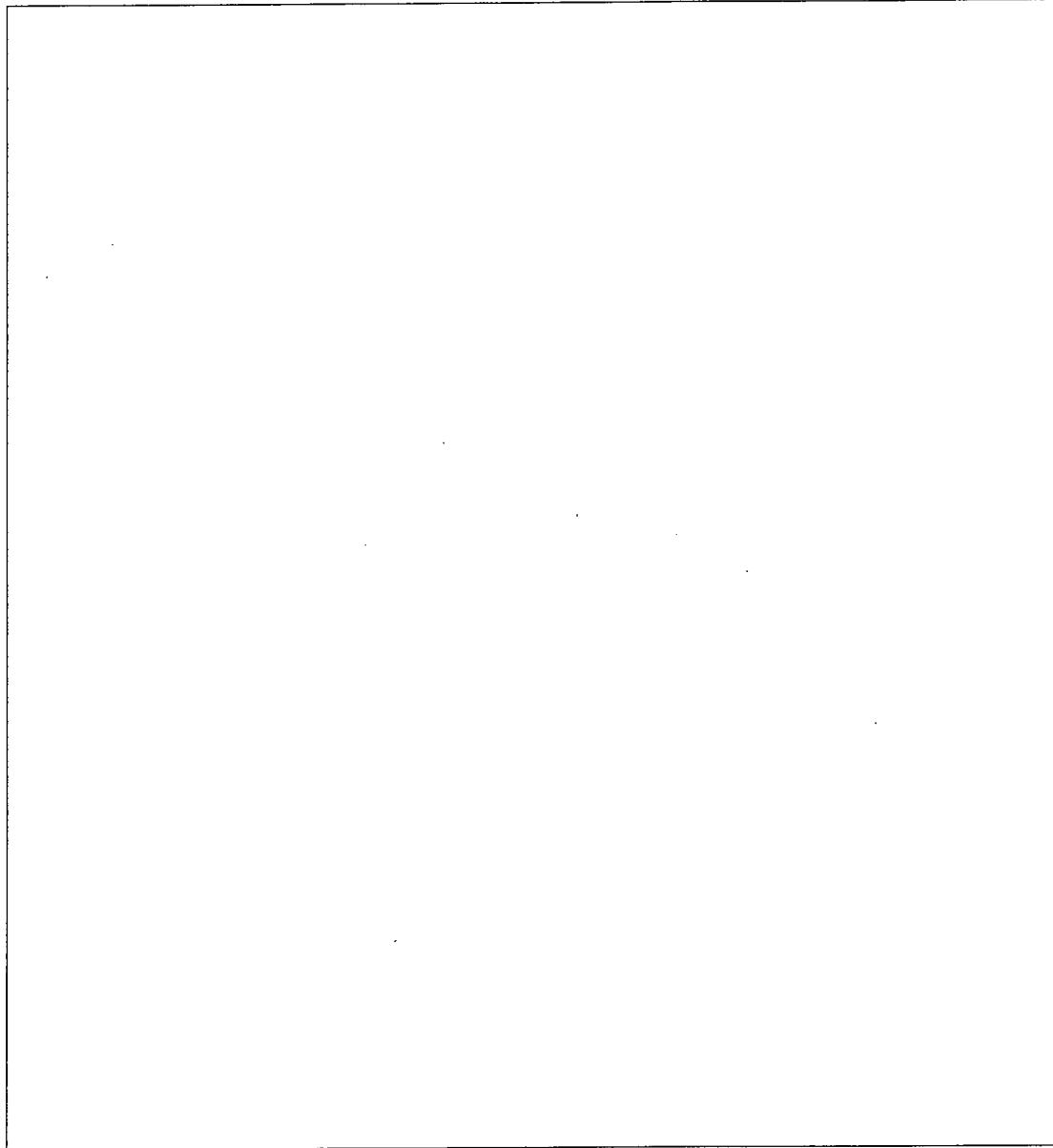
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- Separating funding used for illicit versus legitimate activities is difficult. No method currently exists to ensure that funds collected in the Gulf states by NGOs are not diverted to terrorists or their supporters in the branch offices.
- Even if host countries controlled the donor collection process, terrorists could still use local branch offices for logistics support.
