

[Press release: Charity Commission opens statutory inquiry into Oxfam and sets out steps to improve safeguarding in the charity sector](#)

The Charity Commission, the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales, has today, 12 February, opened a statutory inquiry into the charity Oxfam (registered charity number 202918). It comes after the Commission examined documents sent today 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.

Further details about the scope of the inquiry will be made public in the coming days. The opening of the inquiry is in line with the regulator's duty to promote public trust and confidence in charities. The Commission will ensure the inquiry's findings are put on the public record and will also ensure the [actions the Commission required of Oxfam in 2017](#) on its safeguarding culture and practices are properly and fully carried out.

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](#).

David Holdsworth, Deputy Chief Executive of the Charity Commission said:

Charities and dedicated, hard-working aid workers undertake vital, lifesaving work in some of the most difficult circumstances across the world. However, the issues revealed in recent days are shocking and unacceptable. It is important that we take this urgent step to ensure that these matters can be dealt with fully and robustly.

Future steps

The Commission's Chief Executive, Helen Stephenson met today with the Secretary of State for International Development. They both agreed that charities need to do more to ensure high standards of safeguarding and set the right culture and tone at the top and are committed to ensuring that this is the case. We are pleased to announce, with DFID, that we will be calling in key international aid charities to a summit on safeguarding as soon as possible in the coming weeks, paving the way for a significant conference.

It is vital that trustees set a culture within their charity that prioritises safeguarding so that it is safe for those affected to come forward and report incidents and concerns with the assurance they will be handled sensitively and properly by charities. Full and frank disclosure to the regulator and the relevant authorities, nationally and internationally, is also key. Everybody has the right to be safe, and the public rightly expects charities to be safe and trusted places for all who they come into contact with.

The summit and conference follow on from the [alert the Commission issued to charities](#) in December 2017. This alert made clear that any previously unreported serious incidents should be submitted to the Commission as a matter of urgency. It also reminded charities to review their safeguarding practices and procedures if they had not done so in the last 12 months. The Commission will ensure that charities respond to this alert appropriately.

Ends

Notes to editors

1. For the Commission's response to concerns about Oxfam on 10 February see [GOV.UK](#).
2. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see the [about us](#) page on GOV.UK.
3. Search for charities on our [check charity tool](#).
4. 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.

[Speech: Prime Minister's statement at Stormont House](#)



Prime Minister

Today I have been meeting the leaders of the main parties involved in the talks and I have urged them to make one final push for the sake of the people here in Northern Ireland.

It has been thirteen long months since we last saw devolved government here and I think we are now at the point of where it is time for the locally elected representatives to find a way to work together and to deal with and tackle the many pressing issues facing Northern Ireland.

I have had full and frank conversations with the five parties. I've also met with the Taoiseach.

And while some differences remain I believe that it is possible to see the basis of an agreement here. There is the basis of an agreement and it should be possible to see an Executive up and running in Northern Ireland very soon.

The DUP and Sinn Fein have been working very hard to close the remaining gaps. But I would also like to recognise the contribution of other parties here in Northern Ireland too.

What I am clear about is that we are all fully committed to doing everything we can to support this process – and as far as Westminster is concerned we stand ready to legislate for the re-establishment of an Executive as soon as possible after an agreement.

[Press release: David Mundell to promote Scottish interests abroad](#)

Mr Mundell will meet senior political and business figures, to promote Scotland as a great place for investment, business and study.

Mr Mundell said:

Scotland has long established connections with Hong Kong and Japan and I am looking forward to building on those ties and forming new partnerships as I meet a variety of stakeholders throughout this trip – from businesses and opinion formers to Scottish students abroad.

I am particularly keen to promote the UK Government's GREAT Festival of Innovation taking place in Hong Kong in March offering the latest thinking on innovation across industry, society and community, building life-long partnerships.

I will also be promoting Scottish produce, such as Scottish craft gin which has been a global success story, and is extremely popular in Japan, and meeting with the Japanese investors in Scotland.

Scotland's skills, products and services are highly regarded globally, and we can build on that as we leave the EU and strike ambitious new trade deals around the world.

In Hong Kong, Mr Mundell will meet Scottish companies seeking to develop business interests in Hong Kong and the region, Scottish students studying at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, as well as meeting winners of the annual UK Government's Hong Kong FinTech Awards.

In Japan he will meet with life sciences investors, host a roundtable with Japanese MPs on LGBT issues, and meet with senior Government ministers.

News story: Foreign Secretary's visit to Asia, February 2018

The Foreign Secretary meets Rohingya refugees at Cox's Bazar.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson travelled to Asia on 9 February for a 4-day visit to Bangladesh, Burma and Thailand.

Bangladesh

On first official visit by a Foreign Secretary in 10 years, Boris Johnson met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka to discuss the upcoming Commonwealth Summit, trade opportunities, free and fair elections and gender equality.

The Foreign Secretary also met Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmud Ali to discuss the Rohingya refugee crisis. He visited a refugee camp on the Bangladesh-Burma border near Cox's Bazar to see the conditions of the Rohingya refugees who fled from Burma to Bangladesh.

During his visit, the Foreign Secretary said:

I'm here in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh where I'm looking at one of the biggest humanitarian catastrophes that's happened in the last few decades. The Bangladeshi government have done fantastically well to welcome them, to look after them in this enormous camp that you can see.

Our job as the United Kingdom is to try and work now, with our partners, to do what we can to create the conditions for a safe, dignified return for the Rohingya people.

Burma

The Foreign Secretary spoke with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi about finding a peaceful solution the humanitarian crisis for the Rohingya to enable them to return to their homes in Rakhine province. He also visited northern Rakhine.

