Ms. Donna McKay  
Executive Director  
Physicians for Human Rights  
256 West 38th Street  
New York, NY 10019

Dear Ms. McKay:

Thank you for your January 16, 2016, letter to the President regarding Physicians for Human Rights’ (PHR) concerns about attacks on hospitals and medical personnel, including the tragic October 3, 2015, U.S. military airstrike on the Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) trauma center in Kunduz, Afghanistan. I am responding on the President’s behalf.

First, I wish to underscore the tremendous respect that the U.S. Government has for the work of MSF and other medical personnel serving some of the world’s most vulnerable people. I want to assure you that compliance with international humanitarian law is a bedrock commitment of the United States and we will continue to play a leadership role in protecting civilians and the sick and wounded in armed conflict. The United States expects all parties engaged in armed conflict to comply with international humanitarian law, including the fundamental rules regarding protected medical facilities and personnel.

The President and the Secretary of Defense sent a clear message immediately following the incident with their request for a full accounting of the facts and circumstances of the airstrike on the MSF trauma center in Kunduz. General John Campbell, Commander, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan acknowledged this tragic incident before Congress on October 6, 2015 and more thoroughly addressed how it had occurred on November 25, 2015 when he announced that the military investigation determined it was the direct result of human error, compounded by systems and procedural failures. I am confident that the investigation General Campbell ordered into this incident resulted in an independent and complete report of the facts. The responsible commanders continue to review the investigation and will ensure that U.S. personnel are held accountable as appropriate. The report of the military investigation is currently undergoing classification review and review under the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts before it can be publically released. Although no nation does more than the United States to avoid civilian casualties, in this particular incident, we did not meet our own high standards.
Let me again express my great respect for the important and lifesaving work that you and your colleagues at MSF do for vulnerable communities in Afghanistan and around the world. Should you have any additional questions, the main point of contact for the Department on this matter is Ms. Anne Witkowsky, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs, available at (703) 695-4503.

Sincerely,

Brian P. McKeon
Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy