

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Sexual exploitation in the aid sector, HC 840

Tuesday 20 February 2018

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; James Duddridge; Mr Nigel Evans; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Paul Scully; Mr Virendra Sharma; Henry Smith.

Questions 1-148

Witnesses

I: Mark Goldring, Chief Executive Officer, Oxfam GB; Caroline Thomson, Chair of Trustees, Oxfam GB; Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Oxfam International.

II: Kevin Watkins, Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children UK; Steve Reeves, Director of Child Safeguarding, Save the Children UK.

III: Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Department for International Development; Gerard Howe, Head of Inclusive Societies, Department for International Development; Beverley Warmington, Director of CHASE, Department for International Development.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mark Goldring, Caroline Thomson and Winnie Byanyima.

Q1 Chair: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here with us. Before we start the questions to our first panel of witnesses, the Committee has met in private, and we have decided that, after today's evidence, the International Development Committee will be conducting a full inquiry into the issues that have arisen regarding sexual exploitation in the aid sector. We will publish terms of reference at some point soon.

Can I welcome the first panel of witnesses? Our usual practice is that we go straight to questions. When you first answer a question please introduce yourself. Mr Goldring, I would like to start with you. In your interview with the *Guardian* published on Saturday, you appeared to be downplaying this scandal, using the parallel with the murder of babies in their cots, which many people regarded as grossly inappropriate. Can I give you the opportunity to apologise?

Mark Goldring: Certainly, Chairman. I apologise. I was thinking under stress. I had given many interviews. I had made many decisions to try to lead Oxfam's response to this. I was thinking about amazing work I had seen Oxfam do across the world, most recently for refugees coming from Myanmar. I should not have said those things. It is not for Oxfam to judge issues of proportionality or motivation.

I repeat Oxfam's broader apology and my personal apology. I am sorry and we are sorry for the damage that Oxfam has done, both to the people of Haiti but also to wider efforts for aid and development by possibly undermining public support. I wholeheartedly apologise for those comments and commit to work in that greater public interest, so that Oxfam can play a powerful role in the work that we all believe in.

Q2 Chair: Thank you. You joined Oxfam in 2013. When you joined, the internal investigation into the use of prostitutes by Oxfam staff in Haiti had already concluded and concerns had been raised about Mr van Hauwermeiren's previous conduct in Chad. Can you tell us to what extent and when you were made aware of this evidence, and what did you do about it at the time?

Mark Goldring: When I joined Oxfam in 2013 I was made aware and briefed that there had been serious misdemeanours, including sexual misconduct and the use of prostitutes in Haiti in 2011, that it had been fully investigated, that that investigation had been closed and action had been taken, and that a programme of work to make Oxfam stronger and safer had started. I did not reopen the investigation. I supported the ongoing work to make Oxfam stronger and safer.

The people briefing me included the senior managers at the time, including the head of internal audit, who led the investigation team. I



was given due assurance that this had been well handled and my job was to help lead Oxfam forwards.

Q3 Chair: One of the lessons in Oxfam's own internal investigation—and I quote—was “We need better mechanisms for informing other regions, affiliates and agencies of behavioural issues with staff when they move, to avoid recycling problem staff”. Given that some of these staff went on to work elsewhere in the sector, it is clear that recommendation simply was not implemented. Why not?

Mark Goldring: Oxfam and other likeminded agencies tried to work on a system of shared notice. At the time, no sensible and legal way forward was found. Oxfam circulated all other Oxfam offices to try to make sure that we did not give references endorsing those individuals. There was a wider exploration in the sector over a number of years, but issues around data protection, especially remembering that a finding of culpability by an employer is not the same as a legal conviction, meant that it foundered.

What has happened much more recently is Oxfam has joined with other likeminded agencies to try to work on a system of, as you could call them, “humanitarian passports”. That would be an endorsement of quality. There is also exploration of whether we should be asking Parliament to consider adding humanitarian or development work to that list of professions for which it is appropriate to keep those kinds of registers.

The work did not progress at the time. It was wrong. We should have pushed it farther and faster, but we are now joining with other agencies in doing that.

Q4 Chair: Helen Evans, who is the former head of safeguarding at Oxfam, has spoken publicly in the last week. She has talked about bringing a number of instances of misconduct both to you and the Charity Commission. Why did you, as the management, not report the things that Helen Evans brought to your attention to the Charity Commission?

Mark Goldring: Specific incidents that were reportable I believe were reported to the Charity Commission. Where Helen was concerned was that, as an organisation, we were not doing enough on a systematic basis. In December 2014, she brought a report to our leadership team, which is our cross-organisational board of directors, with particular concerns about violence or abuse in our programmes in three African countries.

I asked her at the time to take that up with the programmes director, and I linked her directly with them to follow it up. The programmes director did follow it up and visits were made to those countries. What we did not do at the time was have the team discussion, although we did say to Helen we would like to have it when she was ready with the action plan.



The other thing that we did not do at the time was take Helen's warning about overstretch of the team seriously enough. She was very successful in getting much more of the issue out in public and people reporting concerns through the whistleblowing line that we had set up after Haiti, into her dedicated team, which we had set up after Haiti. However, she was feeling overstretched and we responded gradually rather than dramatically to that. During 2015 we increased the resources in that team. We increased the level of checking that we did. We increased the level of training that we did in high-risk countries.

Q5 Chair: My understanding is the team is now the equivalent of three and a half members of staff, but the current head is leaving shortly. Is there a case for a much larger team working on safeguarding issues in Oxfam?

Mark Goldring: There is, but there is actually a much larger team working on it. The team that Helen led was a small central team, the role of which was to support 70-odd focal points in all the countries in which we work. They are staff who have this as a part of their work. In addition, we have a large human resources department and a training department, who are responsible for supporting those issues.

Q6 Chair: Do those departments see safeguarding issues as priority?

Mark Goldring: Those departments do, but they need to be led by that central team, and indeed by the leadership. In the human resources department, good conduct of our staff is a central part. Training of our staff appropriately for induction is a central part. The central resource was not big enough, and we have grown it steadily. It was created after the Haiti incident, directly as a result of it. Late last year, in October, we have committed to increase it to six people, but the bulk of the work will still be done on the ground, in the countries in which we work. There will also be better training, which will be done by our general training team and our human resources department, supported by that central team.

Q7 Chair: The sense I get of this is that there is a cultural problem here at a senior level in the organisation. You are employing good people to deal with safeguarding issues. They are very stretched and the concerns that they raise, as Helen Evans set out, are not always or have not always been given the serious priority they deserve by senior management in the organisation. Do you accept that criticism?

Mark Goldring: In 2011, Oxfam rightly got a serious wake-up call.

Q8 Chair: I mean more recently, under your leadership, because you were not there in 2011.

Mark Goldring: We have increased the resources in that team. We have increased the priority. We should have acted faster when Helen Evans said in 2015, "We are making progress. We need much more". What she recognised in her statement to Channel 4 is that we have made real progress since then.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Winnie Byanyima: Can I come in?

Chair: Ms Byanyima, of course.

Winnie Byanyima: Thank you very much. My name is Winnie Byanyima. I come from Uganda. I am the executive director of Oxfam International. Please allow me to begin by saying how sorry I am about what has happened. I am ashamed. I have spent my life trying to stand up for women's rights and to fight for people living in poverty, so this is painful for me.

I just want to add to the point that Mark has made. We have admitted that we have been seriously under-invested in safeguarding. We know that, and part of the action plan that I have announced is to double the resources for safeguarding and triple the number of people we put on the job for safeguarding.

Let me agree with you, Chair, that this is a big cultural issue. Safeguarding is like the police department, but people in a country behave well as citizens not because they are policed but because of their values. This is about aligning our people with the values of Oxfam. Some hideous men came into our organisation and abused the trust of the British people, the supporters. They were able to get away, to get a recommendation to leave. This was wrong. We are going to change the culture. Working on the culture costs money, and we are going to put money on this.

Q9 **Paul Scully:** Mr Goldring, you talked about a wake-up call. I want to look at the investigation in 2011 for a second and see how robust it was. One of the allegations that came out over the last week in the media was that there were already concerns about one of the guys that you sent over there to investigate this, your head of counter-fraud, by his management. That was before you sent him over there, and subsequently I know you investigated him and he went to prison for fraud. At the time, when you sent him out to Haiti to actually investigate this, there were question marks over his capacity to do this job.

Mark Goldring: The then chief executive was aware of concerns about his performance. She described it as being "erratic". He was one member of a team of four investigators and his boss, who was the head of internal audit, led that team. The investigation was done in a way that his boss believed at the time was robust and serious. At the stage that this particular investigator, Mr McKenzie-Green, left Oxfam, the investigation had been completed. The report had been approved by his manager and submitted, and action had been taken.

It is absolutely correct that he was later found himself to be complicit in fraud. Oxfam reported him to the police and the police prosecuted. We do not think that undermines the credibility of the report, because there were four investigators and everything was overseen by a more senior manager.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q10 **Paul Scully:** Did you send him, though, knowing that there were issues, because of lack of capacity, or was it just that you thought he could do the job? Why did you still send him? Sorry, I say “you”. Obviously I mean the organisation.

Mark Goldring: I believe that Oxfam sent him believing he had still got the right technical skills but his behaviour was, in the words that we used at the time—or I have seen them used soon after in writing—“erratic”. The belief was that he needed to be in a team rather than allowed to do this on his own. He was part of a team. His technical competence as an investigator was not in question.

Q11 **Paul Scully:** Can you give us assurance that this was not part of a wider systemic issue of concern that you were employing these people?

Mark Goldring: I can tell you that everybody involved at the time, including the chief executive, believed that the investigation was robust, even when they knew afterwards of his misbehaviour. That only came out after he had left Oxfam. I do not think that the investigation itself was compromised by his own failings. There are other issues, which I am sure the Committee will want to explore, as to whether Oxfam took the right decisions at the time, but I do not think that came down to the behaviour of that one individual.

Q12 **Richard Burden:** Mr Goldring, you said you were fully briefed on the 2011 investigation when you took over two years later in 2013. Did you actually look at the investigation report, or did you simply rely on the briefings you received from managers?

Mark Goldring: I relied on briefings I received because, at the time, I was given assurances that Oxfam had handled this appropriately, the investigation had been completed, staff had been dismissed and a report had been made to the relevant authorities. The action plan that was developed was where my responsibility came in. That action plan included the setting up of a separate safeguarding team, so that Oxfam had the right in-house expertise, but also to protect the innocent women in question, rather than just to investigate the potential crimes or culpability.

I had no reason at the time to believe I should have reopened the details of the investigation. At the time, Oxfam believed it had been suitably transparent in reporting those issues and that the case was therefore closed. I fully accept that is not a judgment that I would now support. The individual that Mr Scully asked about had left and was actually being prosecuted, so that had been dealt with.

With hindsight, yes, I deeply wish I would have looked at that report. At the time, the protection issues that were being faced to me were about how we dealt with this on a longer-term basis. The most pressing issue at the time I joined was actually a very different one that the team were briefing me on. As war was scaling up in Syria, Oxfam was trying to work with civilians on both sides of the conflict: how would we do that in



a way that was safe for all involved? That was the most pertinent discussion, but that does not in any way underestimate the seriousness of the Haiti issue and its follow up.

Q13 Richard Burden: The year before you were appointed, Helen Evans was appointed as head of safeguarding. Was she not starting to raise issues around how thoroughly Oxfam was looking at safeguarding issues well before 2015?

Mark Goldring: Helen Evans raised questions about the capacity of her team to do the thorough investigations. Nobody raised with me, up until the journalists began to inquire, around about January this year, any sense of discomfort with the way that the Haiti investigation had been carried out at the time. The real question was about whether we had resourced the team fully enough since. We continued to strengthen that team through 2014-15 and indeed more recently, but prior to these current stories.

The one area where there was concern within the organisation that Helen did raise, and which we did respond to, was the systematic approach to whom we check and how we check them. That was in terms of the 25,000 people who work as volunteers and staff in our shops. In 2015 we appointed a senior former police officer with specialist skills to lead the work of overhauling the way we handled safeguarding in our shops. We extended the number of people who we checked, for example, to volunteers as well as staff who are left in the supervisory position. We rolled out significantly more training.

The work that Helen started was building and was gaining momentum. I do not think there were issues where Helen was saying, "I am worried about how this investigation has been carried out".

Q14 Richard Burden: In her Channel 4 interview, she said that she asked for direct face-to-face meetings to discuss her concerns. As I understand it, they covered issues of resourcing, allegations that had been made in parts of Oxfam's overseas operations, and, the last point you made there, the question of what was going on in Oxfam shops in the UK. Why were the alarm bells not ringing that actually prompted a face-to-face meeting?

Mark Goldring: Helen asked to come to our broader leadership team. Because, at that time, the issues she was raising were focused on concerns in a small number of countries, I asked her to deal directly with our programmes director, which she did in the month after. She also met with our lead trustee on safeguarding, and we followed up those concerns, which is why we strengthened the team in trading.

With hindsight, I am absolutely clear we should have followed this up in the same spirit that Winnie has described, more forcefully. However, we appointed more staff, we rolled out an overview of how we handled



HOUSE OF COMMONS

safeguarding in our trading department, and Helen herself has recognised the improvements that we made as a result.

Q15 **Mr Evans:** In the *Guardian* article, it said you had not slept for six days. What impact is this having on you?

Mark Goldring: The first thing, Mr Evans, is that I make no excuses. I make an apology for comparing what I was going through with the bigger picture. My first concern is the women of Haiti and anybody else who has been wronged as a result of Oxfam's programme. My second was to try to reassure our staff around the world that actually we were doing powerful work and this did not stop as a result. I should not have put my own sleep or lack of it in the public domain.

