

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

December 7, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Tim Geithner
Secretary of the Treasury
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Clinton and Secretary Geithner:

I am writing concerning the implications of recent news that Franklin Bank, reportedly the last bank in Minnesota to work with Somali money transmitters, will stop providing services for remitting funds to famine-stricken Somalia. A cutoff of the ability of Somalis in the U.S. to remit funds to their loved ones in Somalia would be a real risk to American national security. However, the Treasury Department has indicated to my office that it does not believe members of the Somali diaspora will be prevented from legitimately sending money back to Somalia, and I urge your departments to communicate that message to the Somali community in Minnesota and elsewhere, so they may continue to remit funds to Somalia through legitimate channels.

As you know, Somalia is suffering from a terrible drought and famine after years of instability and terror by al-Shabaab. Many Somalis count on funds remitted by relatives in the U.S. to survive. I am concerned that the inability to transmit money back to Somalia would intensify the humanitarian suffering in Somalia and threaten U.S. national security interests in at least three ways. First, it would deprive many Somalis of a major source of sustenance, which will increase the already terrible suffering in Somalia and create greater instability, to the advantage of al-Shabaab. Second, the lack of legitimate means for the transmission of funds to Somalia may end up driving people into more difficult-to-track channels for sending money, which heightens the risk of funds ending up in the hands of bad actors. Third, an end to the flow of remittances from the U.S. to Somalia would be a potential victory for al-Shabaab, which could then claim that America was preventing needed funds from getting to suffering Somalis.

Given this deep concern, I was encouraged by the information my office has received from your departments, which indicated that Somalis in the United States should be able to continue to use legal and transparent channels to send funds to Somalia. The continuing use of such channels, including other existing relationships between banks and money transmitters, would enable vital assistance to get to Somalia through legitimate means and would deprive al-Shabaab of a symbolic victory.

I also appreciate that your departments have been in contact with money transmitters in Minnesota and elsewhere and with the Somali community to explain the situation to them. I urge you to continue to communicate as clearly, urgently, and broadly as possible with the Somali community in Minnesota and throughout the U.S. to make clear how, going forward, they may

continue to remit funds to Somalia legitimately, so that their loved ones can receive vital assistance consistent with important national security interests of the United States.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this important matter, and if you have any questions, please contact me, or Jeff Lomonaco on my staff, at (202) 224-1043.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Al Franken". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Al Franken
United States Senator