

Statement to Parliament: Safeguarding in the aid sector

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on my Department's response to the sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated by charity workers in Haiti in 2011, and the measures we are taking to improve safeguarding across the aid sector.

I'd like to start by paying tribute to Sean O'Neill of The Times and the two sets of whistleblowers – those in 2011 and later – for bringing this case to light.

On February ninth, The Times reported that certain Oxfam staff when in Haiti in 2011 had abused their positions of trust and paid for sex with local women. These incidents happened in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in 2010, which killed hundreds of thousands of people and left millions more homeless and reliant on aid for basic needs such as food and shelter.

This is shocking, but it is not by itself what has caused such concern about Oxfam's safeguarding. It was what Oxfam did next.

In chaotic and desperate situations the very best safeguarding procedures and practices must be put in to place to prevent harm, but when organisations fail to report and follow up incidents of wrongdoing that occur, it undermines trust and sends a message that sexual exploitation and abuse is tolerated. We cannot prevent sexual exploitation and abuse if we don't demonstrate zero tolerance.

In such circumstances we 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.

In this duty Oxfam failed under the watch of Barbara Stocking and Penny Lawrence.

They did not provide a full report to the Charity Commission. They did not provide a full report to their donors. They did not provide any report to prosecuting authorities.

In my view Mr Speaker they misled, quite possibly deliberately. Even as their report concluded that their investigation could not rule out the allegation that some of the women involved were actually children.

They did not think it was necessary to report to the police in either Haiti or the country of origin for those accountable.

I believe their motivation appears to be just the protection of the organisation's reputation. They put that before those they were there to help and protect – a complete betrayal of trust.

A betrayal too of those who sent them there – the British people – and a betrayal of all those Oxfam staff and volunteers who do put the people they serve, first.

Last week, I met with Mark Goldring, Chief Executive of Oxfam, and Caroline Thomson, Oxfam's Chair of Trustees.

I made three demands of them –

That they fully cooperate with the Haitian authorities, handing over all the evidence they hold.

That, they report staff members involved in this incident to their respective national governments.

And, that they make clear how they will handle any forthcoming allegations around safeguarding – historic or live.

And I stressed that for me holding to account those who made the decision not to report and to let those potentially guilty of criminal activity slip away, was a necessity in winning back confidence in Oxfam.

As a result of those discussions, Oxfam has agreed to withdraw from bidding for any new UK Government funding until DFID is satisfied that they can meet the high safeguarding standards we expect of our partners.

I will take a decision on current programming after the twenty-sixth of February as I will then have further information which will help me decide if I need to adjust how that is currently being delivered.

Given the concerns about the wider sector this case has raised, I have written to every UK charity work working overseas that receives UK aid – 192 organisations – insisting that they spell 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.

I have set a deadline of the twenty-sixth of February for all UK charities working overseas to give us the assurances that we have asked for and to raise any concerns with the relevant authorities.

We are also undertaking in parallel a similar exercise with all non-UK charity partners – 393 organisations in total and with all our suppliers including those in the private sector – over 500 organisations – to make clear our standards and remind them of their obligations, and we are doing the same with all multilateral partners too.

The UK Government reserves the right to take whatever decisions about present or future funding to Oxfam, and any other organisation, that we deem necessary. We have been very clear that we will not work with any organisation that does not live up to the high standards on safeguarding and protection that we require.

I will also be sharing details of this approach with other governments departments, who are responsible for the ODA spend.

Although this work is not yet complete it is clear from the Charity Commission reporting data – and lack of it from some organisations – that a cultural change is needed to ensure all that can be done to stop sexual exploitation in the aid sector, is being done.

And we need to take some practical steps. Now.

We should not wait for the UN to take action. We must set up our own systems now.

My department, and the Charity Commission, will hold a safeguarding summit on the fifth of March, where we will meet with UK international development charities, regulators and experts to confront safeguarding failures and agree practical measures, such as an aid worker accreditation scheme we in the UK can use.

Later in the year, we will take this programme of work to a wide-ranging, global safeguarding conference to drive action across the whole international aid sector.