I have tried hard to balance work and sleep over the last two weeks. The results, I believe, are that I am continuing to do my job and I am continuing to make appropriate decisions. I hope I have led Oxfam competently, but that is for others to decide. I hope that I am helping our staff make the right decisions. The first thing to do is repeat my sorrow and my apology at what happened. The second is to work with my colleagues here and outside this room to make sure we have it right for the future.

Q16 **Mr Evans:** Since the *Times* story on 9 February we know that there have been changes to safeguarding. How many more revelations have come to your notice?

Mark Goldring: Across Oxfam Great Britain, we have had about 26 stories, reports come to us that were either new reports come out as a result of the stories, or earlier stories where people said, "I did not necessarily report this at the time", over an extended period of time. I am not talking about recent cases. What Winnie has done is stand up and say that we really want people to come forward, wherever they are and whenever this happened. Some of those cases relate to the UK; some of them relate to our international programme.

What we have done is, first, brought independent help in to support our own safeguarding team. I have to stress our safeguarding team have done very well. Any failings are not theirs. We have brought in independent help to support and scrutinise the way we handle it. Winnie has also made an absolutely explicit commitment that we will reinvestigate old cases if the commission feel that this is something we should do. The commission is the body that we want to oversee all future improvements.

Q17 **Mr Evans:** We have seen one or two revelations about Malawi, Nigeria and Chad. On the international scale, how many new cases are you aware of?

Winnie Byanyima: I would first say that I see that my priorities as the head of the global family are two: one is to make sure that that lifeline to people trapped in conflict and disasters stays there, and that people's



HOUSE OF COMMONS

lives are saved; secondly, we must make amends to the women who were abused.

Chair: Are you able to answer Mr Evans' question specifically?

Mark Goldring: I can answer it, yes. I can.

Chair: I think enlightenment came over your shoulder just then.

Winnie Byanyima: I have called out to people to come forward, and some people have come forward, saying they were afraid or they did not think they would get justice. I have announced an independent commission. We are compiling these cases and we will put them before the independent commission to advise us. If they ask us to reopen them, we will reopen them.

Q18 **Mr Evans:** Thank you for that. I think you have some fresh information.

Mark Goldring: Yes. Mr Evans, I was correct in telling you there are 26 cases that have come forward. Of those, 16 are in our international programmes. That means in any of the dozens of countries that we work in across the world. They range in timeframe from more recent events to long historic events, where people did not report them at the time but now feel it is right to do so, in response to the call that we have made.

Q19 **Chris Law:** I just want to explore this long-term unwillingness to speak out about some of the issues that were going on at Oxfam. Do you think there was a cultural issue within Oxfam itself because of the good work that it does around the world, and a fear of damaging the brand and the good work that there is? Was there no opportunity for those who are the victims of crimes that have been carried out, or for people who witnessed who worked for Oxfam, to speak out? Was there a place they could go, a safe place within Oxfam, to share their views and make sure they are heard and dealt with properly?

Caroline Thomson: I am Caroline Thomson. I am the chair of Oxfam. I started in October. I will not hold the Committee up with this, but I want to say, on behalf of the council of Oxfam, that we are ashamed of what happened in Haiti. We do not think it was well-handled. Our task now, and my task certainly, is to make sure that we move forward in a way that makes sure that we always operate with transparency and accountability. I welcome this opportunity to be with the Committee and be accountable to Members of Parliament, as representatives of the British public, to whom we owe a great debt. My task is to make sure that we never again can be at risk of being perceived as having put reputation over accountability. That is very important to me going forwards.

Mark Goldring: Can I build in on the specific question from Mr Law? At the time of the investigation into Haiti, there was no existing press interest. It was not public. Oxfam leaders made a report to the press that serious misconduct had happened, and they did not describe that in explicit terms. They did not describe the sexual misconduct. They did



HOUSE OF COMMONS

not describe the use of prostitutes. They talked about bullying and intimidation and serious breaches of Oxfam's code of conduct. At the time, people thought that was being transparent. We know now that was not enough. Under Caroline's leadership, she has explained exactly how we would handle things in the future.

As a result of the Haiti investigation and the internal commitment to improve after it, we set up a safeguarding team that can actually support the victims as well as help with the formal approach to justice. They can also do preventative work. We set up a helpline that was completely separate from management hierarchy, because that was one of the challenges and problems within Haiti.

What we have committed to more recently is that we will get more independent support for those, so that we can not just do the right job within Oxfam, but others can look in and say whether we are doing this in the correct way. I want to stress I attach no responsibility whatsoever to the people who were managing the whistleblowing line or the safeguarding team. That is the line in that we have used. That is the line in at the moment bringing through many of the complaints that Mr Evans asked about, where people are coming out and saying, "I did not report this at the time, but I am doing it now". We will use external help simply to manage that, as well as guide it through the commission that Winnie has announced.

Winnie Byanyima: In answer to your question, could I add something about our brand and reputation? Our view is that our reputation depends on how well we treat the people we work with. We cannot see one as a contradiction to the other. In fact, part of the evaluation of ourselves we do is to check in with our partners and find out, independently, what they think of our partnerships with them. We listen and try to be honest in our relationships with partners and respond to where they criticise us. We care. Our brand is not about us being seen out there and hiding our weaknesses. Our brand depends on good relationships with people we work with.

Q20 Chris Law: You can understand, from our point of view—the panel and obviously the wider public—that it seems like there is a sense of cover up. It seems like there have been years of stagnation, of not being able to open up and have a real proper self-critical analysis. For example, when one individual goes from Oxfam to another organisation, surely you would have references that follow afterwards, explaining the conduct of this person, as well as what their skills are, so that another organisation can make a proper assessment of whether or not they are fit for their purpose. That does not seem to be coming across at all. Is that the case?

Going back to my original point—I am not just talking about Oxfam; maybe it is wider—is it a culture of trying not to damage what you are already doing, and the good work that you do? As a result, you are internally causing damage by employing some wrong individuals and



keeping it quiet as a result.

Mark Goldring: I will try to give you an answer in two parts, one to the bigger picture of reputation and the other to the specific of references. My colleagues at the time made a set of decisions as to how public to go. Not all organisations choose to go public at all. With hindsight, they made the wrong call as to how public to be. If we were culpable, which we were, they should have been completely transparent. That is the commitment that Caroline has made that she will lead.

At the time, I suspect there was a balance of saying, "Oxfam is delivering lifesaving assistance to 1 million people in Haiti in 2011. We have to keep that work going, but we also have to be public that we have failed". They made a decision and we think that decision was wrong.

In terms of references, I have looked at the references that Oxfam gave for Mr van Hauwermeiren. The specific response said, "Oxfam is not able to complete the reference form you request. We are unable to do so. He served between 2006 and 2011 in the following capacities." That was not enough. We should have been more proactive, but that is what Oxfam stated in his respect. We should have said, "Please call us. There is cause for concern", or we can simply say nothing. It was believed at the time that a statement of service was the minimum obligation that we had, particularly because Oxfam had, wrongly, allowed him to resign. I am not defending that. I am explaining that.

What we have tried to do now, and the work that we are on with other British and international agencies is to say, "How can we get beyond that?" How can we avoid the issues of legality, data protection and libel, and actually be much clearer, as we did with one of the other employees, and actually say, "We cannot give any reference for this person. He was dismissed for gross misconduct"? That is what we should be able to do, on a systematic basis.

I also saw the references that Oxfam got for Mr van Hauwermeiren when he was first employed. They gave no cause for concern. I am deeply concerned, as you have said, Mr Law, about the idea that people can move on and that we do not put public interest first. That is the commitment we have made. We are working as hard and as fast as we can with other agencies on that.

Q21 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** We will come back later on some of the other questions about the legal challenges that you have said you face. You have said that a number of times. Before I do that, I just wanted to ask some questions about where the safeguarding team feeds into. You have set up this new safeguarding unit. Does it feed to yourself? Does it feed directly to the board of trustees? At what level is that head of safeguarding?

Mark Goldring: The safeguarding team was set up in 2011 as a direct response to the cases of 2010 and 2011. The head of safeguarding



HOUSE OF COMMONS

reports to the head of internal audit and also has a line through to a lead trustee, who is one of our voluntary trustees sitting under Caroline. The head of safeguarding reports to the leadership team, now on a quarterly basis now. That was not the case historically. We also have an absolute commitment that, if she has concerns on individual cases, that is handled directly with the Charity Commission and other authorities as need be.

Caroline Thomson: Can I just add to that from a governance point of view? The safeguarding group meets quarterly. As we were saying, the head of safeguarding has a direct line to trustees, to the lead trustee in safeguarding. The lead trustee in safeguarding chairs something called the audit and finance committee, which has received quarterly reports on safeguarding and is now receiving an annual report to look at the bigger causes and bigger pictures. That then feeds into the broader council agenda.

Q22 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Has the head of safeguarding attended trustee meetings?

Caroline Thomson: Yes. For example, the head of safeguarding came to the meeting in October. I have checked through the trustee audit and finance committee and both Helen and her successor, Hannah, have had direct access to the trustee audit and finance committee.

Q23 **Chair:** Do they have direct access to you? If they had a concern, could they come directly to you, as chair of trustees?

Caroline Thomson: Yes. They certainly could come direct to me.

Q24 **Chair:** Have they done?

Caroline Thomson: One of the things I did as part of my induction in October was have a meeting with Hannah, the current head of safeguarding, direct, where she was able to spend an hour and a bit talking to me about things.

Q25 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Is there a direct line? Could they ring up at any time and say, "Can we have a meeting?" and it would be a yes, or do they have to go through a procedure? Is it direct or is it intermediary?

Caroline Thomson: Under the current arrangements, I would expect the normal procedure to be that they would talk to the trustee who is the lead on safeguarding, whose mobile phone number, as far as I know, they have. They certainly have regular meetings.

However, what I should just say is that, having looked at the situation we are now in and at the agenda that the audit and finance committee meeting has, I have decided that we need to have more focus on safeguarding. We are going to take all the safeguarding issues out into a special council sub-committee, which I will chair. Going forward, for the action plan that we are now developing to minimise the chance of anything like this happening again, I will take personal responsibility for



holding Mark to account for delivering it, together with the honorary officers, and indeed for the direct link to the safeguarding unit.

Q26 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** On whistleblowing, is that a similar process—that there is a way that staff members can contact someone, either in the trustees or someone independent, directly?

Caroline Thomson: There is a whistleblowing hotline, which was set up in 2011. We are now strengthening that and it will be run completely independent of management. Where it goes to when they have done the whistleblowing obviously depends upon the nature of the complaint. The council of Oxfam Great Britain receives an annual report on whistleblowing. If there are any big significant issues that come up in between, of course there is constant monitoring of those and an obligation to report them.

Winnie Byanyima: We have different arrangements with different organisations of Oxfam, but we have been bringing it together. Now, increasingly we are looking at an external whistleblowing system, so that people can feel safe and able to report, and not feel that they could be victimised. This is a system that is already working for Oxfam America, one of our organisations. Oxfam UK has been looking at using the same system. A number of others are also joining the external whistleblowing system.

Q27 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** It is about making sure that all the Oxfam branches around the world operate in the same system.

Winnie Byanyima: We are working on that.

Q28 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Over the weekend my office spoke to a number of people who work not just for Oxfam but work in the Middle East and Africa. Their response was that not only does prostitution and rape happen in all the sector, but they said that—and this is a quote—“no one grasses” as the process in many agencies is that everyone might be sent home. This means that you can lose your additional high pay money, if you are in a danger area, and that everyone is tarnished with the brush of misdemeanours.

I also know that yesterday the HR director met with Unite the Union. Unite have asked for a guarantee that this work will be done with the union and that staff who report complaints about other staff and actions are given protection. They have not yet received that cast-iron guarantee. I wonder if here is a moment that you could give it on the record, so Unite is happy and those people are happy: that any staff member that reports bad behaviour, first, will have no persecution against them, unless of course they have actually done something wrong, and will be protected, and, secondly, will not be automatically moved out of country, and the whole country team will not be swept away. The danger is that they will keep quiet. Can you give me those reassurances?



Caroline Thomson: I can certainly give you an assurance that no one who makes a complaint will be victimised in any way. I am rather shocked that people do not understand that at the moment, because that is the position at the moment. I would give a personal guarantee that would be the case. Clearly the dreadful events in 2011 well predated me as well as Mark, but actually, at its maximum, Oxfam had 500 people working in Haiti. Seven or eight of them ended up leaving. The rest of the team carried on doing incredible, fantastic work, helping the people of Haiti, so I think that ought to provide comfort to those who are concerned at the moment.

Q29 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Will you make sure you get back in touch with Unite so they are 100% sure that there will be those reassurances?

Mark Goldring: Can I reply to that, Mr Chairman?

Chair: Very briefly. We have a lot more to cover.

Mark Goldring: As soon as I got the letter from Unite I responded to say we were happy to meet with them. That seemed better than responding to a long list of questions, and we have done that. The whistleblowing line is anonymous. When I have had issues that have come to me for my attention related to the whistleblowing line, I have never known who the complaint was made by. I would certainly reiterate, from a management perspective, the assurances that Caroline has given you.

Q30 **Chair:** We are going to move on in a moment to dig a bit more into Haiti and how it was handled. I have two supplementary questions to the evidence that you have given so far, Mr Goldring. One is just to pursue a bit further this issue of reporting serious incidents to the Charity Commission. Are you able to confirm that you have always reported serious incidents of sexual misconduct to the Charity Commission during your time in position?

Mark Goldring: I certainly believe so. If I can bring that to life, last year we had about 87 reports of incidents across Oxfam Great Britain in the UK and internationally, among a workforce of about 30,000 volunteers and staff. 50 of those related to our shops and our trading operation. Many of them did not relate to incidents that happened in them. They could have been issues of domestic abuse in the home that somebody brought to work. We sort those. We report the ones that are relevant to the relevant authorities, whether it be the police or social services. We reported about 35 incidents to the Charity Commission, and those are the ones where we think there is an issue for Oxfam, rather than an issue for other authorities. In many cases, we have followed up with further detail where that has been relevant.

