

Press release: Mordaunt leads aid sector action on sexual exploitation at landmark summit

The Department for International Development and the Charity Commission will co-host a safeguarding summit today (Monday 5 March) to bring together UK international development charities, regulatory bodies and independent experts to commit to drive up safeguarding standards and take bold steps to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse within charities and by staff abroad.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt has tasked the delegates to come up with a series of actions to address the shortcomings in the aid sector. Some of the ideas to be discussed at the summit include:

- Introducing new standards for vetting and referencing across the sector.
- Ensuring whistle-blowers and survivors of exploitation and abuse get the counselling and support they need.
- Creating an independent body to promote external scrutiny and ensure the highest possible standards across the aid sector.
- Changing organisational culture to tackle power imbalances, encourage reporting, take allegations seriously and hold people to account.

NGOs and charities in attendance will sign a joint statement setting out the key principles they will adhere to, and agree on a set of practical actions to take forward. This summit will speed up the process of improving standards and restoring full trust following the allegations that have come to light since early February.

Speaking ahead of the event, International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

Now is the time for action. The aid sector needs to ensure it is meeting its duty of care to the world's most vulnerable people. It needs to be honest about past mistakes. It must do all it can to win back the trust of the British public.

This summit is a crucial moment to learn lessons from the past and drive up standards across the sector.

Today, we begin taking the practical steps to ensure the safety of the people we help is always our first priority and that the British aid sector sets the standard for the rest of the world to follow.

In a strong statement to Parliament following the Oxfam scandal, Ms Mordaunt set out how the public must be able to trust organisations, not only to do all they can to prevent harm, but to report and follow up incidents of wrongdoing when they occur.

Baroness Stowell, Chair of the Charity Commission added:

The recent accounts of sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector are deeply distressing. Not only have some aid workers abused the people they were sent to support, but by not exposing and responding to these serious failings properly at the time, charities have betrayed the public's trust in what the word charity actually means.

I am encouraged to see leaders of international aid agencies coming together at today's summit with a firm commitment to bringing about cultural change in charities and making the protection of people their top priority. The Charity Commission will work constructively with charities to identify practical changes and help make them work.

But however noble the cause, it will never justify means which fall below basic standards of conduct expected of any organisation. And if we are to restore public trust and the nation's pride in what charities achieve, we have to show that's what we understand.

The points raised at the summit will be taken to a wide-ranging global safeguarding conference later in the year to drive action across the whole international aid sector.

This summit will build upon the action already taken by DFID in response to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector, including:

- Establishing a new Safeguarding Unit in DFID to urgently review safeguarding across all parts of the aid sector and catalyse further action to ensure everything is being done to protect people from harm, including sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Appointing Sheila Drew Smith, a recent member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, to bring her expertise to support DFID's ambition on safeguarding. She will report to the Secretary of State directly and will Chair the Safeguarding Summit.

- Writing to every UK charity that receives UK aid insisting that they set out the steps they are taking to ensure their safeguarding policies are fully in place and confirm they have referred all concerns they have about specific cases and individuals to the relevant authorities, including prosecuting authorities. A similar request has been sent to non-UK charities and other DFID suppliers, including those in the private sector.
- Agreeing with Oxfam that they will withdraw from bidding for any new UK Government funding until DFID is satisfied that they can meet the high standards we expect of our partners.
- Continuing to work with UN Secretary-General António Guterres to stop abuses under the UN flag and we have introduced specific clauses in our funding agreements with a number of UN agencies to take every action possible to prevent all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse and take robust and prompt action in response to any allegations.
- Reviewing any allegations of sexual misconduct involving DFID staff, which will conclude shortly.

Notes to editors

- On 12 February, the International Development Secretary announced a series of actions to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector. The fourth of the five actions was “to co-host a safeguarding summit with the Charity Commission to agree a set of actions to strengthen safeguarding processes and mechanisms, including around staffing and recruitment.”
- In a statement to Parliament on 20 February, International Development Secretary committed DFID to a review of reported allegations of sexual misconduct involving DFID staff and delivery partners. That is due to report back by Tuesday 6 March.
- The International Development Secretary has written to every UK charity working overseas that receives UK aid—192 letters to 179 organisations—insisting that they spell out the steps they are taking to ensure that their safeguarding policies are fully in place, and that they confirm that they have referred all concerns they have about specific cases and individuals to the relevant authorities, including prosecuting authorities.
- The Charity Commission opened a statutory inquiry into Oxfam on 12 February after it examined documents sent by Oxfam regarding allegations of misconduct by staff involved in its humanitarian response in Haiti. The Commission has concerns that Oxfam may not have fully and frankly disclosed material details about the allegations at the time in 2011, its handling of the incidents since, and the impact that these have both had on public trust and confidence. Details on the scope of the inquiry is available [here](#)
- The Charity Commission has [announced a suite of measures](#) to help ensure charities learn the wider lessons from recent safeguarding revelations involving Oxfam and other charities, and to strengthen public trust and confidence in charities. This includes a new Charity Commission taskforce to handle the recent increase in safeguarding incident reports.