And I'm pleased to say the US, Canada, the Netherlands and others have already agreed to support our goal of improved safeguarding standards across the sector.

The UK is not waiting for others to act. We are taking a lead on this.

I will also be speaking to colleagues across government and beyond about what more we can do to stop exploitation and abuse in the UN and broader multilateral system.

The message from us to all parts of the UN is clear – you can either get your house in order, or you can prepare to carry out your good work without our money.

I welcome the UN's announcement on the fourteenth of February that the UN does not and will not claim immunity for sexual abuse cases. This sends a clear signal that the UN is not a soft target, but we must hold the UN to account for this.

Further actions we have taken in the last week include the creation of a new Safeguarding Unit. We have also promoted our whistleblowing and reporting phone line to encourage anyone with information on safeguarding issues to contact us.

We have appointed Sheila Drew Smith, a recent member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, who has agreed to bring her expertise and her challenge to support my Department's ambition on safeguarding. She will report to me directly.

I have asked to meet leaders of the audit profession to discuss what more

they can do to provide independent assurance over safeguarding to the organisations that DFID partners with globally.

And I have held my own Department to the same scrutiny that I am demanding of others. I have asked the department to go through our centrally held HR systems and our fraud and whistleblowing records as far back as they exist.

I am assured that there are no centrally recorded cases which were dealt with incorrectly.

Separately, we are reviewing any locally reported allegations of sexual misconduct involving DFID staff. To date our review of staff cases has looked at 75% of our teams across DFID and will complete in a fortnight.

Our investigations are still ongoing and if, during this process, we discover any further historic or current cases, I will report on our handling of these to Parliament.

DFID, other government departments and the National Crime Agency work closely together when serious allegations of potentially criminal activity in partner organisations are brought to our attention and we are strengthening this, as the new Strategy Director at the NCA will take on a lead role for the aid sector.

I am calling on anyone who has any concerns about abuse or exploitation in the aid sector to come forward and report these to our counter fraud and whistleblowing team. Details are on the DFID website and all communications will be treated in complete confidence.

Later today I will have further meetings, including with the Defence Secretary, regarding peacekeeping troops, and the Secretary of State at DCMS regarding the Charity Sector.

My absolute priority is to keep the world's poorest and most vulnerable people safe from harm. It is utterly despicable that sexual exploitation and abuse continue to exist in the aid sector.

The recent reports should be a wake-up call to all of us. Now is the time for us to act, but as we do so we should note the good people working across the world in this sector – saving lives often by endangering their own – and all those from fundraisers to trustees who make that work possible across the entire aid sector.

In the last week alone UK aid and UK aid workers has helped vaccinate around 850,000 children against polio.

And we should also recognise that work can only be done with the support of the British people.

I commend this statement to the House.

Press release: Minister for the Middle East statement following an increase in violence in Eastern Ghouta, Syria



Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Alistair Burt, said:

The Asad regime's brutal siege of Eastern Ghouta, coupled with escalating bombardment and reports of chemicals weapons use, is causing unprecedented levels of suffering. The enclave has become a crucible of misery and violence, which is simply unacceptable in the 21st century.

Airstrikes, artillery and rocket attacks by pro-regime forces are at some of the most intense levels seen in the besieged area in years, leading to scores of civilian casualties. Over 700 people need medical evacuation, but the regime continues to refuse to allow this.

We call on the regime and its backers to cease this campaign of violence, to protect civilians and allow rapid and unhindered humanitarian access. As the international community has made clear to the Asad regime and its backers: the world is watching.

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Statement to Parliament: Oral

Statement on the political situation in Northern Ireland

With permission I should like to make a statement about the current political situation in Northern Ireland.

Over recent weeks there have been talks involving the main political parties, particularly the two largest parties, the Democratic Unionists and Sinn Fein, to see if there is a basis for re-establishing the Executive.

The UK Government has facilitated and supported these intensive negotiations. We have been in close touch with all the parties, and responded to requests for advice and support

The Irish Government have also been involved in accordance with the well-established three-stranded approach.