Caroline Thomson: It might just be worth adding that, in reporting the 35 incidents to the Charity Commission, that comes through the governance unit to me and the honorary officers to sign off.

Q31 **Chair:** Earlier you told us about the 26 recent cases. Tell us more about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

these 26. Are these similar sorts of issues to what happened in Haiti, or are they issues that relate to allegations of rape or other forms of sexual violence?

Mark Goldring: I am sorry. I will have to update you on that after the meeting. It has all happened in the last two weeks. My belief would be that this is a direct response to the publicity and therefore will be the full range of concerns, from the very serious to somebody who felt perhaps something was not dealt with properly in the past. I do not want to give you a misleading picture.

Q32 **Chair:** Could you write to us with that response as soon as possible?

Mark Goldring: We can report back with that response. I have given you the breakdown of where the issues happened. If I look at the 87 cases of last year, they related from the very serious to the minor. Because we have young people and vulnerable people volunteering in our shops, we report everything, and indeed we published this summary in our last annual reports. We then try to sift and ensure that the right references and follow-ups are made.

Q33 **James Duddridge:** I am surprised you say you published the summaries. I am looking at page 24, which goes through roughly the same numbers, but it does not seem to have any more detail. Setting that aside, the next three paragraphs are on this issue. It says, "Under-reporting is recognised within the sector". Oxfam are in the crosshairs and it feels a little bit like a potential Ratner moment for you, but is it not the truth that this is a cross-sectoral issue? If it had not been Oxfam it could have easily been a different organisation, or a multilateral like the UN in front of us, having had a scandal exposed.

Mark Goldring: Mr Russell-Moyle quoted from your constituency work, where you are saying people are talking generally about the sector. Oxfam believes it has well-developed systems and processes, although not good enough. We have made that commitment. Every agency needs to have those systems.

Q34 **James Duddridge:** Have you got a feel for the size of underreporting, and whether it is a scale of two or 10? It feels like this could be exponential.

Mark Goldring: What our safeguarding team are aware of, and the 26 cases that Mr Twigg just asked about, would give a sense that, at the time, some people choose to report and some people do not choose to report. Some speak to a friend but do not report it and will not allow them to report it formally, so we are hearing more stories.

It is not right for me to look at other agencies. What I can do is say over time there have been stories in the media about peacekeepers and about international aid workers that have consistently come up. If any good can come out of the horror of both Haiti and the last couple of weeks, it is a more intensive commitment across the whole sector that we root this



out. That is both in the practical way by encouraging reporting, which Oxfam has tried to do, but also in the way that Winnie was describing, which is getting to grips with culture, power relations, responsibility and values. That is the real commitment that we are having to step up to.

Chair: We are now going to drill a bit more into some of the specifics around Haiti. I am conscious of the fact that you did not hold responsibility at the time and we are, as I announced at the beginning, going to be conducting a fuller inquiry. I am sure that, as part of that, we will seek to bring to give evidence those who did have responsibility at the time. I am going to hand over to Pauline. I should put on record the Committee's appreciation to Pauline, who has been speaking out about these issues following things that she heard at the World Humanitarian Summit in Turkey two years ago.

Q35 **Mrs Latham:** I just want to go back to a couple of things that you said. You said there is no blame for the safeguarding team. Surely there is blame, because they were not doing their job adequately to bring to your attention—or you were not listening—things that were happening within Oxfam. I found it quite shocking that you said that when you first came into post you were briefed on it, but actually you were very focused on Syria on both sides. Does it mean that, as head of this organisation, you can only deal with one problem at a time? Surely that is not the right sort of person for the job, if you cannot deal with a multitude of things. You are obviously being paid a lot of money to do this job. Surely you should be able to deal with more than one thing. It should not just be, "I am now focused on Syria so I cannot deal with all that, because it is too difficult to do".

Mark Goldring: I am sorry if I gave the impression that I could not deal with multiple things.

Mrs Latham: That is what you said.

Mark Goldring: That was not my intention. My point was that at the time I was given clear assurances that the Haiti case had been well-handled, it had been properly closed, action had been taken, and there was a work programme of improvement that had been put in place straightaway.

Q36 **Mrs Latham:** Haiti would not have been the only problem that Oxfam were having. They would not have been the only thing you were being briefed about. There would have been other country problems. We have heard about three other African countries. There would have been more. What you are saying is you thought that was okay, that was fine, they had dealt with that, push that to one side and, "Now I am going to think about Syria and Syria alone".

Mark Goldring: I certainly was not thinking about Syria alone. I am dealing with dozens of countries and issues every day and every week. The issue I was trying to say was that I felt at the time that my job was



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to work on how Oxfam could improve. I had no reason to believe I should reopen the Haiti case. I am not saying I was working on only one issue. I am saying that I believed that my job was to actually apply that learning to Oxfam's work around the world. That is what I was trying to do at the time.

Q37 Mrs Latham: Actually you have failed on that. You have not made it so much better, because this is all coming out now. It is not just Haiti. There have been other instances that perhaps have not got into the media yet that will do, because it will come out in the open.

Mark Goldring: As I responded to an earlier question, we report the summary. We investigate every single case and report the serious ones to the Charity Commission. There will always be individual cases in any organisation, whether it is international or not. Our job is to minimise them, to repeat the unacceptability of it and to drive them out of our organisation. That is what I have tried to do, and I believe we have made really progress in doing that. I fully acknowledge we have not made enough progress, which is why the step change that Winnie has been describing is something that we are all backing.

Q38 Mrs Latham: You were appointed in 2013 and we are now 2018. I want to go on to Haiti now. One of the reasons that you said that you did not report the matter of prostitution to the Haitian police was that you believed it was extremely unlikely that any action would be taken. Prostitution is illegal in Haiti. Should Oxfam not have reported the matter anyway?

Mark Goldring: Oxfam should have reported the matter to the Haitian authorities. It was not for Oxfam to decide whether a crime had been committed or not. Something that was serious and undermined the rule of law and public confidence in Haiti should have been reported to the relevant Haitian authorities. I can only apologise that Oxfam did not do that. That was a decision that was made at the time, having taken advice. It was the wrong decision.

Q39 Mrs Latham: Why did Oxfam believe the advice that it was given about the likelihood of any action being taken? Why did you think that, as Oxfam? Where was the substantiated case that you could prove that they would take no notice of it?

Mark Goldring: I can only believe that advice was taken within Haiti at the time. I do not know who the advice was sought from. I have not seen the specifics of the advice myself. I repeat that I think that Oxfam should have reported it in Haiti in 2011.

Q40 Mrs Latham: Knowing that the media and other people are spotlighting on to Haiti, you have not looked at the evidence. I find that completely astonishing. This has been running for over a week.

Mark Goldring: I have looked at the evidence. I have not been able to find any evidence as to whom Oxfam spoke with. I have looked at all



evidence that I have been able to find. I have not been able to track back to who took that advice, informally, verbally or in writing. I have seen a range of different advice given at the time, including from legal advisers in the UK as to what we said in the UK, but I have not seen advice as to what we said in Haiti.

Q41 Mrs Latham: Prostitutes are victims. They are not doing it because they want to be prostitutes. In this particular case, they were probably doing it so that they could get some aid from Oxfam. It is believed—and I would like to know what you think—that some of them would have been between the ages of 14 and 16. The legal age of consent in Haiti is 18, so how can you justify not reporting these failings and these matters to the Haitian authorities?

These poor girls have had a natural disaster. You, as an organisation, along with others, would have gone in there promising to help. You are talking about some pretty vulnerable women and girls in that situation, who are looking to Oxfam and others to help them get through this terrible situation. You are not telling me those girls said, “We are prostitutes, so we will come and entertain you in the evening”, for any reason other than they want some help.

You, as an organisation, are dealing with these women and girls as if they are just trinkets, and you can pay for them and give them a bit of aid and that is okay. When you know about it, the organisation does not report it to the Haitian authorities. That is pretty shocking.

Mark Goldring: Mrs Latham, I want to repeat that what Oxfam did in 2011 in Haiti was wrong. I was not in post, but I apologise for that. I am sorry. At the time, Oxfam conducted an investigation. It was wrong not to report that set of issues to the Haitian authorities and decide how they wanted to handle it. Part of the investigation that Oxfam carried out included trying to speak to the women involved. I fully accept your definition of the circumstances. I make no excuses there whatsoever. It interviewed as many of the women as it could trace. In those interviews, the women were asked their age and no evidence arose to suggest that they were under 18. That does not mean that no women were involved who were under 18, so the investigation concludes that we could not establish that any women were under 18.

Oxfam should have reported it, absolutely clearly, and it should have let the Haitian Government decide how they wanted to investigate, not just investigate it internally. The commitment that we have made under Caroline’s leadership is that we will always report to the relevant authorities, and we will work with them as to how they want to handle it.

Q42 Mrs Latham: The country director was not sacked. He left before you had concluded your evidence and before you had concluded the investigation. Has he ever been re-employed, or have any of those seven or eight people that left over Haiti been re-employed by Oxfam, in any capacity whatsoever?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mark Goldring: I believe that one person was re-employed as a contractor, so indirectly, by another Oxfam, not Oxfam Great Britain. That is a mistake. It should not have happened. It was a short-term contract in another country. It was a failing.

Chair: Was it done knowingly?

Mrs Latham: It is a complete failing.

Mark Goldring: Yes.

Q43 **Mrs Latham:** As the Chairman said, did you know, as an organisation, that this person had been involved before?

Mark Goldring: I know that Oxfam Great Britain warned all the other Oxfams, including a list of names, about not re-employing these people.

Q44 **Mrs Latham:** It is completely shocking that you should even contemplate re-employing them, however short a time, ever. These men were predators on young women.

Mark Goldring: I quite agree. I am not excusing it.

Winnie Byanyima: That is why we have now set up a global database of accredited referees of Oxfam.

Q45 **Mrs Latham:** When was that started?

Winnie Byanyima: We have just started it. That is true.

Q46 **Mrs Latham:** You just started it, only because you were found out, not because you actually wanted to do it or thought you needed to do it, but because you were found out.

Winnie Byanyima: Not really. We had been working with our peers to establish a way of vetting humanitarian workers, but we were not making progress because of different legal jurisdictions and the complexity of doing this across many countries.

Q47 **Chair:** Sorry to interrupt, but when you say "our peers", who do you mean: other organisations in aid, or different Oxfams in different countries?

Winnie Byanyima: Yes, other international NGOs working in the humanitarian sector. We were not making sufficient progress, so we have decided on our own to make our own system of ensuring that references coming from Oxfam are genuine, not fake.

Q48 **Chair:** As Pauline says, it has basically taken the last 10 days and this scandal for you to do that. Had this not blown up in the *Times* 10 days ago, then you would not have done it. Is that a fair summary of the situation?

Winnie Byanyima: To the extent that we have made this decision on the global database, yes, but in terms setting up a taskforce to look at these issues, we have been working on this since November.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q49 **Chair:** If we had not had the events of the last 10 days, you would still be struggling with these other NGOs, the legal jurisdictions and all of that, and the database would not be being set up. It is a direct consequence.

Caroline Thomson: It is right to admit that this has been a real wake-up call, not just for Oxfam, but for the whole sector. It is timely and important that it happened, and I am sorry that we did not do these things earlier.

Q50 **Mrs Latham:** I have been talking about this for two years and nobody has taken any notice, not least the sector itself. Apparently, when I went to this conference in Turkey, everybody was talking about it across a panel; it was common knowledge. Everybody knew this had happened. Everybody knew that the aid sector was pretty rotten, because it had got all these people who were abusing women and girls regularly in all countries. Nobody—not one organisation—was actually tackling it and doing a thing about it. That is shocking. You are all supposed to be good people trying to help the world, but it would appear that you are not as good as you should be.

Winnie Byanyima: Mrs Latham, it is really heart-breaking that we are in this situation.

Mrs Latham: It is.

Winnie Byanyima: I want to assure you that we were not doing nothing. We were working on it, but we have reached a point where the world has woken up to the abuse of women and girls in a very special way, and we find ourselves not to have done enough. We did something. We have been improving every year, but we are not where we want to be. We admit that.

Q51 **Mrs Latham:** Your organisations are not the victims in this. It is the women and girls who are being abused by the men that you employ, and other aid agencies. This is so shocking; no wonder the world is angry, and no wonder people are questioning whether any money should be given to charities. Sadly, the people who should benefit from this are the poor people in the different countries, and they are going to lose out because of all of your behaviours in the aid sector.

Winnie Byanyima: I can say that, indeed, some people entered our system who did not share our values. They abused the trust of Oxfam and the power of Oxfam in their hands, they abused the trust of the British public who contribute, and they turned on the very people they were supposed to protect. It is true. I am deeply, deeply sorry for that.

I know personally this lifeline that we give to people caught in conflict and in disasters. I came to this country as a teenager fleeing a brutal dictatorship in my country and benefitted from the generosity of British people. We must keep going with that lifeline, but we will clean up.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mrs Latham: Absolutely. It must happen.

Q52 **Mr Evans:** On the back of Pauline's question, Mr Goldring, how many subscriptions have been cancelled to Oxfam following the revelations?

Mark Goldring: I think about 7,000 individuals have cancelled a regular donation to Oxfam over the last 10 days.

Q53 **Mr Evans:** It is a massive impact. Have any corporate sponsors severed their connections?

Mark Goldring: Corporate sponsors at the moment are reserving judgment. They want to look at what we have done, what our policies and procedures are, how their particular relationship may have been compromised, and indeed what we are setting in place for the future.

Q54 **Mr Evans:** Of the new cases that are coming to light, even though some of them are historic, taking regard of sex tourism rules that exist throughout the world, will you now be passing that information on to the relevant police authorities in the domestic countries?

