

Safeguarding in the aid sector: Written Ministerial Statement

This week marks one year on since the UK Department for International Development hosted the 2018 [Safeguarding Summit, Putting People First: tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector](#).

In early 2018 the aid sector's failure over many years to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) came into sharp relief.

The shocking stories that emerged exposed how aid workers had been allowed to get away with sexual misconduct. Their actions undermined trust in the whole sector and all the positive work that it does.

So from February 2018 DFID set out to work with others to change the way the aid sector tackles SEAH, from root to branch.

The October 2018 summit in London was an important milestone. More than 500 organisations came together to make commitments for change. This included 22 donors – who provide 90% of global ODA. We committed to global standards on prevention and improved processes covering ethical behaviour, robust recruitment and complaints processes.

These were not empty promises. Work is ongoing to put victims and survivors first and drive real culture change across the aid sector. This includes:

DFID's £10 million project with INTERPOL to help stop perpetrators of SEAH moving around the aid sector by strengthening criminal record checks and information sharing between countries. Regional hubs are being set up and priority countries have been identified.

The Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, which means employers can share data on conduct and disciplinary records related to sexual misconduct with greater confidence. It is still early days, but the over 1,500 requests for information since January have prevented the hiring of at least 10 individuals.

Awarding the contract this month for DFID's £10 million Resource and Support Hub to provide guidance, support and training to NGOs and others and access to independent investigators for smaller charities.

Today, DFID is publishing [three reports showing some of the progress made](#) and the challenges remaining.

The first has updates from each of the eight groups which made commitments at the summit: donors, UK NGOs, private sector suppliers, the United Nations, International Financial Institutions, CDC, research funders, and Gavi and the Global Fund. Initiatives include new tools and guidance for NGOs; mechanisms

to collaborate and learn lessons among private sector suppliers; a new reporting tool for United Nations staff; the development of a Good Guidance Note by International Financial Institutions and CDC; an evidence review of safeguarding challenges by research funders; and the rollout of new training by Gavi and the Global Fund.

The second covers how donors are meeting their commitments. This includes the adoption of a new OECD Development Assistance Committee recommendation on ending SEAH in the aid sector; work to align donor SEAH clauses in funding agreements with multilateral agencies; and collective leverage to drive change across the UN. Donors are continuing to strengthen accountability, build more robust systems and drive culture change across the whole international system.

The third gives more details about what DFID has done. We have been clear that any sexual misconduct is totally unacceptable. But we know that sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector still happens far too often.

The international work led by DFID over the last year has generated good momentum and is starting to deliver results. But we must collectively keep working until every individual feels able to speak up and challenge abuses of power wherever they occur.

We must continue to do all we reasonably can to make zero tolerance a reality, by which we mean responding appropriately to every single report or case.

We must prevent SEAH from happening, listen to those affected, respond appropriately when allegations are made, and learn from every single case.

This is just the beginning of a long-term process.

I will build on the work of my predecessors to maintain momentum, to ensure the failings of the past do not happen again and to deliver better results for the people we serve.

If we do not get things right on safeguarding, and ensure the protection of the most vulnerable, then we fail in our ultimate goal to support the world's poorest and jeopardise all the positive work aid does.

The commitments made at the London summit are having a positive impact. But more is required by every organisation and every programme if we are going to stop sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector. Something which we must achieve.