And I would like to place on record my appreciation of the contribution made by the Irish Foreign Minister, Simon Coveney, and his team.

In addition my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister has been consistently and closely involved, speaking to party leaders and visiting Belfast last Monday. I have continued to give her up-to-date reports as the talks have progressed.

The aim of those talks has been very clear: to bring about the re-establishment of inclusive, devolved government at Stormont which Northern Ireland has effectively been without for over thirteen months.

In doing so, we have been able to build on the progress made by my predecessor, my Right Honourable Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, who I warmly welcome back to this House today.

In the Government's view, both the DUP and Sinn Fein participated in discussions seriously and in good faith.

And we believe that progress towards reaching agreement on all the key substantive issues has been made.

It became possible in the light of this progress to identify a basis for a possible agreement to allow an Executive to be formed, embracing how the parties ensured the Executive was sustainable, and how they reached a balanced and fair accommodation on the difficult issues of language and culture, and how this was reflected in a package of legislation. Many other issues were addressed too, if not always resolved. Unfortunately, however, by last Wednesday it had become clear that the current phase of talks had reached a conclusion, without such an agreement being finalised and endorsed by both parties.

As I said then, it is important for everyone to reflect on the circumstances which have led to this and their positions, both now and in the future.

What is important today is for me to give some direction as to next steps.

First, as our manifesto at the last election set out, this Government believes in devolution under the terms of the 1998 Belfast Agreement.

We want to see local politicians taking decisions over local matters accountable to a local Assembly.

We need devolved government to help deliver a stronger economy, to build a stronger society and to ensure that Northern Ireland's voice is properly heard as we leave the European Union.

In addition we want to see all of the other institutions of the Agreement operating in the way that was intended.

I cannot reiterate too strongly that devolved government is in the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland because it ensures their interests and concerns are fairly and equitably represented.

It is also in the best interests of maintaining and strengthening the Union, to which this Government remains fully committed, consistent with the principle of consent.

So we will continue to explore with the parties whether the basis for a political agreement still exists.

And as my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister has re-affirmed we stand ready to bring forward the necessary legislation that would enable an Executive to be formed at the earliest opportunity.

That is this Government's clear hope and desire, something that I believe is shared widely across this House.

Second, however, things in Northern Ireland cannot simply remain in a state of limbo.

A number of challenging decisions will have to be taken.

Ultimately the Government has a responsibility to ensure good governance and the continued delivery of public services.

In particular, as the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service has made clear, there needs to be certainty and clarity about a budget for Northern Ireland for next year as soon as possible.

And I intend to take steps to provide clarity on the budget and I will update the House as soon as I am in a position to do so.

This is clearly not where I want to be but in the absence of an

Executive in Northern Ireland I will have no other choice.

Longer term the Government will not shirk its responsibilities to take whatever steps are necessary to provide certainty and stability for the people of Northern Ireland, while maintaining our commitment to govern with rigorous impartiality in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland.

But we will only do that once we are sure that all other viable options designed to restore devolved government have been properly considered, including my statutory obligation to call an Assembly election.

In the absence of devolution it is also right that we consider the issue of salaries for Assembly Members.

At the end of last year my Right Honourable Friend for Old Bexley and Sidcup received recommendations on this from Mr Trevor Reaney, a former Clerk of the Assembly.

The Government will need to decide shortly on the next steps.

I acknowledge the public concern that while a number of Assembly members continue to carry out constituency and representative functions, current salaries are maintained while the Assembly is not meeting.

On the issue of addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past the Government has manifesto commitments to consult on the implementation of the bodies set out in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement and to support the reform of inquests.

I would much prefer to do this in the context of an agreement that sees the restoration of a devolved Executive.

But I am conscious of the Government's responsibilities to make progress in this area to provide better outcomes for victims and

survivors, the people who suffered most during the troubles.

So we will continue to proceed toward a full consultation as soon as possible, so that everyone can have their say.

Mr Speaker, as the House will recognise this April marks the 20th anniversary of the historic Belfast Agreement.