Mark Goldring: We have made an absolute commitment that if there is a possibility that a crime has been committed, we will pass that information on. What I have done already is write to the Governments of the seven countries from which the perpetrators in Haiti came, and explained what we found them culpable of. I have also given that full list to the Haitian Government. Our commitment is that we will report anything that may be a crime. It is not for Oxfam to decide whether it is a crime; if it is potentially illegal, our job is to make sure the relevant authorities, whether they be civil or police, are informed.

Winnie Byanyima: Could I add something here? Oxfam works at any one time in more than 40 crisis countries. I will tell you in one moment. We have a long history that started here in 1942. On the ground, things are very complex. You find in some countries there are laws against prostitution, but the practice is that it is women who are pursued for being prostitutes, not the men who buy sex. In other countries, it is only women who are under the law prohibited from prostitution; the law does not touch men. In providing this information to authorities, we must always be conscious: are we risking the very women who have been abused by doing this? It is not very simple.

Q55 **Mr Evans:** I appreciate that, but we have domestic laws in the United Kingdom and other countries where we can pursue wrongdoers here for what they have done. We must not forget that. I realise this was out of your purview, because you came in 2013, but when Andrew Mitchell was Secretary of State, he seems to suggest that in the discussions that Oxfam had with the Permanent Secretary then, the gravity of the situation really did not come to light. In the discussions that you have had with the Permanent Secretary, how far have the DFID officials drilled down into the seriousness of allegations about the sexual problems that existed in Haiti and other countries?



Mark Goldring: It is completely fair to say that Oxfam did not tell the Department for International Development enough. Oxfam contacted every donor that had given money for that appeal. DFID was not among those donors. As, in a sense, the parent Government of Oxfam Great Britain, Oxfam also contacted DFID. It did not say enough, and Mr Mitchell's assurance that he did not realise the gravity is absolutely backed up by our evidence.

Q56 **Mr Evans:** Since you have taken over, at what stage have you started to give full information about what is going on or what has gone on?

Mark Goldring: What I did with the Secretary of State last week was call on her at her request, give her a copy of the full investigation report, and give her a full picture of what had happened and what Oxfam did afterwards. We have assured the Charity Commission, which is our primary regulator no matter where the money comes from, that we will not use words like "sexual misconduct", which is what we used in our report to it. We will actually spell things out, and then it can make a much more informed decision as to whether it wants to follow that through.

We do see the Charity Commission as our prime source of formal accountability, because the money may or may not come from DFID. Where we are really concerned, and where I add my apology, is that DFID is trying to be a global leader in aid, development, humanitarianism, and indeed in tackling violence against women, and anything we do that undermines that effort of the British Government and people is compromising and we should not do it.

Mr Evans: I appreciate that. That is why I am not delving too far back before your time. All we have got is what Andrew Mitchell said when he was Secretary of State, and you have conceded that that was the case: that your officials or your predecessor were not as forthcoming. What I am really interested in now is the discussions DFID officials have had with you. How often do they raise the case of sexual malpractice in projects around the world? How rigorous are they in drilling down with you these days?

Chair: Nigel, you do not just mean in the last week; you mean through the five years.

Q57 **Mr Evans:** I mean ever since you took over the position. How interested have they been in the issues that Pauline has been raising?

Mark Goldring: DFID is an important funder of Oxfam on specific projects. We do not get general funds from DFID. Around 10% of our turnover per year comes from DFID. As the representative of the British Government, we have a bigger obligation. Our detailed accountability is to the Charity Commission. What we have committed to the Secretary of State is we will actually give her details of all of these new cases that have come up.



Q58 **Mr Evans:** In essence, Mr Goldring, what you are saying is that discussions between permanent officials and yourselves on this issue really have not been all that detailed until now.

Mark Goldring: On individual cases where they have related to the British government funding, I believe we have kept them well-informed. Where we have funds from other sources, it has been much more a sense of, "What do we do together to pick up on the kinds of issues that Mrs Latham was talking about?" The former Foreign Secretary really took a lead on tackling sexual violence. We have tried to contribute at that strategic level.

Q59 **Mr Evans:** But you have never got the sense that Permanent Secretaries or other officials within DFID have raised this issue as being something that is endemic in aid work in certain parts of the world?

Mark Goldring: The British Government have shown real leadership in saying this is a problem not just about the behaviour of aid workers, but that violence against women and abuse of women is something the British Government have given real priority to. We have tried to work with them on that. We have also made a commitment to them consistently that there should not be any surprises from Oxfam that undermine it.

Q60 **Mr Evans:** How often have you spoken with the Permanent Secretaries about sexual malpractice?

Mark Goldring: I cannot say that I have spoken to the Permanent Secretaries or indeed Ministers about sexual malpractice in Oxfam until these issues have arisen now. I have spoken to leaders of DFID, both political and civil servants, about working together to tackle violence against women and abuse of women. We have tried to work on a sectoral basis—and indeed are now doing so—to respond to things like the passporting that we talked about.

Q61 **Mr Sharma:** Mark, you mentioned many times that you were answerable mainly to the Charity Commission, but when Oxfam reported the matter to the Charity Commission, it failed to mention that crimes had been committed. I do not know the reasons behind that, but it is true. Minors may have been involved. Why was there that failure? Why was that omitted?

Mark Goldring: Mr Sharma, I cannot defend that decision. I do not defend that decision. The report Oxfam made at the time in 2011 talked about sexual misconduct, bullying and intimidation, breaches of Oxfam's code of conduct and unacceptable behaviour. I believe my colleagues at the time thought that that was sufficiently transparent. I am not defending it, I do not justify it, and we have committed that we will go further. I can see why the Charity Commission says that that was not enough.



At the time, the inquiry report, which I believe you have, said that Oxfam was unable to establish, or there was no proof, that women under 18 were involved, despite the investigation. We should have actually said exactly that, rather than simply leaving it out. My colleagues did what they thought was sufficiently transparent at the time. We know now that was not transparent enough. Our commitment is that we will give the details to the relevant authorities, whether in the countries concerned or in the UK, and we will let them work out what is right and wrong and how we should follow it up. We will co-operate with that.

Q62 Mr Sharma: Do you agree that it was a deliberate way of hiding the truth from the general public when you failed to include such an important part of that complaint to the Charity Commission?

Mark Goldring: I can fully see why the public has a challenge to any confidence in what Oxfam said and did at the time. We now have to work very hard to earn back that trust from the public, and will not earn it by words; we will earn it by deeds. At the time, my colleagues reflected and decided on a form of words that they thought was sufficiently transparent, which included "sexual misconduct". We know that that was not sufficient. Telling half a story is not enough; we have to go further. Especially if we want to set ourselves up to be trusted by the public, we have actually got to say we will go the extra mile and will be unequivocal in the way we handle this. That is the commitment that we have all made.

Q63 James Duddridge: Earlier, in response to Mr Evans, you conflated prevention of sexual violence as perpetrated in country by people in country. Should we not expect a higher standard of people from a European environment with a European set of laws who are funded by the taxpayer and funded by small donations? Could I give you the opportunity to split those two things out? I do not think they are equivalent in any way, shape, or form.

Mark Goldring: I am sorry if I gave that impression. I was trying to respond to what Oxfam had talked with the Department of International Development about. I was saying that we had talked more on the bigger issue, not on the specific behaviour of organisations. Oxfam has got to be held to the absolute highest standards of personal behaviour. Those individuals came from seven different countries around the world, not including the UK, but they were being managed by a UK agency and we take full responsibility for that.

We have got to work on this at a cultural level in the way that Winnie described, so that our values are driven through everything from how we collect references to how we give them at the other end, and everything in between—the training, the behaviour, the accountability. Their behaviour was not acceptable. It was not acceptable that Oxfam tolerated it, or indeed that it let certain individuals resign rather than actually go through a formal disciplinary process. You have our complete



commitment that we do not accept those standards and we will not live with them.

Q64 **James Duddridge:** Can I probe the Charity Commission's submission, where there was a statement that there was categorically no abuse of beneficiaries? I am just trying to get a grasp of what a beneficiary is. I think what you are saying there is there was no transaction: "For aid or for some food, I expect you to have sex". Is there not a much wider definition of beneficiary, in that nobody goes into prostitution as an alternative to a well-paid job somewhere else? These are desperate people that we were trying to help collectively as a community, and those people should be defined as beneficiaries.

Mark Goldring: I completely agree. Oxfam used "beneficiary" to mean those in direct receipt of Oxfam assistance. In fact, the whole population of Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas, and indeed much of Haiti, were beneficiaries in the wider sense, of which they were affected by the earthquake or were living in poverty whether or not they were affected by the earthquake. Therefore, Oxfam trying to distinguish in a technical way was not the right thing to do. The investigators were trying to say there was not selling of sex in return for Oxfam aid, but actually there was a much bigger failing and a much bigger misdemeanour.

Q65 **James Duddridge:** Do you think there is sex for aid going on, not just in Oxfam, but intuitively as more comes out? Do you think it happens?

Winnie Byanyima: I just want to say that this categorisation is not even something we should give much attention to. This is about abuse of power. This is about abuse of women and girls because they are powerless, they are vulnerable and they are voiceless. Whether they have given them some money from an Oxfam programme or from their pocket as their salary, it is still abhorrent and we are ashamed. I am hurt about it. We are going to root it out of our organisation. It is, as I said, a cultural issue. We have to fight it as a cultural issue. It is also an issue of systems and procedures.

Q66 **James Duddridge:** I do not think it is a cultural issue; I think it is a legal issue. I disagree with you.

Winnie Byanyima: A legal issue, yes. I agree.

Q67 **Richard Burden:** Could we go back to the issue of references? You said that the former country director of the Haiti office went on to work for other NGOs, and that what Oxfam provided was a record of when he worked for Oxfam, rather than a reference in the traditional sense. There were seven men involved, though, in those incidents in Haiti. Did any of them have references on Oxfam paper?

Mark Goldring: To the best of my knowledge, one did. One gave as his referee one of the other staff in the Haiti office who was his senior, who then got sent a form by another agency to fill in and filled it in as from Oxfam. It had no official Oxfam stamp, but it was as from Oxfam. Because the reference went straight to the former manager to be written,



he filled it in having left Oxfam's employment as an individual, but said, "I was the manager of that person".

That is the one instance that I have come across in which an innocent third party—as in another agency—could reasonably believe that the reference had come from Oxfam, even though it had not come from the institution. To prevent any ability of that to happen again, we have now introduced the improvements that we have been talking about. We will only allow references to come through certain channels. We should have been aware that was a risk that could happen, but obviously we could not stop the individuals doing it. We need something that is more proactive, which is effectively the central register that goes across all agencies. That is what we are now trying to explore.

Winnie Byanyima: I have directed that no Oxfam reference will be given until we have that database. No references are going out now.

Caroline Thomson: It is just important to add for clarity that the manager who gave the reference was one of the group who had been dismissed.

Q68 **Richard Burden:** Could we go back to the 2011 report that you were briefed on when you took over? One of the recommendations of that report was that all regional management teams were to review learnings from Haiti, and to consider potential risk countries and any further actions needed. That was meant to be carried out by December 2011. Were you briefed that that was one of the results that came out of that investigation?

Mark Goldring: I was not briefed specifically on that. I was told that all necessary follow-up actions had been taken, that it had been followed up at country and regional level, and that certain central actions, such as the setting up of the safeguarding team and the whistleblowing line, had been carried out. It was not that my briefing was specific on that recommendation, but the sense that this had been appropriately followed up was the sense that I was very clearly given.

Q69 **Richard Burden:** Has there ever been an organisation-wide review of potential risk countries? If so, what are they?

Mark Goldring: We have been well aware of the high-risk countries, and we have tried to put extra work into them. They tend to be the countries with the highest levels of conflict and destabilisation of government and civil authorities. At the moment, we would put places like Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan in that very high risk level. Any country where you have an immediate natural disaster is always a high risk, because there are people who, as in Haiti, have had their lives traumatised. What we try to do is actually put protection teams in at an early stage of our response to ensure we work on both the practical front and the safety front at the same time.

Q70 **Richard Burden:** One of the other recommendations was that when



HOUSE OF COMMONS

regional management team staff or headquarter senior staff visit countries, they should arrange a meeting with female staff only, where they explore issues of culture, ways of working, and any problems. Does that happen?

Caroline Thomson: As part of my induction into Oxfam, I have done visits, one to Zambia and one to Pakistan. It was made clear to me right at the beginning that one of the things I should do was have this meeting with female-only staff. I did it in both cases. My predecessor, I know, did it religiously every time she visited. It is as much about building trust as anything else. It is about giving people an opportunity, giving women a voice, and making sure that they have a safe place where they can report things or even just give indications about problems and malpractice in the running of the unit.

Q71 **Richard Burden:** Is that done as a matter of course by senior staff?

Mark Goldring: By all senior female staff.

Caroline Thomson: It is very important it is done by the women staff. Sorry; I should have made that clear.

Q72 **Richard Burden:** When was that brought in?

Mark Goldring: It was certainly happening by the time I joined in 2013. It is something that my predecessor did that other senior staff have done. All I can say is that it was in place by 2013. It was not something that I had to get involved in starting.

Q73 **Mrs Latham:** I just wanted to ask a really quick question about the references that you give. It is quite common practice in a lot of organisations that references are shown or are available to the employee who is seeking them to go on to another job. Is that Oxfam's practice? Are they available to your employees?

Mark Goldring: I will have to get back to you on the universality of that, but I do not think it is normal practice. In other words, if I am asked for a reference, I feel no obligation to show it to the individual. If something is being shown to the individual, I would expect that to have been agreed and be shared with the person to whom you are giving the reference. It is not a standard practice.

Q74 **Mrs Latham:** It is not standard practice, so you can be completely honest in your references.

Mark Goldring: Yes.