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[Press release: PM call with President Trump: 4 March 2018](#)

The Prime Minister had a telephone call with President Trump earlier today.

They discussed Syria, and the appalling humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta. They agreed it was a humanitarian catastrophe, and that the overwhelming responsibility for the heart-breaking human suffering lay with the Syrian regime and Russia, as the regime's main backer.

They agreed that Russia and others with influence over the Syrian regime must act now to cease their campaign of violence and to protect civilians.

The Prime Minister raised our deep concern at the President's forthcoming announcement on steel and aluminium tariffs, noting that multilateral action was the only way to resolve the problem of global overcapacity in all parties' interests.

[Press release: PM call with the Chancellor Merkel: 4 March 2018](#)

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News story: Government announces £1.5 million fund to help tackle the gender pay gap

The fund, which will launch on Monday 5 March, will offer grants to projects which help people to return to work in the private sector. These projects could help returners update their skills, provide other training, or support businesses to increase employment opportunities for returners. The fund will prioritise projects that focus on small and medium enterprises, employers outside London, and projects that support returners at all skill levels. This is part of the government's wider strategy to develop the evidence base on what may help to close the gender pay gap.

Home Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities, Amber Rudd, said:

It is truly striking that nearly 90 per cent of people out of paid work because they are caring for the home or family are women.

Too often people struggle to get back into paid work after taking time out to care for others. That is a huge loss not only to those individuals, but to our economy and to businesses all over the country.

That's why I'm delighted to announce this government will be launching a £1.5 million fund to support people, particularly women, back into work after time out looking after children and other relatives.

By offering meaningful work that pays, the fund will give people who want to return to employment the opportunity to use their valuable skills, talents and experience.

A toolkit and guidance have been created to support companies that would like to employ returners. The guidance, which was developed by Timewise and Women Returners, is aimed at employers across sectors and of all sizes. The toolkit, sponsored by Vodafone, explains the business benefits of employing returners.

Vodafone UK General Counsel and External Affairs Director and member of the Women's Business Council, Helen Lamprell, said:

Vodafone is proud to support Returners: A toolkit for employers. Having launched ReConnect – Vodafone's programme to help both women and men return to work after a career break – we've seen first-hand the benefits of hiring returners, and the positive impact this can have on them, as well as on our business.

We are keen to share what we've learned, and to learn from other employers, so that we can all do more to support people back into work. With this toolkit, which contains best practices and clear advice on supporting returners, we hope to help even more employers develop returner programmes of their own.

The [guidance](#), toolkit and [fund](#) are all part of a commitment of £5 million made by the Prime Minister in the 2017 Spring Budget, to help people back into employment after a career break. There are already public sector returner projects running in the health professions, social work, and the civil service. In addition, a Cyber Security Skills impact fund, run by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, will be particularly looking for initiatives that help women who have been out of the labour market due to caring responsibilities to get jobs in cyber security.

Press release: PM call with the First Minister of Scotland: 2 March 2018

The Prime Minister spoke to First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon yesterday evening.

They spoke about the impacts caused across the UK by the adverse weather conditions.

Turning to the speech she made that day, the Prime Minister went on to say that she has set out a vision for an ambitious economic partnership between the UK and EU. Alongside the five foundations that would underpin the future partnership, she said we would seek customs arrangements that would lead to as frictionless trade as possible with our European neighbours, as well as ensure no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. The new agreement we reach should protect the jobs and security of the British people and strengthen the union of nations in the UK.

The Prime Minister then said we would be working closely with the EU to provide certainty for businesses within both the UK and Europe.

The Prime Minister and First Minister discussed recent progress on Clause 11 of the EU Withdrawal Bill and agreed both governments should continue to work to reach an agreement.

They finished the call by saying that they both looked forward to furthering discussions during the Plenary meeting of the JMC P on March 14.