

Press release: Safeguarding Summit: Statements by the International Development Secretary and DFID's Permanent Secretary

Penny Mordaunt at the Safeguarding Summit. Picture: Jo Harrison/DFID

At a landmark Safeguarding Summit today (Monday 5 March 2018), co-hosted by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Charity Commission, 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 announced 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. 19 of those 26 charities have made reports, among others, relating to incidents that occurred in previous financial years, prior to April 2017, and are therefore classed as historic. In total, the 26 charities have reported 80 incidents broadly related to safeguarding issues.

DFID's Permanent Secretary, Matthew Rycroft, also announced the conclusion of DFID's internal review into sexual harassment and misconduct allegations involving DFID staff, which includes the following information.

Based on currently available records since 1995:

- There have been 14 closed cases where claims that DFID staff were responsible for misconduct of a sexual nature have been substantiated.

- The majority of these closed substantiated cases relate to sexual harassment between staff members. Sexual harassment could include a range of actions such as complaints of inappropriate language and threatening behaviour.
- None of these closed substantiated cases include proven allegations of DFID staff paying for sex. There is no information to suggest misconduct of a sexual nature involving DFID staff and under 18 year olds or of sexual exploitation in exchange for aid.
- The 14 closed substantiated cases involve DFID staff in the UK and abroad.
- There were fewer than five closed substantiated cases in 2017.

On the basis of information available to the review:

- Action was taken in each of these 14 cases in line with DFID policies at the time. This includes informal action at the request of the complainant and disciplinary action.
- DFID does not currently hold any information on historic closed substantiated cases that we should have passed on to the prosecuting authorities.

In addition to the 14 closed substantiated cases identified: • There are fewer than five cases that are open or have been newly reported to DFID relating to past events that we are currently investigating.

DFID cannot give any further details on these cases. This is to safeguard individual personal data under data protection legislation.

If any new information comes to light through DFID's continued efforts the department will ensure appropriate action is taken.

The Cabinet Office is assessing DFID's internal review and we are looking at how best to report cases like these in the future.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

Thank you for being here on this important day. Today we will start the vital change this sector needs.

Your task is to start laying the foundations to rebuild the credibility of the aid sector on this issue, both here and overseas.

Today, I want you to come up with the ideas and initiatives we can take forward the practical tools, processes and protocols to ensure we protect the people we are here to serve.

Unless, we do all we can to prevent wrongdoing, and unless we can hold all those who do wrong to account, we will have failed in our duty to protect the most vulnerable.

As you know, I wrote to every UK charity, which receives UK aid directly, asking that they provide me with a statement of assurance on four key areas:

Their safeguarding environment and policies, their organisational culture, their clarity and transparency, and their handling of allegations and incidents.

I also asked them to confirm that they have referred any and all concerns on specific cases and individuals to the relevant authorities, including prosecuting authorities.

All 179 organisations have given me their statement of assurance, and many gave additional details on reporting and allegations.

We are following up with 37 organisations to gain further clarity on their assurance, or reporting, and will issue a summary of all our analysis when this work is complete

But this exercise is not just about receiving assurances. It marks the starting point from which we must now build.

Across the returns, we saw important examples of good practice, but overall, there was too little evidence in the areas of robust risk management, comprehensive reporting, responsibility being taken at the highest level for safeguarding, and of beneficiaries always being put first.

So if we are to meet our duty, then the sector must raise standards.

I am determined that DFID will play its full part in this. So, from today, DFID will put in place new, enhanced and specific safeguarding standards for the organisations we work 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 the very core.

That assessment will set the bar at a level of the very best – a bar that we will continue to push higher – from our work here today and in the time to come.

Our standards will be world-leading. They will be tough and exacting. Organisations should not bid for new funding unless they are prepared to meet these tough new standards.

We will not approve funds to them unless they pass our new standards.

We will also start to apply these new standards to organisations we have ongoing work with.

And will ensure that all those standards can apply to all our partners, big and small.

DFID is holding itself to these high standards we expect of others and today, I can also confirm that DFID's internal review into historic allegations involving DFID staff has concluded.