Q75 **Mrs Latham:** But you are not, because you allow people to leave and move on to other jobs even though they are questionably perpetrators of sexual violence against women and girls.

Mark Goldring: I think the events you are describing were in 2011, when Oxfam gave a certificate of service. It should have gone beyond that.



Q76 **Mrs Latham:** I am not just talking about that; I am talking about others. You have been given a note, so I am sure it is clarified.

Mark Goldring: No. The note actually says that the statement of service that was given for Mr van Hauwermeiren in 2011 said, "We cannot complete the form that you asked us to complete". What I did not tell you before was that it says, "For legal reasons, we cannot say more". That is the note that I have just got. It then said, "He served from 2010 to 2014", but what I had not shared with you previously was that statement that this was actually said for legal reasons.

Q77 **Chris Law:** When Oxfam's internal investigation concluded in 2011, the statement issued to the public was hopelessly vague, quite frankly. Why did you not provide full details? Was it a cover up, or was it thumbs up and head in the sand?

Mark Goldring: I cannot give you the thinking of each individual. I can tell you what has been recorded and what we now know. Oxfam was trying to deliver a programme of desperately needed assistance to a million people. It was a huge programme with 500 staff. I believe that in making the decisions at the time, my predecessors would have looked at the balance of being proactive and actually saying, "We have got this wrong", wanting to reassure the public that money that should have been spent on beneficiaries had not been defrauded, and carrying on delivering that programme.

I do not defend that decision, but I believe those would have been the reasons that were primarily behind it at the time. I also need to say that Oxfam believed, wrongly, it was being proactive, in that not every organisation chooses to go out and tell the public about something that they have got badly wrong. That is not an excuse, but I suspect that the motivation was actually the power of delivery of what Oxfam was trying to do for a million people in desperate need.

Q78 **Chris Law:** I appreciate your comments, but, from our point of view, does it not look like that Oxfam was more interested in protecting its own brand than protecting vulnerable women and girls?

Mark Goldring: It may look like that, Mr Law, and I cannot do anything other than say I think it was wrong. I actually think that the first thought in the minds of my colleagues at the time would have been protecting the delivery of assistance to people who were living in poverty. That money had already been raised for Haiti. It was really important that it was well spent. I repeat: I do not think they made the right call, but I believe the call was made in good faith at the time.

Q79 **Paul Scully:** I have a very quick question on the back of that. Do you use or retain any PR or public affairs companies?

Mark Goldring: No, not normally. We will use companies that help us with creation of particular advertising at a given time for a fundraising campaign. We will use people who help us with creative design



HOUSE OF COMMONS

externally, but we have our own in-house team who manage our routine operations.

Q80 Paul Scully: Because of your reputation, do you perceive the way that you have to bid for government funding, and obviously to donors and generous members of the British public, to be a disincentive to being open and transparent?

Mark Goldring: Oxfam has tried to be open and transparent. It has not tried hard enough, and we have not always succeeded. For more than 10 years—before 2007—I think Oxfam has actually published a list of incidents in our annual report. Not many organisations do that. We have shared data with regulators; that is all of our obligation. We need to go further, and I suspect many times there is a really difficult question about how much we say and what the impact will be. I can reassure you that Caroline as chair has said absolutely explicitly that we will never allow Oxfam’s reputation to be put ahead of our absolute commitment to delivering our mission.

Q81 Paul Scully: I was going to turn to you, Caroline, anyway. I was just going to ask you to summarise what more you think the trustees should have done specifically in 2011 in response to the scandal?

Caroline Thomson: As I have said, I start from the premise that secrecy is anathema to trust, and that transparency is a really key tool in helping to root out this sort of behaviour and change the values of the organisation. It has a value beyond the accountability value, if you like, in terms of culture change. In 2011, it should have been made clear that the allegations were about prostitution. That should have been clear in the report to the Charity Commission, the report to DFID and in the press release. It should essentially just have been more explicit.

Q82 Paul Scully: Mr Goldring, one of the things that came out last week was that you do not specifically exclude the use of prostitution in your contracts because of the civil liberties of employees, which is slightly bizarre, in my view. Do you not, then, have a catch-all in your contract that would effectively cover that, i.e. “bringing into disrepute”? Essentially, in the 18 months that I have been on this Committee, the two things that DFID does is talk about tackling global poverty and “do no harm”.

Mark Goldring: We do have that catch-all. That should have covered it. It is absolutely clear that the behaviour at the time was contrary to Oxfam’s code of conduct.

Q83 Paul Scully: Would you say, then, that the use of prostitutes in a conflict zone or disaster zone, because they are, in the wider sense, beneficiaries, as we were talking about earlier, would automatically be against the employees’ code of conduct?

Mark Goldring: Yes.

Caroline Thomson: Yes. It is explicit in the code of conduct.



Q84 **Chair:** And it was not at the time explicit in the code of conduct?

Mark Goldring: It was not in that wording, but it was in the sense that Mr Scully talked about, which is anything that was exploitative. As Mr Duddridge has said, all of these relationships are exploitative. We fully accept that, and that is why we should not have accepted the resignation of individuals. In two cases, we had no choice, because they literally disappeared, but we should still have completed the hearing and found them culpable, and that is the practice that we now have.

Q85 **Paul Scully:** Was that another example of someone mis-speaking, then, when they said that it was not in there because of civil liberties? The report that came out said that the use of prostitution was not specifically excluded in the employee's contract so as not to offend the employee's civil liberties.

Mark Goldring: There are two things there. The code of conduct has always said exploitative relationships are absolutely prohibited. The code of conduct did not say that the use of prostitutes explicitly was. We should have just used that issue of bringing Oxfam into disrepute, power relations and all those other dimensions. We could have done that without worrying about legal jurisdictions.

Q86 **Chair:** Can I ask Ms Byanyima to comment on this particular aspect? I cut you off slightly earlier on.

Winnie Byanyima: The use of prostitutes in conditions of poverty, helplessness and conflict is exploitation and abuse. It is intolerable in our organisation. What happened to let the country director go away with some dignity was wrong. This is something that would not happen today in Oxfam. It hurts me that the organisation I serve can be today faced with the question about whether we put our reputation and our brand before the lives of people. Our reputation depends on the relationships with the people we serve. It is not there—there is no brand—if we abuse the people we serve.

I am going to make sure that Oxfam is that organisation: our plan of action, which I have put out, is precisely about that. It is our top priority right now to open our books to investigators who tell us what we need to do. It is about vetting the people who come in through accredited references. It is about increasing money for safeguarding and making sure that we do this job properly. Chair and honourable Members of Parliament, this organisation reaches 90 million people every year in 90 countries, most of them women trapped by war and disasters. Help us to get this right, to clean up, but to keep reaching people who need the British help.

Q87 **James Duddridge:** You said there was a list of all the cases in the report. Was that the annual report and accounts? The only thing I saw when I read through it last night was the three paragraphs. Was that a different report?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mark Goldring: No. We have, since I believe 2007, done a summary in our annual report, which was the summary numbers of the cases.

James Duddridge: Sorry. I thought that was an actual summary.

Mark Goldring: It is not a summary of the case. The details get reported to the relevant authorities. What we publish is the summary number of cases.

James Duddridge: Not a summary of the cases. I misunderstood.

Q88 **Henry Smith:** In your statement last week, you spoke about extending a review of the practices of recruitment and managing those people who are employed to work in challenging environments. Should you not have had that as part of your review before Oxfam was exposed as being negligent?

Mark Goldring: We should have done. We believed that we had sound recruitment systems that very occasionally failed. We now recognise that that is not good enough, and that what we need is something that goes right through the culture of the whole organisation. That includes recruitment systems, management, the commitment that we have been making to transparency and to drive things, and no tolerance whatsoever.

We launched in November a piece of work that was intended to help look at the whole employment cycle of staff. That work is underway and we have made a commitment to report on it as soon as it is finished. What Winnie has done in the last week is announce something that is much bigger. It looks at all the different strands of work, holds them together, asks if they are sufficient, and commits to make that public. We have had too many people whose behaviour is unacceptable and who have been allowed to work. We have to find better ways of making sure we do not recruit them in the first place, and indeed that they are reported to the relevant authorities.

Q89 **Henry Smith:** When is that review going to report?

Mark Goldring: The first report comes to our governing body, the council, in March.

Q90 **Henry Smith:** Ms Thomson, would you like to expand on the council's involvement?

Caroline Thomson: Yes, certainly. Thank you for the opportunity. When I arrived as chair in October, before this happened, I immediately commissioned an external review of our governance, because in the corporate world it is good practice to have external reviews every three years, but also because, particularly with the creation of new arrangements with Oxfam International, I thought our governance needed to be brought up to date.

Just a few weeks after that, we had the initial stories in the *Times* about safeguarding, so we immediately, working with the Charity Commission,



extended that review of governance. It is an external review done by a former Charity Commission member. We extended it to include our governance of safeguarding. I have seen the preliminary report. On safeguarding, it is making some really big recommendations about how we could improve our governance. It talks about the strengths as well as the weaknesses. That preliminary view has already been shared with the Charity Commission and will be coming to the council in March for action.

Q91 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: On that idea of looking at the recruitment of staff, I know that there have been a number of reports, including for example the sexualexploitationreport.org, which interviews a number of aid workers about sexual abuse in the aid sector over a number of years. Also, Unite the Union have raised the practices of short-term contracts, which often mean that aid workers who are the troublemakers, or who raise issues, are the ones who will not get their contract renewed, whereas the more established men in management will often be on permanent contracts. Is how the use of short-term contracts may prevent people from speaking out something that you need to urgently look at?

Winnie Byanyima: As a humanitarian organisation, we are committed to achieve speed and scale when disasters strike and conflict erupts. It is true we have a challenge of recruiting many people to work on an emergency; they must have a short contract, because then the emergency ends and they have to go. Short-term contracts have to be part of emergency work. The issue there is about having people who are already vetted, at least. That is why it is so important that humanitarian workers are also certified the way teachers and doctors are certified, so that we recruit from a pool of already vetted people when there is an emergency. This is something we are championing.

Q92 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: [Sexualexploitationreport.org](http://sexualexploitationreport.org), for example, lists how junior aid workers are being sexually assaulted by senior management in aid organisations. It is not just about making sure the short-term staff are vetted. It is about making sure the short-term staff are also not victims of some management failure.

Caroline Thomson: You are hitting on a really important issue for us. In November, we also started a review by an external consultant of Oxfam Great Britain's employment practices and how we are handling them. You are absolutely right to point out the risks of people who are on short-term contracts and the vulnerability they feel, which exacerbates this power relationship that already exists. Often, younger women feel obliged and under pressure to do things for older men because the power relationships are wrong. That report is coming also to our March board meeting for discussion, and I will make sure it covers the issue of short-term contracts, because it is a really important one to have raised.

Q93 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Mr Goldring, you mentioned a number of times that there are legal barriers to doing some of this checking. My



understanding is that you can use DBS checks for anyone who is working with vulnerable people. First of all, do you use DBS checking—the Disclosure and Barring Service, which used to be CRB—on all your staff that you are sending out to country? Second, what are the legal challenges of making sure that you are using those checks and that you are reporting back to those bodies so that then issues go on file?

Mark Goldring: If I answer your question by taking us back to Haiti, we had seven staff who were seriously culpable. None of them were British. The issue of international verification is a real challenge. For British staff in positions of working with vulnerable people, DBS is a central part of the way that we work. To use an example, we have extended it steadily in the UK beyond our shop managers to the supervising volunteers; we are steadily rolling that out.

Q94 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Every British person who works in the field, then, is working or in contact with vulnerable people?

Mark Goldring: Every British person who is in a position of directly working with vulnerable people is somebody who I believe should be DBS-checked. I will give you in writing afterwards the assurance of how we actually define that. The real issue for us is that we need something that goes beyond the existence of that system, as it does with social workers and as it does with teachers. That is what we may need parliamentary help with. In the meantime, we can get our own house better in order by actually trying to build this humanitarian passport, where you need a positive endorsement, rather than just a negative mark, to be able to be recommended. There are some things where we are working with others, and on others we may well need greater help.

Q95 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** You alluded earlier on, Winnie, to the idea that some of the other agencies were not being co-operative or forthcoming. Why were they not co-operative and forthcoming? Who is to blame for that lack of co-operation?

Winnie Byanyima: I did not say that they were not co-operating. What I wanted to say was that the process of moving this was slow. The big issue that was being raised is jurisdiction; in some countries, some of the offences in our code of conduct are legal. How do you then expose an employee for breaching our code of conduct when they have not conducted any illegality? These were the questions. Different countries have different jurisdictions, and it was hard. I would not want to blame anyone for this. I would just say that all of us were slow at moving this. We now realise that we have to fast-track it, and we are doing exactly that. We should be coming out with something soon.

Q96 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** The last thing I wanted to touch on was about that wider regulation and reporting to the appropriate authorities, of course. A number of you have mentioned the Charity Commission being your primary regulator. Do we need to consider setting up a new regulator, like they have in education institutions that can be charities but



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are also regulated by Ofsted? Would it be your view that we may need to expand ICAI and have a view of actually looking at how effective you are in the “doing no harm” part? Do we need to beef up our regulation here in the UK? How would you see that possibly happening?

Caroline Thomson: Yes, that is an interesting issue to which we should give some thought. I would say that there would be benefits in it and it would give some focus. It also might help rebuild trust. Against that, there is a risk of multiple regulators, which may cause confusion and allow things to fall between the cracks. If we were to do it, it would need to be done with good debate.

Chair: Education charities kind of manage.

Caroline Thomson: Yes, that might be an interesting model to look at.

Q97 **Chair:** Can I take you back to the question I asked you about earlier, Mr Goldring, which is around the reporting to the Charity Commission? I have been sent a copy of an email from the Charity Commission to Oxfam in 2015 in which they said, “It has been suggested to us there have been incidents in Oxfam shops. I found serious incident reports made to us about fraud in charity shops but not about safeguarding issues. Is this something that you are aware of?” Do you recall that email from the Charity Commission and what was then done in response to it?

