

Speech: Penny Mordaunt speech at the End Violence Solutions Summit

I'd like to say thank you to End Violence, the Swedish government and WePROTECT Global Alliance for hosting today's important event.

One of the objectives of this summit is that we all leave today believing that we can end violence against children – and I believe we can.

And to help that I was going to talk about what DFID had done, what works, our future plans and to talk about the announcement we're making today of new funding to protect children from physical and sexual abuse.

But with apologies for my hardworking team and to you, because I know I'm preaching to the choir, I think my time here is better spent delivering another message.

The sexual exploitation of vulnerable people, vulnerable children, is never acceptable. But when it is perpetrated by people in positions of power, people we entrust to help and protect, it rightly sickens and disgusts. And it should compel us to take action.

The recent revelations about Oxfam, not solely the actions perpetrated by a number of those staff but the way the organisation responded to those events – should be a wake up call to the sector. They let perpetrators go, they did not inform donors, their regulator or prosecuting authorities. It was not just the processes and procedures of that organisation that were lacking but moral leadership.

We cannot end violence against children unless zero tolerance means something.

I will be guided in my decisions about Oxfam depending on the charity's response to requirement and questions I have raised with them, and by the Charity Commission's investigation.

But no organisation is too big or our work with them too complex for me to hesitate to remove funding from them if we cannot trust them to put the beneficiaries of aid first.

I've held meetings with charity bosses, regulators and experts over the last few days and tomorrow I will be meeting with the National Crime Agency. While investigations have to be completed and any potential criminals prosecuted accordingly, what is clear is that the culture that allowed this to happen needs to change, and it needs to change now.

I am writing to every single charity which receives UK aid, demanding full transparency and set out assurances about their safeguarding procedures. If our standards are not met, then the British taxpayer will not continue to fund them.

Unless you safeguard everyone in your organisation that comes into contact with you, including beneficiaries, staff and volunteers – we will not fund you.

Unless you create a culture that prioritises the safety of vulnerable people and ensures victims and whistleblowers can come forward without fear – we will not work with you.

And unless you report every serious incident or allegation, no matter how damaging to your reputation – we cannot be your partners.

The same message goes out to any organisation or partner – whether they are in the public, private or third sector which receives UK aid – and this includes the component parts of the UN.

We want procedures to change. We want leaders to lead with moral authority. We want staff to be held accountable for their actions, no matter where they are.

Sexual abuse and exploitation is an issue the entire development sector needs to confront.

The UN reported that there were 300 incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse, including child rape, carried out by UN peacekeepers and civilian staff in 2016. That figure is as morally repugnant and it is unacceptable.

We will not wait for the UN and other organisations to step up. The British government will take action now.

My department has created a new unit to review safeguarding across all parts of the aid sector, both in the UK and internationally. Among other things, we will urgently look into how we can stop sexual abusers and predators from being re-employed by charities, including the possibility of setting up of a global register of development workers.

Secondly, we will step up our existing work with UN Secretary-General to stop abuses under the UN flag. There will be no immunity for rape and sexual abuse and I welcome the recent statement from the UN to that effect and note the recent work that Unicef has done. We cannot let the UN flag provide cover for despicable acts.

Thirdly, my department and the UK Charity Commission will hold within a month a safeguarding summit, where we will meet with representatives across the aid sector, and discuss new ways of vetting and recruiting staff, to ensure protecting vulnerable people is at the forefront of our minds.

We are all taking necessary actions to ensure criminals are brought to justice, organisations are held to account, and procedures to change and stop sexual exploitation, abuse and rape.

And today, I'm calling on all of us to work together to do this. It is only through working together that we can achieve our shared goal of ending violence against children. And everyone in this room has a duty to ensure

change within their own organisations. We must ensure we all have the highest safeguarding standards.

This past week has to be a wake up call. If we don't want the actions of a minority of individuals to tarnish and endanger all the good work that we do, then we must all respond quickly and appropriately.

We must regain the trust of the public.

We must make staff aware of their moral responsibilities as well as their legal duties.

But above all else, we must strive to ensure that no child, no one is harmed by the people who are supposed to be there to help.

1. The speech was made at the Agenda 2030 for Children: [End Violence Solutions Summit](#)
2. The End Violence summit is the first of its kind, and will see senior representatives from the international aid community coming together to commit to tackling violence against children in all forms – including child marriage, violence in schools and modern slavery.
3. The UN reported there were more than 300 incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse, including child rape, carried out by UN peacekeepers and civilian staff in 2016.
4. Penny Mordaunt's statement following her meetings with Oxfam and the Charity Commission on Monday 12 February can be found [here](#)
5. At the summit, Ms Mordaunt also announced her support (£5 million) to the End Violence Against Children partnership, which will see the UK teaming up with the biggest group of stakeholders in the world to investigate and implement solutions which really work to keep children safe. Over a million children across the world face some form of violence in their everyday lives – including modern slavery, child marriage, child labour and violence in schools.