That Agreement, along with its successors, has been fundamental in helping Northern Ireland move forward from its violent past to a brighter, more secure future.

And this Government's support for the Agreements remains steadfast. As does our commitment to govern for everyone in Northern Ireland.

There is no doubt that Northern Ireland has taken huge strides forward in the past twenty years.

In my short time as Northern Ireland Secretary I have seen a place full of wonderful talent and huge potential.

Yet any commemorations this year will look decidedly hollow if Northern Ireland still has no functioning government of its own.

So everyone needs to continue striving to see devolved government restored and to build a Northern Ireland fit for the future.

That remains the clear focus and determination of this Government.

Government response: Aramark takes ownership of DIO Hestia contracts



Aramark has assumed full ownership of the CarillionAramark operating company which will continue to provide services to the DIO for the duration of the existing Hestia contracts in respect of the South East & London, Scotland & NI and North Regions;

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News story: People with significant control (PSC): who controls your company?

A person with significant control (PSC) is someone who owns or controls your company. They're sometimes called 'beneficial owners'.

You must [identify your PSC](#) and tell us who they are. This might be you, or someone associated with your company. A company can have one or more PSC.

You must [record their details](#) on your company's PSC register and send us this information. If you can't identify your PSC, you need to tell us why. The easiest way to do this is online.

Send us your PSC information [online](#).

If you don't already have an online account with us, you'll need to [register](#).

You can also send us PSC information using [third-party software](#).

Identifying your PSC

[How to identify people with significant control \(PSC\)](#)

A PSC must meet one or more of the following conditions of control.

Most PSCs are likely to be people who hold:

- more than 25% of shares in the company
- more than 25% of voting rights in the company
- the right to appoint or remove the majority of the board of directors

If your PSC holds more than 25% of shares, they're likely to hold the same amount of voting rights.

You should check your company's register of shareholders. Your company's constitution and articles of association may also contain information on voting and other rights.

Other significant influence or control

Your PSC might influence or control your company through other means. This could be directly, or on behalf of someone else. For example, someone who tells the directors or shareholders what to do.

This condition will only apply in limited circumstances. [Further guidance](#) is available on the meaning of significant influence or control.

Companies controlled by a trust or firm

If a trust or firm influences or controls your company, you must decide if they meet any conditions of control described above. If they do, the trustees or members of the firm are PSCs.

If you think this applies, you should get professional advice.

Recording your PSC information

You'll need to confirm certain details with your PSC, and record them in your PSC register. These details are:

- name
- date of birth
- [nationality](#)
- [country](#) of residence
- service address
- usual residential address (not displayed to the public)
- the date they became a PSC of the company
- the date you entered them into your PSC register
- which conditions of control are met

You must include the level of their shares and voting rights, within the

following categories:

- over 25% up to (and including) 50%
- more than 50% and less than 75%
- 75% or more

You must try to identify and contact anyone you think may be a PSC of your company. If they refuse to provide PSC information, they're committing a criminal offence.

You can place restrictions on the shares or voting rights of someone who won't give you this information. Applying restrictions is a significant step. You should only consider this if they've repeatedly refused your requests.

If you're thinking of making restrictions, you should [read the guidance](#) first.

Changes to your PSC information

If your PSC information changes, you must update your company's PSC register and tell us as soon as possible. The easiest way to do this is [online](#). This could be changes to an existing PSC, such a new address or nature of control. You could also have a new PSC, or someone is no longer a PSC.

Update your PSC information [online](#).

Protection for people at risk

All PSC information is available to the public, apart from their home address. The day is also hidden from their date of birth.

In exceptional cases, some individuals can [apply to protect their PSC information](#). If they've applied for this protection, you should note this on your PSC register.

Protection from disclosure applies from the date the application is made to us.

If a PSC has already been granted protection as a director, they must re-apply for protection as a PSC.

Other company types

Limited liability partnerships (LLP), eligible Scottish partnerships and sociedades Europeas (SE) must also send us their PSC information.

Information on these company types can be found in the [full guidance](#).