Mark Goldring: I do not recall that email. I have not seen that email before. What I have seen is a reinforcement of Oxfam’s work in 2015 in charity shops, to make sure not only that there was systematic reporting, which is just one end of it, but that there was a very systematic approach to training, vetting and upskilling senior staff and operational shop managers. Systematic reporting was part of that.

Q98 **Chair:** As I mentioned at the beginning, we decided in our private session earlier this morning that we would be conducting a fuller inquiry into these matters. I would reiterate that I anticipate that, as part of that, we will seek to engage with those who had direct responsibility at the time of the events in Haiti in 2011.

By way of summary of this part of today’s evidence session, it has been very striking, Mr Goldring, how often you have apologised over the last two hours, and that partly reflects the scale of this scandal and that there was therefore a lot to apologise for. I appreciate the tone of the evidence that the three of you have given today. Clearly, there is a set of issues about what happened in 2011 and what has happened since where Oxfam would appear to have put their reputation ahead of their beneficiaries. You have all said today that that is something from which you want to learn, and I welcome that. I welcome the fact that you have said that it is about deeds and not words. It is very clear from the evidence—and we will explore this with the other two panels—that this is a much wider issue across the sector, that there is a set of challenges across the sector, and that these are not new issues. The world has



known about these issues for a very long time.

My closing comment to you is that, demonstrably, you have to both get your house in order and demonstrate to the British people that you are getting your house in order. Thank you for giving evidence to us.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Kevin Watkins and Steve Reeves.

Q99 **Chair:** Clearly there was a lot of ground that we wanted to cover as a Committee with the previous panel. My plan at the moment is to run this second panel for probably about 25 minutes, so we would be looking to take evidence from DFID at around 12.45. As with our normal practice, we go straight to questions but please do introduce yourselves when you answer the first question.

In 2002, Save the Children, with UNHCR, conducted a study that produced a report on sexual exploitation of women and children by both aid workers and peacekeepers. That was 16 years ago. Save the Children then published a further report in 2008—so a decade ago—that came to similar conclusions. Can you be confident that Save the Children staff have not been involved in the kind of abuse that we have been hearing about that happened at Oxfam, Mr Watkins?

Kevin Watkins: Mr Chairman, could I start by saying that I am utterly appalled by the type of practices that have come to light as a result of investigative journalism, your inquiries and the work of others? I am both shocked and appalled. It is the case that this is an issue that has been on our agenda for a very long time. Both of those reports that you mentioned highlighted the role, essentially, of powerful men as gatekeepers to food, shelter and security, and the fears and concerns of the people they were there to serve who felt threatened by them, unsafe and unprotected.

What has come to light over the past couple of weeks cautions all of us against complacency. If I sat here and told you I felt we were doing enough, that would be complacency. We are absolutely not complacent. We have to strengthen our systems across all of our programmes, and we are working to do that with our colleagues in Save the Children International. We have to strengthen our systems here in the UK, and my colleague, Steve Reeves, is director of our safeguarding operation.

I have seen it argued that, if you work in a difficult and dangerous place, you should somehow be subjected to a different set of rules and that the standards should be lower. There is only one rule that should apply to our mission and to our organisation, and that is that you treat other people as you would expect to be treated yourself. That is the standard that all of us have to work towards.



Q100 Chair: I obviously agree with that and I welcome the fact that you have said it. Do you not think that it is a huge collective failure by the sector, by Governments and by the UN that you published this report with a UN agency 16 years ago and then this other report 10 years ago and then, as Pauline has rightly highlighted, this was actually discussed at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, but it feels as though it has taken the *Times* and other media outlets to really focus the attention on this that it deserves?

Kevin Watkins: Pauline was absolutely right. I was at that summit and it was widely discussed, and it has been discussed, incidentally, in previous summits as well. This is a subject that is known about.

Mr Chairman, you used the words “collective failure”, and that is a very important framing. All of us as individual agencies have to get our house in order on a no-excuses basis. That is my responsibility as CEO of Save the Children in the UK. The problem that we have is that, if you tip poison into a river, everyone who uses that river will get affected by it. Here in the UK, we have very strong screening procedures, because we are a children’s charity and can take full advantage of DBS. I actually strongly believe that, as a sector, we would benefit from legislation that established humanitarian aid work as a regulated sector. However, we cannot just apply that in the UK. We need a globalisation of the DBS system. That is what we need. It is precisely because of the vulnerability of the people that we work with that we need that system.

If I may, Mr Chairman, in the course of my first year of working at Save the Children I have had cause to visit Somalia twice, Yemen, north-east Nigeria and the Rohingya people in Cox’s Bazar. I know many of you will have been on these visits, but when you speak to someone who has been uprooted from their home, traumatised by violence, impoverished, who is a mother who does not know where the next meal for her child is coming from, that is vulnerability and that is why there is only one standard that we should ever apply in our sector.

Q101 Chair: You said last week—and I think I am quoting you correctly—that predatory paedophiles are particularly attracted to seek out this sort of work. Would you elaborate on that?

Kevin Watkins: I am not sure that I specifically mentioned predatory paedophiles. I certainly mentioned predatory men who insert themselves into positions of power as gatekeepers. For those people that I have just described, the person who has access to food and who can provide you with security is a person of great power. The whole aim of a regulatory system is surely to constrain arbitrary power and to protect people from the abuse of arbitrary power, which is a consistent theme in all of the cases that you have been discussing this morning and that have come to light over the past two weeks.

Q102 Chair: Mr Reeves, can I turn to you? Can you tell us briefly about the sort of process that is followed in Save the Children when there is an



allegation of sexual abuse?

Steve Reeves: We have a single reporting line that goes straight through to designated staff who are trained specifically to deal with allegations around the safety of children. Those staff get trained and supervised on a weekly basis for the work that they do. Our default position is that all concerns and allegations are reported to statutory agencies in the UK, either law enforcement or children's social care. Occasionally, we may report directly to the NSPCC if it is difficult to identify the geographical location of where the child might be.

We then await advice from specialist agencies on the basis that we would not want to do anything that hampered their investigations. That advice normally comes very promptly. We have a process where we would suspend individuals as soon as we were clear to do so by statutory agencies. We would await the outcome of their investigations. Once we have the results of those investigations, if we feel that we need to do more work in order to satisfy ourselves about the outcome, we would conduct an internal investigation. However, in the realms of somebody who might be convicted of an offence against a child or have a finding from a statutory agency of culpability, we would take that very seriously and take that as read.

Q103 **Chair:** From the evidence that we have seen about Oxfam, it strikes me that there are two issues there. One is about the size of the team that is working on safeguarding, and the second is about their access to—and how seriously they were taken by—senior people within the organisation. Are you confident that you have the resources you need to deal with these sorts of allegations seriously in Save the Children?

Steve Reeves: I have been in Save the Children for just over four years. I started as a sole member of staff and I now lead a team of six, three of whom are targeted specifically on overseas work and humanitarian child safeguarding. I am a member of the corporate senior leadership team, so I am a relatively senior leader in the organisation in my own right, but I report directly through to the executive team. I meet on a bi-weekly basis with the executive director responsible for our area. I meet periodically with people like Kevin. We have a trustee that I meet with on a regular basis.

Q104 **Chair:** How often would you meet the trustee?

Steve Reeves: It would depend on availability. It averages somewhere in the region of about every five or six weeks. Certainly we would report back exceptions; if anything crops up that we think is significant and we think the trustees should be aware of, we would make a call and have a conversation about that. Our trustees are very responsive. I send reports to our trustee body on a regular basis. I have attended those as well as our audit committee. I find little criticism with the way in which our organisation is led, from my perspective. If I have needed resource, I have got resource. If I have raised issues to be addressed by senior



leaders, they have been addressed. I do not have any complaints about the way in which my team and I have been treated by senior leadership.

Q105 **James Duddridge:** Mr Watkins, you drew a distinction between predatory males and predatory paedophiles. Mr Reeves, through your work in the UK context, prior to joining Save the Children, would you recognise that there was a propensity for people who were predatory males to volunteer or apply to certain paid jobs because it gave them access? Do you have any evidence to say that Oxfam is the tip of the iceberg and that, actually, there are predatory paedophiles actively seeking work in war-torn countries because they can access what one can call prostitution, though if one takes the terms "male" and "prostitute", that seems to almost paste over the fact that it is largely people who are underage and thus it is paedophilia? Is there any evidence that this is much more systematic?

Steve Reeves: It has become clear over the course of media revelations, and the launch of IICSA and things over the previous years, that sexual abuse of children in the UK is far more prevalent than people might have thought before. The National Crime Agency talks about one in 35 adult males in the UK having some form of paedophilic tendency. There is research from Ottawa that talks about 1% of the adult male population having a primary sexual interest in children. Organisations that operate in the context of the most vulnerable children should be operating, in our view, with the mind that those people will actively seek out opportunities to access children and that they will seek out access to children in places where jurisdictions are weaker and where regulations are poorer. Therefore, it is the job of organisations to up their game to meet the gap between regulation in jurisdictions and the risks that might be posed to children.

I started my career in safeguarding—you are absolutely right—in the UK system. While many people may criticise the way in which the UK system operates, it gives a solid framework to organisations around the way it vets its staff and the provision of local authority designated officers in local authorities where employers are obliged to report concerns and take their advice. When you start working on a global scale, that framework is absent. What we have been doing over the last two or three years is essentially trying to create an element of that framework in the way that we do our business. We think there is a lot of best practice around the world. We have worked with Interpol around trying to create an equivalent of the DBS on a global scale. The way in which we have leveraged some research and innovation in tackling some of these things is absolutely critical.

There is no doubt, however, that there are people with a sexual interest in children who actively seek out the opportunity to work with children. It is a very considerable problem. We know that there are large numbers of those people and we know that they will seek out access in



organisations that appear to be weaker and work in places where the protections for children appear to be poorer.

Q106 **James Duddridge:** If one in 35 people or males—I was unclear which you meant—have paedophilic tendencies, are we saying that there will be more in the development community, for the same reasons as you would expect there to be more than that volunteering with youth groups or indeed applying for roles where vulnerable children are available?

Steve Reeves: That is certainly the figure that the National Crime Agency in the UK has talked about: one in 35 adult men, I think, in the UK. They also talk about 50,000 adults in the UK who might be accessing indecent images of children on a regular basis. There are a number of metrics by which you might try to establish the nature or the scale of the risk to children in the UK. We know that it is significant and we know that a number of people target organisations and that the level of abuse that is reported, as far as we are aware, is very low even in well-developed contexts. If you speak to colleagues operating in safeguarding in the UK, they will say that 5% or potentially 7% of child abuse is ever reported at all. That is in a context where we could hope that police would be supportive and social care would be supportive and health services would be available. If you then move into jurisdictions where that is largely absent, or certainly appears to be absent to the people who might consider themselves victims or survivors, then it actually becomes even more challenging.

It is almost beyond doubt that there is more abuse occurring than we know about. The message to organisations should be that we should behave as though this abuse is happening, even if we see no evidence of it, because we know that it almost certainly is and we should behave actively as though it is happening and put measures in place, even if we see no direct evidence of it.

Q107 **James Duddridge:** I want to go on to talk about some of the proposals you have made to the Secretary of State, but in our inquiry we would need to look at some of these numbers because there is clearly more to come out. We cannot look at the proposals without a context as to what the size of the problem is, and I have a horrible feeling that we are touching on the surface of this problem. Of the initial proposals that you have brought forward, what are the key proposals within that that you think are absolutely essential if you were to choose one or two of them?

Steve Reeves: We have a number of proposals. There are some that we think are achievable over the shorter term and some things that are slightly longer-term. Kevin has rightly pointed out the fact that we have a system in the UK about the way we regulate criminal records checks. One of the Committee members asked our colleagues in Oxfam about that. Actually, the regulations around access to criminal records checks in the UK are very complex. They are complicated in lots of ways and they work primarily on the basis of how intense and how frequent the contact between the children and the professionals is. The real struggle



we would have is that we have staff who have intense contact with children over very short periods of time. We found the regulatory environment around DBS checks quite challenging. We use the system very actively. Last year we spent well in excess of £100,000 on criminal records checks for our staff. Stipulating that working in an agency like ours is always regulated activity, full stop, regardless of the level of access to children, would provide a simplicity to that process that would help us significantly. The amount of transactional cost involved in trying to assess the level of check that is required for individual staff is quite astonishing. That would be a short-term piece that we think would be relevant.

We have been working with Interpol over the course of two or three years, attempting to establish a global criminal records checking system. We part-funded a feasibility study to try to get us over the line on some of that. That has stalled at the Interpol end in terms of their willingness to deal with some of the administrative and financial aspects of that. We think those issues could be overcome relatively simply.

Kevin Watkins: Mr Chairman, I would like to add very briefly to that. I have heard the argument over the past few days that the humanitarian passport system that we and other agencies have advocated would be terribly complicated and difficult to put into operation because we do not actually have a global or multilateral framework for doing that. My short answer to that problem is to create one. This is clearly a complicated problem but the consequences of not dealing with it in human terms are utterly appalling, leaving aside the reputational effects for our agency. We absolutely have to tackle this.

In addition to the point that Steve has made, I would say that every year we reach around 20 million to 22 million children, providing life-saving nutritional interventions, health support and education support. If we get just one thing wrong—this one area of regulatory activity wrong—then the whole house of cards comes down and we cannot discharge our responsibilities to those people. I have 1,000 people who come into our office in Farringdon every day—dedicated professionals—who want us to be out there on the front line working with children, and this is a condition for making that possible.