- The popularity of Islamic NGOs in the traditional Muslim world, with their religious and humanitarian mandates, makes strong actions a tough sell to local constituencies. Gulf state governments, in particular, may fear that efforts to control NGOs or pressure them to control themselves would be viewed by the public as limiting the organizations' ability to perform its legitimate tasks.

Actions Against Individual Abusers a Successful Tactic. The greatest success against terrorist abuse of NGOs has come in the form of legal or official action against individuals. Such action not only disrupts temporarily the terrorists' flow of support, but the resulting negative publicity also has forced some NGOs to monitor their personnel more closely to avoid losing donors.

Closing an entire NGO branch office has proven a significant—though sometimes temporary—disruption to terrorists, forcing extremists in the vicinity to scale back their activities.

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- Unfavorable publicity concerning terrorist-ridden local branches or individual extremists employed by NGOs could persuade NGO headquarters' elements to improve their oversight of employment and travel documentation and the accountability of funds. Moreover, donor or host nations could take advantage of

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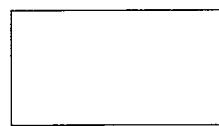
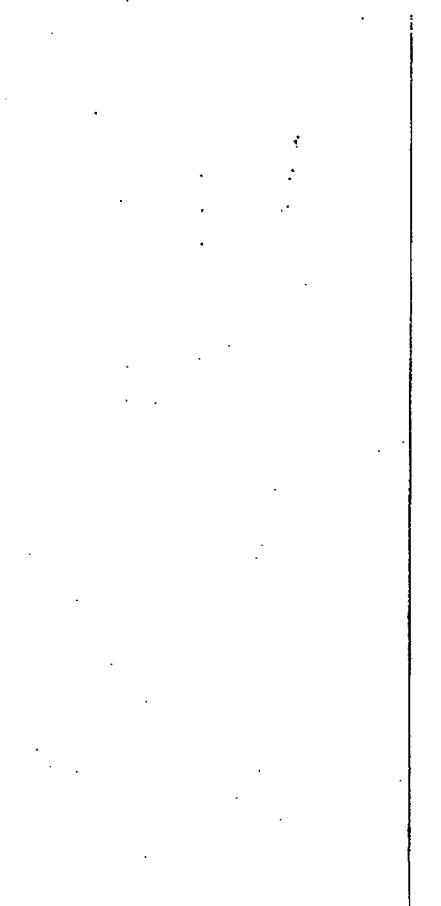
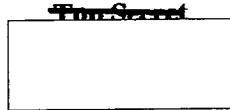
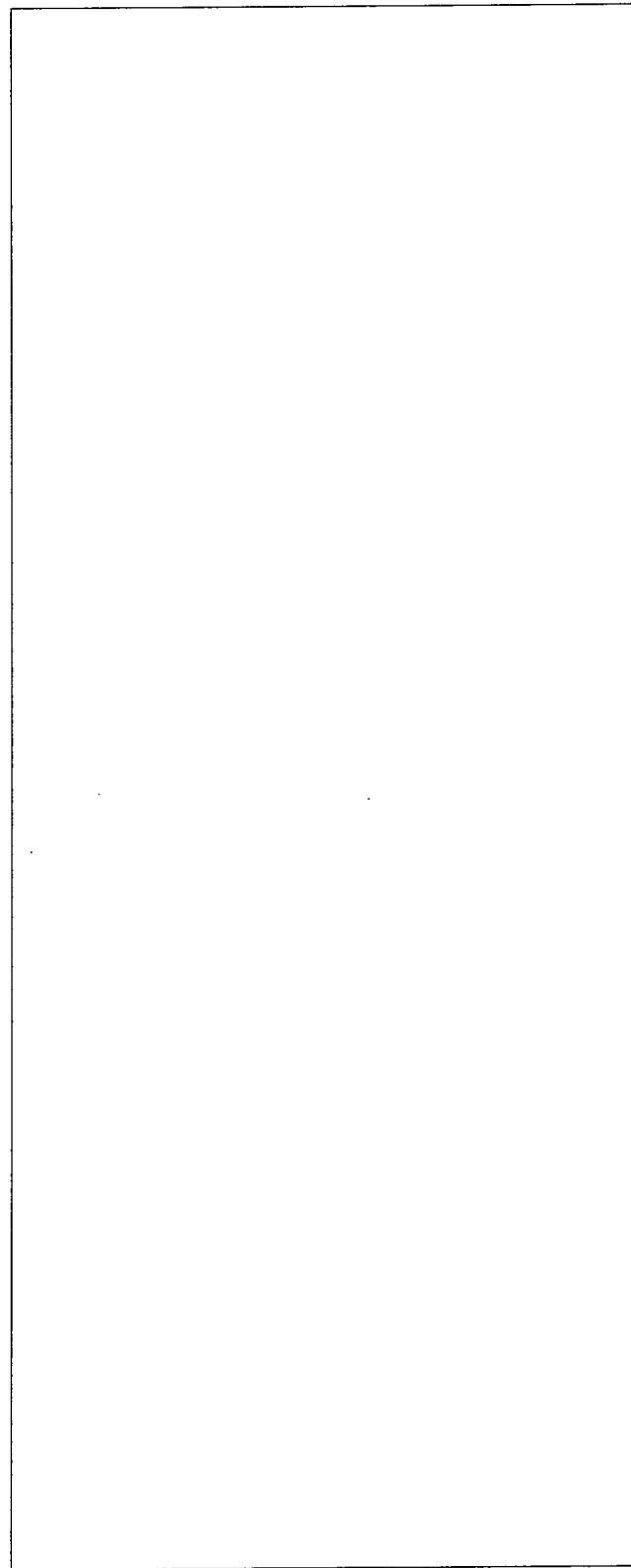
negative public opinion to impress upon NGO leaders the need to adopt such
measures. 

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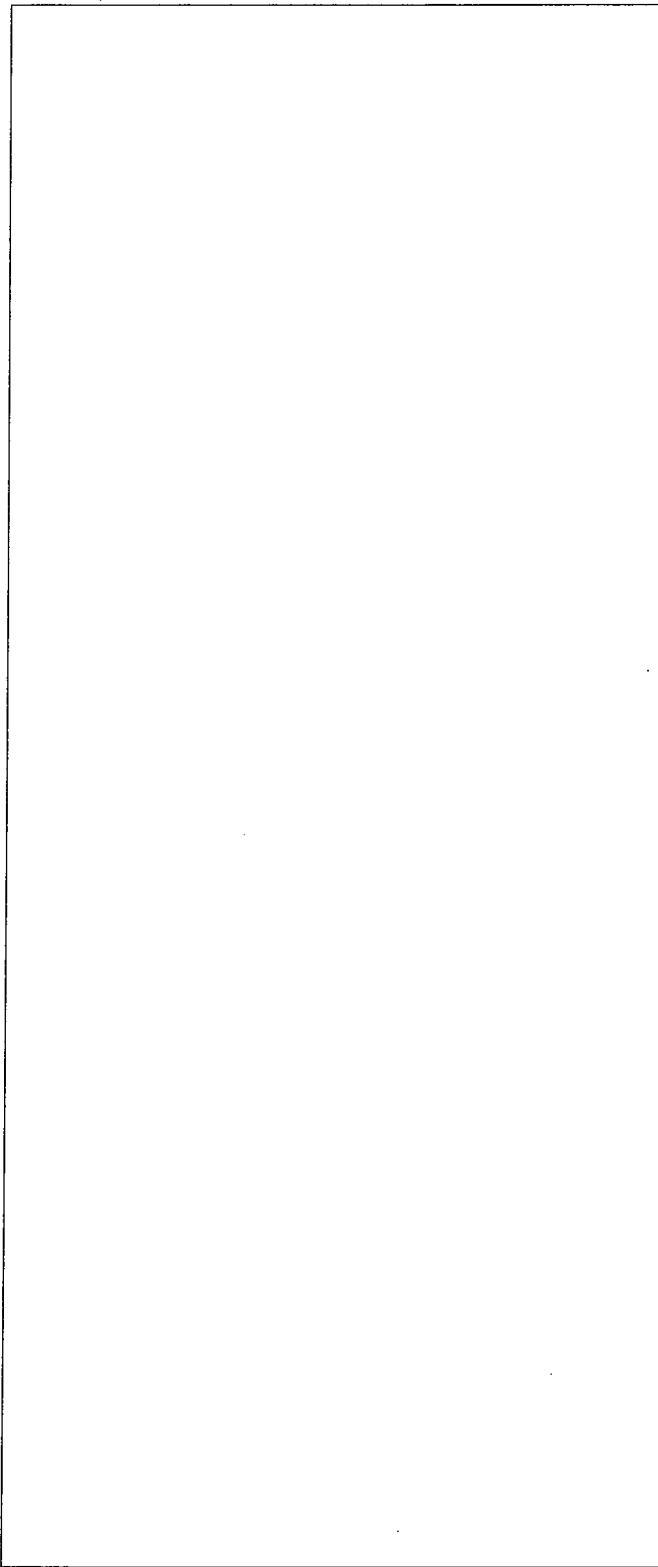
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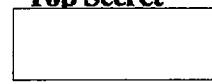