Our Permanent Secretary Matthew Rycroft will say more on this later, but I think it was vital that we went back through every record we have, since they began, to check action has been taken. And if any new information comes to light through our continued efforts we will ensure appropriate action is taken on this.

The sector must do the same, and pay particular attention to the issue of reviewing and reporting historic cases. We expect all who wish to work with us, and indeed any organisation that works on development, to take this issue as an urgent priority.

Why? Because only by reporting can we identify and bring to justice predatory individuals.

And it is those predatory individuals who concern me most.

My message to those who have sought to exploit this sector and the human tragedy in which it operates, is this – we will all share information we have with law enforcement.

We will find you. We will bring you to justice. Your time is up.

This summit is a critical moment to learn lessons and drive up standards across the entire aid sector.

Now is the time for action and for the British aid sector to take a lead. To set standards, a template and an example, for the rest of the world to follow.

To keep people safe we need to find a way staff can be properly vetted and monitored as they move between organisations and countries.

We need to find a way to hear the voices of the people we serve, so we can respond when they tell us they are being mistreated.

Would the Oxfam case, or the abuse of women in Syria, have persisted if those victims' voices were listened to?

And we must have thorough assurance and auditing of the sector.

We must share our ideas and learn how to keep on improving our safeguarding measures. We need continuous training and professional development.

And we must ensure smaller organisations – who are such an asset to the sector- are supported and able to meet these standards too.

These are the outcomes I want to see. Now begins your task of finding the solutions.

Your plans will be put into action. Our partners will sign up to them. Other nations will follow our lead.

Let us ensure that the world's poorest and most vulnerable people are always

our first priority.

Let us ensure that there is no hiding place for those who wish to exploit the vulnerable in our sector.

Let us ensure that the British public can take pride in everything that is done in their name, in the lives you save, in the hope you bring, and in the immense good you do in this sector.

Let us put this right. Thank you.

Permanent Secretary at the Department for International Development, Matthew Rycroft said:

I have been struck today by the collective will of speakers to ensure that between us we improve safeguarding standards.

Earlier, the Secretary of State Penny Mordaunt offered a clear message – organisations that cannot offer assurances, organisations that cannot demonstrate in practice that they have safeguards in place, and organisations that cannot show that they are effectively managing the risks around safeguarding, will not receive funding from DFID.

That is a new standard we are setting. It is an entirely reasonable standard to set. We have a duty to do no harm as an absolute minimum. Donors expect that, the public demand it, and beneficiaries deserve it.

We are not saying that we don't expect to see safeguarding incidents being reported. In fact, as standards of reporting improve and the cultures of organisations shift, it is inevitable that we will see increases in the number of cases coming to light.

As that happens, we need to turn it into a positive – bringing damaging and abusive behaviour out of the shadows and into the light where it can be addressed.

The focus here today is on UK international development charities. But it is clear that safeguarding is, and should be, on the agenda right across the aid sector both in the UK and abroad.

To ensure that DFID now remains at the forefront of tackling exploitation and abuse, I instructed our new Safeguarding Unit, and DFID's internal HR experts, to review urgently our own existing policy and procedures within the department.

This includes reviewing our approach to the whole employment life cycle: from selection, vetting and induction; to performance management, training and development; right through to departure and references – and beyond.

This work includes reviewing our conduct and discipline policy, and our departmental code of conduct – to ensure all our policies and processes are robust, suitably explicit and clear to all our staff.

DFID is also reviewing our approach to learning and development and induction to ensure that our staff have the training and confidence to identify and report any concerns, and that line managers are equipped to support their teams.

So we are determined to hold ourselves to the high standards we expect of the sector. As part of that determination, we have conducted an internal review into sexual harassment and misconduct allegations involving DFID staff. We have completed the review and I can report the conclusions.

Based on currently available records since 1995, there have been 14 closed cases where claims that DFID staff were responsible for misconduct of a sexual nature have been substantiated.

Most of these relate to sexual harassment. None of these cases include proven allegations of DFID staff paying for sex or of sexual exploitation in exchange for aid.