Q108 **Mrs Latham:** I just want to touch on a couple of quick things. We are mainly talking about vulnerable women and girls. Is there any evidence that young boys are being abused as well, and are they being abused by men or by women? You talked, Mr Reeves, about having been in the organisation for a few years—not a huge length of time but a few years. How many women have come forward in that period of time to say that they have been abused? Are the women mainly the vulnerable women that you are trying to help, or are they within the staff body, also being abused by predatory men?

Steve Reeves: There are two parts there. With regards to the first part, globally, it is pretty clear that girls and young women are most frequently



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the victims of sexual violence. We do see evidence of boys and young men being exploited sexually in the same way. As far as we can tell from the statistics available and the research available to us, this is abuse that is largely perpetrated by men. Although we should not discount the possibility that some women engage in sexually harmful behaviour, it is behaviour that is largely manifested by men.

We do see some evidence of boys being harmed. There is some evidence of cross-over offending and the importance of gender of victims for certain types of offenders, but I do not think that is dramatically significant in terms of the way organisations might respond. What keeps a boy safe is very largely what keeps a girl safe in terms of the way you operate in your organisation with regards to the measures.

In terms of people coming forward, my role, very clearly within the organisation and very targeted, is about the protection of children, so my role is about ensuring that children in the organisation have positive experiences every time they meet a member of Save the Children staff. I do not have direct responsibility for the management of allegations that might come to light about adults harming other adults. That would be a leadership responsibility for Kevin.

Q109 Chair: Mr Watkins, do you want to answer that specific issue that Pauline raised?

Kevin Watkins: I do not want to give you incorrect numbers, so please treat these as very tentative. We are actually reporting to DFID on Monday with the full breakdown of our figures.

On our child safeguarding challenges, we had 193 cases in 2016, which is the last year for which I have comprehensive data. Around 53 of those were taken to full investigation. In around 20 of those cases, the files were handed over to the police and 11 people were dismissed. The thing that is always very difficult with these exercises is to know whether you are capturing the tip of the iceberg or whether you are capturing the iceberg itself. The system that we have to build is really about creating a culture in every single one of our offices where people feel safe enough to come forward and report on these matters.

Q110 Mrs Latham: What is the split between vulnerable women and girls in different countries compared with women working for your organisation who are being abused or where there are men trying to abuse them within your system?

Kevin Watkins: We also have investigations on sexual harassment. I am not just talking here about Save the Children UK; this is as part of Save the Children International. I know this is all a bit confusing but it is the programme delivery platform that we share with other Save the Children organisations from the United States, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Australia and others. In those investigations, last year we had 35 cases reported. Again, please treat these numbers



HOUSE OF COMMONS

as tentative. We had 35 cases reported. From memory, 19 of them resulted in staff dismissals. I do not remember the number of files that were handed over to the police but it gives you some sense of the order of magnitude that we are talking about.

Q111 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I have some very quick questions about some of the suggestions that you made. If we brought the issue of regulated activity in by SI quickly, how quickly could organisations such as yourselves then implement it to ensure that all your workers were checked and that you were abiding by the regulated activity requirements under DBS?

Steve Reeves: Certainly, from our perspective, that would happen very promptly. We perform criminal records checks on every single member of staff in our organisation. The issue about regulated activities is in terms of providing a single level rather than staff trying to establish at what level in the long chain of different types of criminal records checks they might be eligible.

Q112 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Would you be able to implement the enhanced level within a month if we introduced it next week?

Steve Reeves: In relatively short order, yes.

Q113 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: You said that there was some financial stalling at Interpol. Do you know what kind of order of money Interpol were complaining about? Have you had any conversations where Interpol has said, "We need another £2 million to do this piece of work"? Have you had any kind of figure on that?

Steve Reeves: There have been some conversations about how the systems set up might get financed, and that would potentially be a very significant technology spend in terms of creating that system. The real crux when we came to some of the stakeholder meetings about how these things operate was that, from our perspective, we spend well in excess of £100,000 a year on checking our staff but the system only works if a small Ugandan orphanage can also afford that check. Creating the system and then simply dividing that cost by the people that we think might use it is not a workable way to ensure that the very smallest—

Q114 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: What I am trying to get at is whether there was an overall cost whereby it was provided free for NGOs and Governments had to pay for it? For example, the British Government would give a donation for 10 years to run that system or some such thing, if that was a realistic option. This is something we need to take a lead on as a country.

Steve Reeves: Certainly. We had some set-up costs that we talked about that we might be able to provide. I suspect, having heard what you have to say, Interpol might be able to provide that figure quite rapidly at this point.



Kevin Watkins: If I may add to that, there are two parts to this. There is the part that the UK Government can lead and drive, which is what you are getting at. There is also a broader international leadership role. We need some sort of international framework. I believe that the UK Government could play a critical role in helping establish that. There are a number of vehicles that could be considered. UN OCHA, for example, as an administrative entity, is one such vehicle.

We put a proposal for discussion into DFID towards the end of last year, which is on the idea of a centre of global excellence for safeguarding. Properly constructed, that centre could potentially help to oversee a global database but, more critically, it could send people in to difficult areas. I will take the example of the Rohingya crisis. There are 800,000 people, with a movement of people bigger than the city of Newcastle from one place to another in the space of a couple of months. What happens when that crisis erupts is that we will surge in our water and people who are providing education. There is no one at the moment who is really surging in, at scale, a safeguarding team that can ensure that there is a proper level of protection. We would have to pool our resources as a sector to do this effectively but, if pooling is what it takes, that is what we need to do.

Q115 **Henry Smith:** What do you think are the wider implications for the aid sector of these appalling scandals?

Kevin Watkins: They are very serious. They are serious because the journalists who have investigated these issues and brought them to light have turned the spotlight on to very horrible stuff that we as a sector have to take responsibility for and have to take responsibility for fixing. Our first order of priority is that we need to recognise that this is not the occasional bad apple that we are dealing with here; it is a structural and systemic problem that we have to deal with through proper integration. There is wider damage to the trust that the UK public put in us to link our incredibly generous population in the UK to some of the most vulnerable people in the world. Trust is our most precious commodity. If that goes, our ability to play that linking role will be damaged. There is an issue of trust with the sector and the Department for International Development. All of these things have to be rebuilt.

One of things that concerns me of course is that I have seen the argument surfacing that this is now all about 0.7%. That is a somewhat opportunistic and profoundly misplaced way of looking at this problem. This is a real problem. It is a systemic problem. It is large-scale and we have to fix it. UK aid, I would submit, is probably the most effective aid in the world. It is the most accountable aid in the world. It makes an enormous difference to the lives of millions of children around the world, working with us and other agencies. We cannot afford to allow this issue to pollute the wider discussion about the role of the UK in aid leadership and the role of UK NGOs.

Q116 **Henry Smith:** As a follow-up, I would say that it took external reporters



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to largely expose this scandal. Do you think that the aid sector as a whole is capable of bringing its house into order?

Kevin Watkins: If I did not believe that, I would not be working in the sector. Our sector and our organisation, as I have already said, are staffed by incredibly professional and committed people. We can resolve this problem.

There is a view that the sector is being given a hard time by the media and that in some way we are victims of this whole thing. There is only one victim in this story, and that is the people who had their lives shattered by some of these practices. The other victims, of course, are the people who stand to lose from the loss of trust that prevents us from doing what we need to do. I am totally convinced that we can fix it and I am totally committed to Save the Children playing a leadership role in that.

Q117 **James Duddridge:** I was concerned when you said, "We could do with some legislation"; it sounded a bit like an abdication of responsibility but you have gone back on that. Could you talk about the role of Bond? We are seeing the Permanent Secretary later. We are seeing the Secretary of State on the floor of the House making a statement. Clearly the UN will play a big role. Clearly DFID should stop giving money to any organisation that does not move in the direction that we want it to. Surely the answer is never to wait for legislation. What can Bond do? What can Save the Children do now, immediately, and move on to protect yourself from the critique that you are abdicating responsibility by saying that it is Governments, it is legislation, it is too complex and it is something for the United Nations? God help us if we have to wait for the United Nations.

Kevin Watkins: That particular cavalry might take some time to arrive. Can I just be absolutely clear that I did not say that waiting for legislation is what we need to do? What we need to do as a sector is to act now and act with great urgency. You asked the specific question about the role of Bond. I believe that there is a great responsibility on the major NGOs in this country to come together and start framing the practical solutions. The legislation that both Steve and I have mentioned on making the sector one of regulated employment would certainly help. It would strengthen one part of the system.

However, there are plenty of other things that we can do to get our own houses in order. One of the things that we are doing in Save the Children UK and with our partners in Save the Children International is strengthening our safeguard systems across the world. I think I am right in saying that there are 100 focal points for our safeguarding work in the 125 countries that we operate in through Save the Children International. That has to be strengthened.

We need to come up with ideas. That is our job. We obviously really appreciate the ideas that you are generating in the inquiry that you



mentioned, but we cannot sit around and wait for somebody else to come and solve this problem for us. This is our problem. We need to generate the ideas for solving it. There are good ideas out there. We have tried to outline some of them today. The challenge is to move very quickly and to build the coalitions that we need to drive it forward, and Bond is a critical part of that coalition-building.

Chair: Thank you both very much indeed. Please feel free to stay to listen to the final panel. Thank you for your time today.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Matthew Rycroft, Gerard Howe and Beverley Warmington.

Chair: Welcome. Thank you for joining us and for your patience. We are running a little behind schedule. Our usual practice is to invite you to introduce yourself at the point at which you first answer a question.

Q118 **Mrs Latham:** Nearly two years ago I went to the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul where I learned from a panel that was talking that sexual abuse was happening by NGOs and by UN peacekeeping forces as well—and that is another issue—and that it was common knowledge but nobody really knew how to deal with it. I came back and wrote to the then Secretary of State saying that DFID is respected around the world and that we should be leading this to set up an international register for people who worked in the aid sector. I got a letter back—the civil servants would have written it—saying that, actually, this was too difficult. It was in the “too difficult to do” box and they really could not tackle it. We have had a similar letter back to the Committee after our Chairman wrote on the predecessor Committee from Rory Stewart, basically saying the same sort of thing.

We have heard from Oxfam and Save the Children. Save the Children appear to be doing this. Oxfam say they are going to do it. Why do you think that we cannot have a global register for aid workers? It is clearly absolutely necessary if the money that we spend is going to protect vulnerable women and girls in incredibly difficult circumstances. I am sure this is happening in the Rohingya refugee camps. I am sure it is happening around the world with many different organisations. Why do you believe that DFID cannot start a global register and hold it so that people can do the same sort of service as the Disclosure and Barring Service does currently? It seems to me to be a no-brainer. We have to do it.

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you, Mrs Latham, and thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is Matthew Rycroft. I am the Permanent Secretary at the Department for International Development as of three weeks ago.

Mrs Latham: Yes, I accept that you are very new into the job, so it is



almost slightly unfair, but, on the other hand, you bring a very fresh view into this and so it is fair to ask you these questions.

Matthew Rycroft: All of your questions are fair and I look forward to answering all of them today and on future occasions.

Let me begin by saying how shocking these issues are and these incidents have been. Let me agree with you, Mrs Latham, that this is an issue that the United Kingdom must lead on in response, and that is what the Secretary of State for International Development is determined to do. She has already written to all of the UK-based charities to make sure and to tell us what their systems are to put in place all of their safeguarding. We are doing something similar with all of our partners around the world that are not based in the United Kingdom. We are going to be working with the United Nations, which has had a long-running history in relation to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in relation to peace-keeping, and we need to learn from that. We need to work with the private sector. We need to work with all the other government departments around the British Government that spend official development assistance.

This is a huge issue for the whole of the sector. One of the things that the Secretary for State for International Development has already announced is a summit on 5 March with the charity sector to look at the way ahead. Central to that summit will be an analysis of the issue that you brought back from the Istanbul World Humanitarian Summit, and which we very much hope the sector itself will put forward.

Nothing is in the "too difficult" box anymore, even if it ever was. This is a moment where we need to be looking with fresh eyes but also with experienced eyes, with everyone coming together, whether they are in Government, in the charity sector, in the private sector or in international organisations—all of us—to make sure that we root out this evil, and that something good can come from the crisis, which has been a breach of trust for the people of Haiti and other countries like that, as well for the people of the United Kingdom who give so generously to charities like Oxfam.

Q119 **Mrs Latham:** Can I just say that the current Secretary of State has done a fantastic job given that she is also very new into the job? She has had to go out there and say some pretty tough things. She has done a good job on that. However, what I have been disappointed about is that the previous Secretary of State did raise these issues with the department and she was asked not to raise them, not to bring them to the floor and not to speak about them in the speeches. She continued to do so anyway and it is good that she did, particularly in terms of the UN. We know that peacekeepers have been raping women in vulnerable situations. You said that you have been working with them. What exactly are you going to do to be able to stop women being raped and abused—and children—in very vulnerable situations like DRC? We know it is happening there. It seems that everyone knows it is happening, so it



HOUSE OF COMMONS

is, "Oh, that is okay, then", because we cannot really do anything about it, because the UN use different armies from different places. There must be a system. The world is a much smaller place now. We need to work worldwide to safeguard these very vulnerable people. What is DFID going to do to stop the sexual abuse through the UN?

Matthew Rycroft: You are quite right that the Secretary of State is leading on this agenda and that her predecessor did a very good job in raising this issue up the prioritisation. I remember from my previous job at the United Nations, as the British ambassador in New York, that it was a big theme of the UN General Assembly last September, and that was because of the previous Secretary of State for International Development.

The United Nations has long had a huge problem with sexual exploitation abuse amongst peacekeepers, and the UK has been helping to lead the way in response to that. First of all, the UK has doubled its contribution to UN peacekeeping in the last couple of years and we make sure that every single one of the British peacekeepers who go to join UN missions has proper training on how to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. We also offer training to other contingents from other countries, who perhaps have less of a tradition in this area than we ourselves do, and we are working with the United Nations itself to make sure that one part of that family of organisations is able to spread that best practice to another part. One thing about the UN is that it is such a large bureaucracy that, even if there is good practice in, for instance, UNICEF, that might not spread to other parts of the UN. One of the things we were seeking to do with the previous Secretary of State was to rise up all the different parts of the United Nations to the level of the best.