Speaking in Burma, the Foreign Secretary said:

I've been talking to Aung San Suu Kyi who is the leader of Burma, State Councillor Daw Suu and she's in a very difficult position. She's a leader that many people including me greatly admire.

But she needs now, I think, to show some leadership, to work with the international community, work with the UN agencies to give

these people the safety, the security that they need to be able to come back to their homes that have been torched in such huge numbers and to rebuild those homes, and to make it clear to them that they are welcome and that Myanmar is their home.

Thailand

In Bangkok the Foreign Secretary had talks with Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, who confirmed that a government minister from Thailand would attend the London Illegal Wildlife Trade conference this autumn. The Foreign Secretary also viewed illegally trafficked ivory and pangolin scales seized by Thai customs.

He also met the chair of the Advisory Board on the Rakhine Advisory Commission, Surakiart Sathirathai. and visited a transport development to highlight opportunities for UK businesses in the infrastructure sector.

Watch a summary of the Foreign Secretary's visit

[Foreign Secretary's visit to Asia](#)

[Press release: Statement from International Development Secretary on Oxfam and UK action to tackle sexual exploitation in the aid sector](#)

A statement from International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt:

"This morning I met with Mark Goldring, Chief Executive of Oxfam, and Caroline Thomson, Oxfam Chair of Trustees.

"Oxfam made a full and unqualified apology – to me, and to the people of Britain and Haiti – for the appalling behaviour of some of their staff in Haiti in 2011, and for the wider failings of their organisation's response to it.

"They spoke of the deep sense of disgrace and shame that they and their organisation feel about what has happened, and set out the actions they will now take to put things right and prevent such horrific abuses happening in future. They did not inform the Department for International Development at the time that this case involved sexual misconduct or beneficiaries.

"Oxfam assured me they are cooperating fully with the authorities in Haiti

and will do so in any other country where abuse has been exposed. Because the perpetrators in Haiti were not British nationals, Oxfam has – at my request – also today committed to immediately provide full details of those involved to the governments of their home countries, so that appropriate legal processes can be taken forward.

“But assurances are not enough so I have asked them to confirm to DFID by the end of the week precisely how they will handle any forthcoming allegations around safeguarding – historic or live – in a way in which the public can have confidence. We expect this process to include an independent and external element of scrutiny.

“I told Oxfam they must now demonstrate the moral leadership necessary to address this scandal, rebuild the trust of the British public, their staff and the people they aim to help, and deliver progress on these assurances. It is on the basis of their actions going forward – rather than of their commitments in one meeting today – that I and others will judge them. I was clear that part of an organisation’s moral leadership comes from individuals taking responsibility for their actions.

“I have today also met with the Chief Executive of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, Helen Stephenson, who informed me that the Commission urgently requested full and frank disclosure of what happened in 2011 from Oxfam and they are considering their next regulatory steps.

“But the Charity Commission and I agree that it is not only Oxfam that must improve and reach the high standards of safeguarding we require. Right across the charitable sector, organisations need to show leadership, examine their systems, ensure they have clear whistleblowing policies and deal with historical allegations with confidence and trust.

“My absolute priority is to keep the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people safe from harm. In the 21st century, it is utterly despicable that sexual exploitation and abuse continues to exist in the aid sector.

“I am determined that we do our utmost to prevent exploitation and abuse happening – and ensure that where it does happen it is identified and dealt with appropriately. We cannot wait for others to act – the UK must show leadership ourselves and that is why today I am taking action.

“At their best, UK charities do extraordinary work around the world, saving and transforming lives. It is vital now that the whole sector steps up and demonstrates the leadership that the public expects.

“Firstly, I have issued a letter to all UK charities working overseas – including Oxfam – to demand that they step up and do more, so that we have absolute assurance that the moral leadership, the systems, the culture and the transparency that are needed to fully protect vulnerable people are in place, all of the time, and wherever these charities work and with whichever partners they work with. I have also requested that they confirm they have referred any and all concerns they may have on specific safeguarding cases and individuals to the relevant authorities. In requesting this, we are using

Charity Commission guidance and will continue to work closely with them. We will shortly commence a similar exercise with our non-UK partners. If anyone has specific allegations, I urge them to contact our Counter Fraud and Whistleblowing Unit.

“Secondly, my department has today created a new unit to urgently review safeguarding across all parts of the aid sector to ensure everything is being done to protect people from harm, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

“This unit will be wide-ranging and comprehensive in its remit, looking at safeguarding across UK and international charities, suppliers, and the UN and multilateral organisations so that together we can make progress. This will look at how to guard against criminal and predatory individuals being re-employed by charities and abusing again, including the option of establishing a global register of development workers.

“I will bring in independent experts to advise myself and this unit on this work. This builds on the changes we have made to introduce tough sanctions for human rights abuses including sexual exploitation for all new contracts with suppliers and new training for DFID staff to identify and respond to any concerns. I have asked for a meeting with the NCA, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and others to discuss how to make further progress.

“Thirdly, I am going to step up our work to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse across the UN and other international organisations. Already, the UK is working with the UN Secretary-General 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.

“Fourthly, the Charity Commission and DFID will co-host a safeguarding summit before the end of the month with the aid sector and alongside UK counterparts, where we will agree a set of actions to strengthen safeguarding processes and mechanisms, including around staffing and recruitment, paving the way for a series of events throughout the year. We will also work with the Commission to provide technical assistance and support to other nations that wish to improve the standard and regulations of safeguarding.

“Lastly, I will take this tough message to the international community – and call for action from them. Later this week I will make a speech in Stockholm and firmly demand that all donors and development organisations show leadership and take action alongside the UK.

“Whatever the complications and pressures organisations face, the people we are here to serve must be the number one priority. I remain very clear: we will not work with any organisation that does not live up to the high standards on safeguarding and protection that we require.”