

Press release: Actions to tackle exploitation and abuse agreed with UK charities

A number of actions were today agreed to drive up standards in the aid sector at a Safeguarding Summit co-hosted by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Charity Commission.

This follows a challenge to UK-based international development charities by the International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt, to come up with ideas and initiatives to ensure we protect the people we are here to serve.

Major UK charities, the Charity Commission and DFID have agreed upon initiatives to be taken forward to improve safeguarding standards.

This shortlist of actions includes immediate short term measures, and longer term initiatives to be developed in the coming weeks and months.

These include:

Creating an independent body to promote external scrutiny and ensure the highest possible standards across the aid sector

- The summit agreed to explore an international safeguarding centre to support organisations to implement best practice on safeguarding and maximise transparency in the sector.
- This could include conducting safeguarding reviews, offering guidance and support to organisations, and a deployable team of experts on sexual exploitation and abuse who can advise organisations on the ground.

Introducing new standards for vetting and referencing across the sector

- All organisations agreed the importance of an urgent review of referencing in the sector.
- The summit agreed that vetting and referencing standards are required for: UK-based staff; international staff; locally-employed staff – to ensure no offender can fall through the cracks.

Ensuring whistle-blowers and survivors of exploitation and abuse get the counselling and support they need

- The Summit agreed to plan for a systematic audit of whistleblowing practices across the sector to ensure individuals feel able to report offences.
- It also identified the importance of developing and implementing mandatory standards which would make organisations accountable to beneficiaries – ensuring those receiving aid are able to identify and raise concerns.

Changing organisational culture to tackle power imbalances, encourage reporting, take allegations seriously and hold people to account

- The summit agreed annual reports would be made more transparent, with specific information published on safeguarding including the number of cases.
- Mandatory inductions on safeguarding for all staff should be introduced to ensure any issues are identified and acted upon.

Ensuring concerns are heard and acted upon

- The summit agreed the vital role of establishing clear guidelines for referring incidents, allegations and offenders to relevant authorities – including the National Crime Agency.

In addition to the actions agreed at today's summit, DFID will continue to ensure small charities are supported during this process.

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.

~ 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.

~ Penny Mordaunt challenged UK-based international development charities, regulatory bodies and independent experts to drive up standards and to agree practical tools, processes and protocols to ensure the aid sector protects the people it serves. As part of this, Ms Mordaunt confirmed that:

- DFID will put in place new, enhanced and specific safeguarding standards for the organisations the department works with. These standards will include an assessment of codes of conduct, how organisations identify and respond to incidents, and how their risk management places safeguarding and beneficiaries at its very core. New funds to organisations will not be approved unless they pass the new standards.
- All 179 UK-based charities that work overseas and receive UK aid have responded to the letter from the International Development Secretary giving DFID their statement of assurance on four key areas, including their safeguarding environment and policies, their organisational culture, their clarity and transparency, and their handling of allegations and incidents.
- DFID is following up with 37 organisations to gain further clarity on their assurance.
- Of the 179 charities that have provided returns, in response to

assurances sought by DFID, 26 have made serious incident reports to the Charity Commission. In total, the 26 charities have reported 80 incidents broadly related to safeguarding issues; some of these reports relate to incidents that occurred prior to April 2017.

~ This summit builds 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.
- Concluding a review of allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct involving DFID staff

~ Speeches made at the Safeguarding Summit by International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt; Chair of the Charity Commission, Baroness Stowell; and DFID Permanent Secretary Matthew Rycroft, can all be viewed online.