On the basis of information available to the review, action was taken in each of these 14 cases in line with DFID policies at the time.

Since a number of these cases occurred, some of DFID's procedures have been tightened up and strengthened.

We do not currently hold any information on historic, closed substantiated cases that we should have passed on to the prosecuting authorities.

In addition to those closed cases, there are a number of live cases that relate to past events, on which I am unable to comment.

I continue to encourage all staff to report any concerns historic or present to our confidential whistle blowing hotline.

If any new information comes to light through our continued efforts we will ensure appropriate action is taken.

We can go further. I want us to seize this moment to ensure a shift in culture across our whole sector. That is the way to ensure we bring some lasting good out of this crisis. We all in this room have the opportunity – and the obligation – to raise the bar. By that I mean three things: tougher standards; greater meeting of the standards and stricter consequences when the standards are not met.

So, as I said before, I encourage anyone with concerns – historic or present – to share these. If we all encourage full and frank transparency we can root out exploitation and abuse.

As I said, I think DFID should be holding ourselves to as high a standard as we hold all of you. If any of your organisations are going further, please share your best practice today so we can all set higher benchmarks and learn from each other.

That is what today is all about: us coming together, collectively as a

sector, to agree a way forward. I hope that we can all agree a statement based on five principles.

Firstly, echoing what the Secretary of State has said, we need to put beneficiaries first. But this should also more widely include a duty to our staff, volunteers and the communities in which we work.

Accountability to beneficiaries and survivors, including staff and volunteers, is essential. Prioritising those who have suffered and survived exploitation, abuse and violence should be at the front of our minds.

Secondly, we have to commit to shifting organisational culture to tackle power imbalances. If we can't do this in our own organisations, we can't hope to do it in society more broadly.

As a first step we need to ensure that breaches are challenged and that those who report incidents are taken seriously, treated with care and dignity and given redress.

More widely, and this is especially pertinent given that DFID is launching its gender equality strategy on Wednesday, we need to make sure that we position all our work to "do no harm" within our wider conviction to gender equality.

Third, I think it important that we take a holistic approach ensuring that safeguarding is integrated throughout the employment cycle. We need to make sure that, from recruitment and induction through to dismissal or voluntary exit, strong checks are in place.

Fourth, it is vital that when things do go wrong, we take all the actions at our disposal to ensure that incidents are investigated, and reported to the relevant authorities, and ultimately that perpetrators are held accountable.

We must ensure that there is rigorous reporting and there are complaints mechanisms for any misconduct that occurs under the banner of our organisations. And we must commit to seeing investigations through to their conclusion. This should ensure that we no longer find ourselves in a situation where a minority of individuals are able to move from one organisation to another with impunity.

Finally, we need to take whistleblowing extremely seriously. We need to see those who raise incidents not as trouble makers but as critical friends who are able to identify and weed out problems.

I am sure most already do, but our systems need to reflect this better. That means actively promoting the whistleblowing process, showing that it is anonymous and impartial and providing feedback on the outcome.

All of this will require sustained effort and leadership from all of you and it will require resources. It is legitimate, in fact essential, activity in any partnership with DFID.

Over and above these broad principles, we need to set about defining concrete

actions.

I know you have all already begun work on the task in hand, following the commission sent out from the Secretary of State last month.

There is a great deal of expectation on us outside of this room. After lunch, it will be time to deliver.

Sheila will be explaining your task in more detail but put simply: your job is to set an agenda which moves us away from a narrative of scandal and recrimination, and towards a positive vision for a charity sector that promotes equality and respect.

By the end of today we will have all come together and agreed a set of concrete actions which will enable us to move towards this vision.

It is important that we set ourselves actions which are ambitious. That we commit to meeting minimum standards now and to exploring how we can build on those in the future.

Please come back after lunch ready to roll your sleeves up and get down to work.

Notes to Editors:

[PHOTOS: International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt speaking at the Safeguarding Summit this morning](#)

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt has tasked the delegates at the Safeguarding Summit 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.

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 harassment and misconduct involving DFID staff.