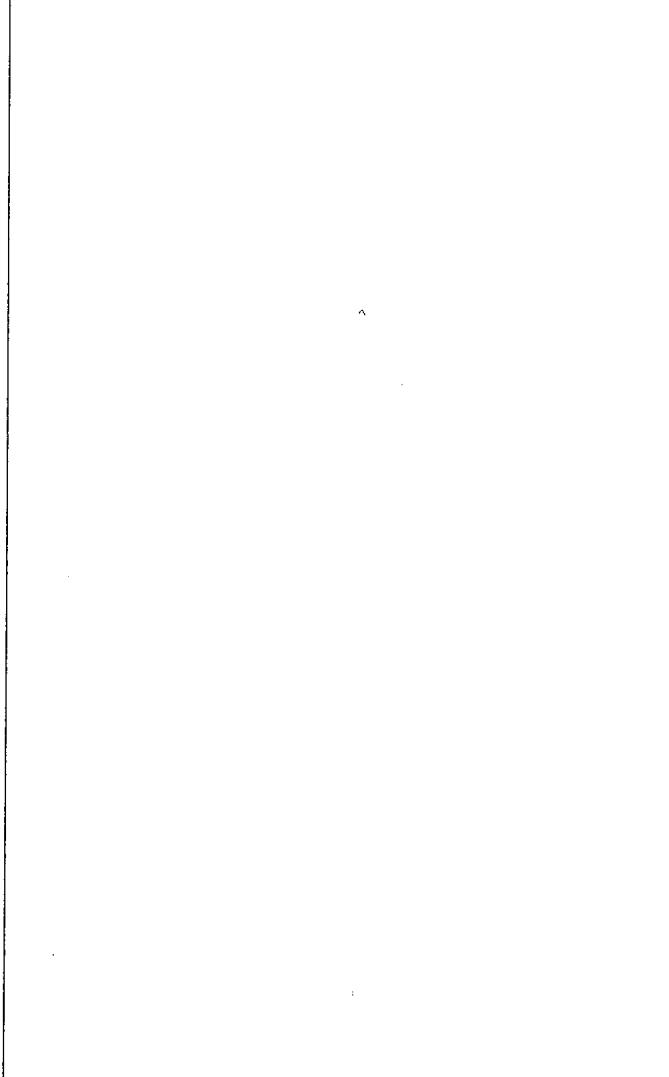


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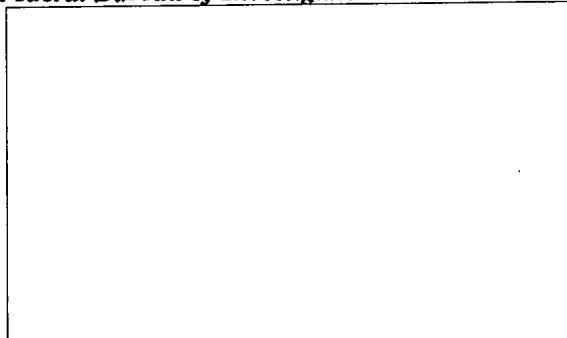
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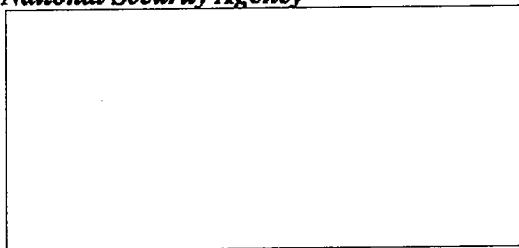
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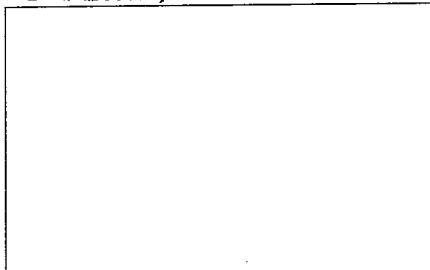
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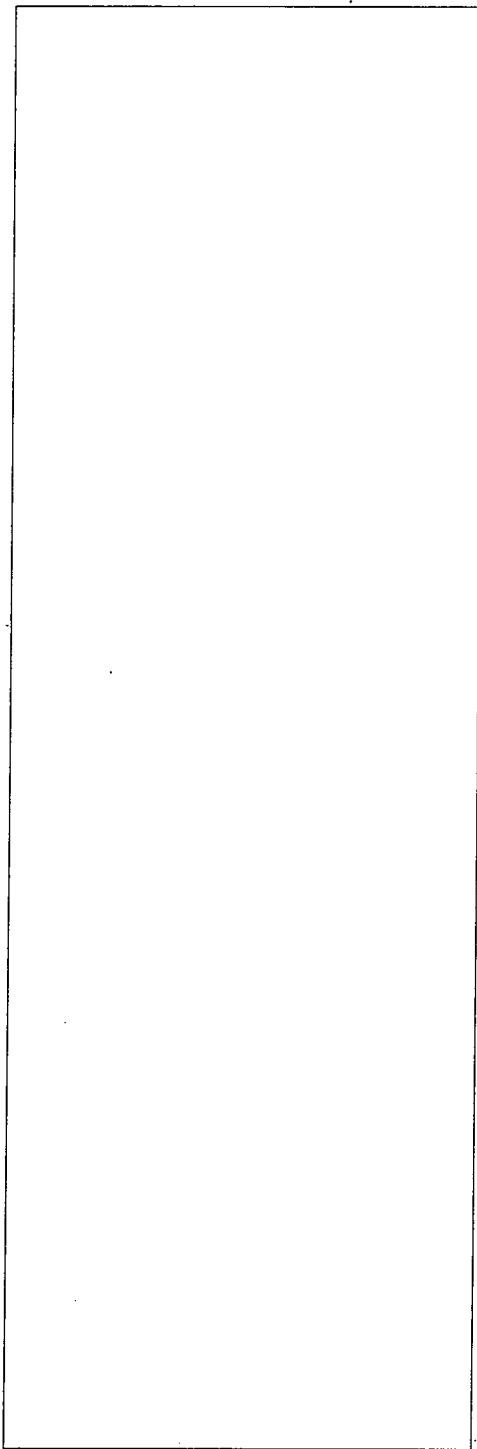
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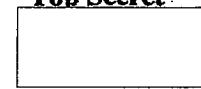
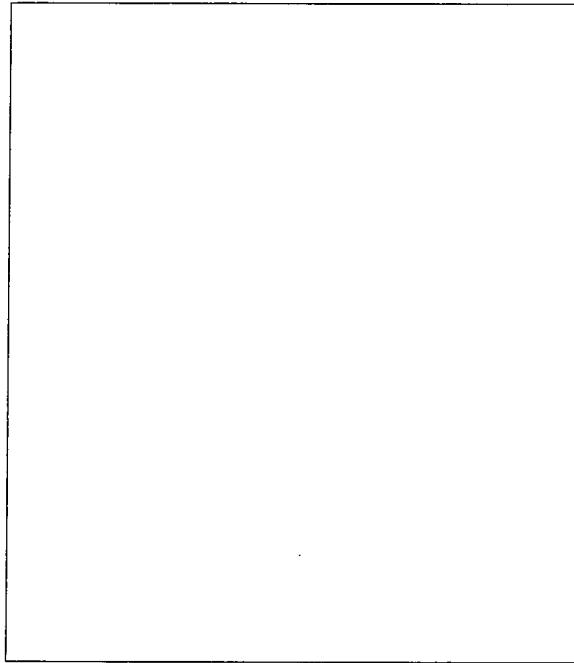


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