

Press release: Charity regulator sets out scope of statutory inquiry into Oxfam

The Charity Commission, the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales, has today set out the scope of its statutory inquiry into Oxfam, registered charity number 202918.

The inquiry was opened on 12 February 2018 after the Commission examined documents sent on Monday 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.

The purpose of the statutory inquiry is to:

1. examine the charity's governance (including leadership and culture), its management and its policies and practices with regard to safeguarding, in the context of the applicable law, good practice and its obligations as a charity, both generally and particularly in relation to:
 - its response, general handling and disclosure to the Commission, statutory funders and other key donors, agencies and stakeholders in relation to serious safeguarding incidents which have taken place since 2011 including its Haiti programme
 - its responsibility to provide a safe environment for its beneficiaries, staff and other charity workers in the delivery of its overseas programmes and generally
 - its recruitment and supervision of its employees, volunteers and other charity workers
 - maintaining its reputation as a major aid charity which can be entrusted with international, governmental and public support and the confidence of its beneficiaries, staff and volunteers
2. scrutinise and review the charity's progress with implementing the requirements in the action plan agreed with the Commission in 2017 and ensure such other actions that may be required to address the findings from the inquiry's work are undertaken

Michelle Russell, Director of Investigations, Monitoring and Enforcement at the Charity Commission said:

Acting in the public interest as regulator, this inquiry must and will establish the facts about what the charity knew about events in Haiti in 2011, and how it responded at the time and since. The inquiry will also help us, and the public, understand Oxfam's overall approach to safeguarding those who come into contact with

the charity – whether they be beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, or the wider communities in which they work. Resolving this is key to upholding public and donor trust and confidence in charity.

This week Oxfam's Chair Caroline Thomson has given us an unequivocal commitment to co-operating fully with the inquiry to ensure our work progresses thoroughly and speedily and to resolving the issues faced by the charity to restore public trust and confidence in Oxfam.

It is expected that the inquiry will review and consider:

- case records to test and verify assurances on the charity's handling of cases
- the charity's handling of the allegations in Haiti; the extent of the charity's knowledge of similar allegations against its staff which predated Haiti (including Chad and Liberia); and the matters or risks arising from its handling and subsequent decision making
- the charity's reporting and communications with law enforcement and other agencies and donors, including DFID and DEC

Anyone with information that could be relevant to the inquiry is advised to contact OxfamInquiry@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk.

The inquiry will assess what additional actions will need to be taken by the charity in order to address the findings from the inquiry's work and to assist in restoring public trust and confidence in Oxfam. The scope of the inquiry will include the charity's trading division and may be amended if other issues emerge during the course of the investigation which raise additional regulatory concerns.

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. [Reports of previous inquiries](#) by the Commission are available on GOV.UK.

The charity's details can be viewed on the Commission's [online charity search tool](#).

Ends

Notes to editors

1. Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
2. Search for charities on our [online register](#).
3. Section 46 of the Charities Act 2011 gives the Commission the power to institute inquiries. The opening of an inquiry gives the Commission access to a range of investigative, protective and remedial legal powers.
4. The Commission has been engaged with Oxfam on its safeguarding culture and practices since last year. As a result of the Commission's

engagement, the charity committed to a number of actions in [late 2017](#) to review and improve:

- the charity's governance of safeguarding, including leadership, culture, role modelling and internal reporting;
- the charity's HR culture, policies and practice;
- the charity's organisation structures, management reporting lines and resourcing to support the effective delivery of the charity's safeguarding objectives; and
- the safeguarding management framework where the charity has shared responsibilities in the Oxfam confederation, in particular with Oxfam International