Q120 **Mrs Latham:** It has to happen. We have to stop this abuse of the most vulnerable people in the world. DFID has also said that it is reviewing the grant agreement wording to strengthen action in this area, which was due last April. Has it been completed? If not, when do you expect it? If it has, can we have a copy, please?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, that work has been completed and indeed the assurances that you received at the time have all been met and we have gone beyond those assurances. If you do not have a copy already then, yes, we will make that available to you right away.

Q121 **Mrs Latham:** Excellent. This is really urgent. It has been going on for years. I believe it is the minority of people in the aid sector but we need to root those out. What is wrong with that minority of men that they cannot keep their trousers done up and they have to go for very vulnerable people in the most vulnerable situations in the world? What is wrong with these men? Do they need mental health help? If they do, let us get them some. They should not be doing this, and nobody can believe that it is right.



Matthew Rycroft: I am not going to seek to justify or explain or excuse that behaviour, because I totally agree with you that it is wrong and inexcusable, so I am not going to go down that route. All I would say is that we are determined to use this crisis—and it is a crisis for the whole of the aid sector, for the reasons you have been hearing about this morning—to get the whole of the sector into a better shape and to root out this evil wherever it occurs and to draw on the whole of the sector and beyond to get the ideas on how best to do that.

Mrs Latham: Good. I am encouraged to hear that and I hope that we move very quickly.

Q122 **Chris Law:** I want to turn specifically to the events in Haiti in 2011. What did DFID know about these events?

Matthew Rycroft: I might ask my colleagues, Gerard and Beverley, to add to what I say, but let me first of all say that Oxfam did bring to DFID's attention at the time the fact that there was an investigation into misconduct by some members of staff. They in fact wrote three letters in 2011, the first saying that that investigation had started, the second saying that it was ongoing and the third to give us some summary of the outcome. However, at no point was either the scale or the severity of the allegations made clear to our predecessors.

Gerard Howe: My name is Gerard Howe and since last Monday I have been providing senior lead for DFID's newly established safeguarding unit. I would reinforce Matthew's point. The second letter that Oxfam wrote to us on 18 August told us that the country director had resigned and that the investigation would soon be concluding. The third letter reported on the outcomes of that investigation, saying that there had been a breach of Oxfam's code of conduct but that none of these issues of misconduct involved beneficiaries or the misuse of any funds. You were discussing earlier the nature and the meaning of the word "beneficiary", and it would be fair to say that we understood "beneficiary" to be the people of Haiti that Oxfam were indeed fundraising for, and that we were involved in supporting through this particular grant for Oxfam for providing shelter.

Q123 **Chris Law:** In July 2015, Oxfam's former head of global safeguarding, Helen Evans, contacted the then Secretary of State, Justine Greening, and informed her of examples of sexual misconduct in Oxfam from 2011. What was done as a result of this and how was it carried out?

Gerard Howe: At this point, we can find no record of that contact. We have been looking since we received that allegation.

Q124 **Chris Law:** Do you potentially think that that is a false allegation?

Gerard Howe: No, we have no record of that.

Chair: My understanding is that a then Member of Parliament wrote on her behalf to the then Secretary of State.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Gerard Howe: We did receive a letter from Andrew Smith MP asking us about our approach to child protection policies for protecting children between 14 and 17. In that letter, Justine Greening responded to Andrew Smith, reporting how we were managing our accountable grants in terms of the absolute requirement, if people see allegations, accusations or any proof of child abuse and child sexual exploitation, to tell DFID immediately. That was in line with good practice elsewhere in the sector.

Q125 **Chris Law:** Thank you. The former Secretary of State for International Development, Priti Patel, has also claimed that the department knew about instances of sexual abuse. What do you have to say about this?

Matthew Rycroft: I want to be very clear about two different things. First of all, at no point has she said that there were particular members of staff who were aware of particular instances of sexual exploitation or abuse. She has not said that, as far as I am aware. What she has said is that the department did not respond as quickly as she wanted to her push to push the whole issue of sexual exploitation and abuse up the international agenda. I know that, in the end, the department did do that. Her concern was that it took too much pushing to get to that point. I want to be clear that she has not said that individual incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse were known about by DFID.

Q126 **Chair:** Obviously we are taking evidence in terms of the safeguarding or lack of safeguarding by non-governmental organisations. Can one of you outline what safeguarding procedures are adopted for DFID's own staff that work both in this country and in the field?

Matthew Rycroft: Let me make a start on that and then I will hand over to my colleagues. First of all, the general point to make here is that we hold ourselves at least to as high a standard as all of our partners, and we are explicit in doing so. For instance, we have made sure that all staff are aware of the whistleblowing procedures and so on.

We need to distinguish between UK-based members of DFID staff and staff employed locally in individual countries around the world. The former are civil servants and are recruited in the same way that other civil servants are recruited with the same sort of vetting. Local staff, as the name implies, are recruited in an individual country and are recruited according to procedures and the law within that country. There is always some form of background check but the precise nature of that check does vary from country to country.

Q127 **Chair:** What about contractors? In the evidence from Oxfam earlier, an example was given of someone who had left Oxfam's employment and been subsequently employed by a contractor. What sort of due diligence process would there be with a DFID contractor?

Beverley Warmington: I am Beverley Warmington. As I am sure you know, we have just started a new contract with Palladium for our humanitarian response. Palladium are very aware of this and have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

procedures and processes in place at the moment. They do due diligence on their staff and background checks and legal checks. The issue is that it is as far as you can go given the nationality of the person you are looking at. They have that in place. They are now reviewing and looking again at all of their processes and plan to write to us soon with an idea of what further steps they can take. They have quite strong measures in place. They are looking at how much further they can go.

Q128 Chair: They are your contractor with regard to humanitarian but obviously you have a whole range of contractors that you use for other services, and those contractors may well come into contact with vulnerable people including children. Is there any similar process with other contractors?

Beverley Warmington: As you are also aware, because you have seen this too, we have just had a very big process of looking at how we work with our contractors. We have a new supplier review. Part of that review has a new code of conduct for how our suppliers are to operate. We have also just implemented that big supplier review and that new code of conduct for suppliers.

Q129 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: We have heard a number of times it be said around depending on national circumstances or the nationality of the people. I am struggling to understand that. For example, here in Parliament, I employ an Australian national and he had to come with a certificate from the Australian police and provide it to me and the parliamentary authorities. They then still did a check with the British security services. Through our Five Eyes arrangement, they checked back in Australia. That seemed to be no problem, so I do not understand. Maybe I am misinterpreting what you are saying, but I do not understand why we do not have a standard system that we are just imposing not only for London-employed staff that we send out but domestically employed staff and maybe even imposing that on any NGO that we ever fund. Why is that not a possibility?

Matthew Rycroft: All I meant was that when we employ someone in Country X then, in addition to whatever we are doing globally, we need to make sure that we are employing that person within the laws of Country X.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: It is an additionality rather than a taking away.

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, certainly there is no taking away.

Q130 James Duddridge: At the beginning of this session, the Chairman said there would be a broader inquiry that we would be conducting. If possible, could someone from the Committee come along on 5 March when everyone is coming together at the summit to join up on this? It strikes me that this is a longer-term issue that is quite complex and cross-party, and we would be keen to hear what you were saying and be part of that as part of our inquiry.



Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely.

Gerard Howe: We would welcome that. 5 March is an important point. You were hearing earlier on about some of the proposals from Save the Children. We have also been gathering over the last while other policy proposals that we want to test. That is only a start. What we will then be doing is working with a broad range of organisations after 5 March to further test and refine those ideas to potentially see whether we could test them in reality through some of our partners and then look towards a larger conference possibly later in the year where we can bring an even larger group of people together. We would welcome participation from the Committee.

Q131 **Mrs Latham:** I just wanted to develop that a little bit. It seems to me that the UN is not fit for purpose because it is not stopping what is going on. We ought to be leading that as well. What plans do you have, following this summit, for working with the UN to get all of those organisations together to make sure that they actually put in proper safeguarding procedures and proper training and not just leave it to the UK? I have heard about this ever since I have been involved with this, ever since I came in to Parliament in 2010, and it has not gone away. It is not going away. What are you doing to lead the world by holding the UN to account? They do not seem to be at the moment.

Matthew Rycroft: The Secretary of State for International Development has made absolutely clear that we will not be waiting for the United Nations or for anyone else; we will lead from the front on this issue, by example, and we are already reaching out to others to encourage them to join us in that fight, because we know that the more numerous we can be the more effective we will be, but we will not be waiting for anyone to catch up.

In addition to the points I made earlier about peacekeeping, we also have in place, thanks to the previous Secretary of State and subsequent work, a whole series of performance agreements with the different parts of the United Nations, which permit us to withhold funding from any parts of the United Nations that do not match our requirements, either in terms of their reform or of their results. Results can mean either the development results or the internal processes in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse or other priority issues for us. We have already announced them, and I remember that we discussed this, the Secretary of State and I, when we were before this Committee a couple of weeks ago. We have made absolutely clear that those parts of the international organisations that wish to continue to receive UK government funding need to make sure that they not only have zero tolerance for sexual exploitation abuse but that they can prove they have that zero tolerance.

Q132 **Mrs Latham:** That would include the World Bank.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Matthew Rycroft: We have different performance agreements with the World Bank. I would have to check whether the precise wording is the same, but the same principles apply, yes.

Q133 **Chair:** Can I return to an issue we discussed with the Save the Children witnesses, which is these two reports that were published? The first was in 2002, jointly between UNHCR and Save the Children, and the second was in 2008. Can you tell us what, if anything, DFID did at the time about those two reports?

Gerard Howe: First—and Mr Watkins said it earlier on—we would acknowledge that, system-wide, there was a collective failure to respond at scale to those messages, including from 2007. We are all taking responsibility for improvement in this area; there is no doubt about that. When the Committee, through your inquiry, looks at some of the measures that we have been putting in place within DFID, even over the last year, you will see a further strengthening.

From early on, we now have in our accountable grants a requirement for people to tell us immediately when they face any sort of concerns, and that is really important. We have made sure that we do much broader work, as you are aware, on violence against women and girls, and we have spoken to the Committee about this. The Secretary of State was in Stockholm last week as a founding member of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. What you are seeing here is a broadening movement that has found purchase. The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children was only established two years ago. The wake-up call that we have been hearing earlier on is resonating more broadly.

Q134 **Chair:** Why do you think it took the *Times* journalists to give us this wake-up call when we had these reports in 2002 and 2008 and when the department has known about the Oxfam allegations from Haiti for some time? Why has it taken the *Times* newspaper for this to give us the wake-up call that you have just described?

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, I want to pay tribute to the investigative journalism that has led to this wake-up call, because we would all agree—and I think all of your witnesses this morning have agreed—that it was a much needed wake-up call. One can speculate on the psychology involved over the intervening years. It is fair to say that this whole issue of safeguarding has long been a priority for DFID and for the sector, but it has been a priority amongst others. What we are now doing is honing in on it and giving it a laser focus and making sure that we pull in ideas from wherever we can, in order to root out this evil, as I said earlier.

Chair: It really is a huge collective failure on all our parts, is it not, and I include Parliament in that? These reports were published such a long time ago, the events that Pauline alluded to in Istanbul took place almost two years ago, and it has taken this investigation.

Mrs Latham: I have raised it with every single Secretary of State and



Minister to come in front of us.

Q135 **Richard Burden:** Moving from the collective to the specific, the Secretary of State put Oxfam on a pretty tight deadline, saying that, by the end of last week, they should show precisely how they would handle any future allegations around safeguarding. Have they done that?

Gerard Howe: Yes, they have. Oxfam wrote to the Secretary of State late last Thursday night. The Secretary of State set three demands to Mark Goldring and Caroline Thomson. The first was that they make clear how they will handle any forthcoming allegations. The second was that they would co-operate completely and fully with the Haitian authorities. The third was that they would show leadership across this piece.

On the first, on the Haitian authorities, we know that Mark Goldring has met the Haitian ambassador. I met the Haitian ambassador yesterday to discuss this case and to ensure that that co-operation was indeed happening. We have also been talking to our Foreign Office colleagues in Port-au-Prince, and the ambassador there has been to see the Foreign Minister in Haiti to ensure that Oxfam are doing that right thing.

Going back to the third demand, it was also reporting each of those individuals to their national authorities. Oxfam also confirmed they had reported all of those individuals to the national authorities.

On making clear how they will handle forthcoming allegations, Mr Goldring mentioned it earlier on; they handed over their current case load of live cases. They have told us that they are now employing an independent firm to come and oversee and to also run their whistleblowing, and we will be looking very closely at their performance on that over the next period of time. We welcome the opening of the Charity Commission's statutory inquiry, which will also shed further evidence on the handling of the incidents in Haiti in 2011, the governance of Oxfam going forward and how we can collectively respond.

Q136 **Richard Burden:** Do I take it from that that you are satisfied that Oxfam, in terms of what they were asked to do in the last couple of weeks, have responded appropriately and sufficiently?

Matthew Rycroft: There are two sets of requirements. There are the Oxfam-specific requirements, which had a deadline of the end of last week, which are the three that Gerard has just outlined. Then there are the sector-wide requirements. They are one of the UK-based charities that has received the letter from the Secretary of State asking them to give us assurance that they have processes in place on safeguarding. Clearly, they have themselves, following discussions with the Secretary of State, withdrawn from bidding for any new UK government funding until we are satisfied that they can meet the high standards that we expect of our partners. Of course, the Secretary of State for International Development will be looking very seriously in order to make that judgment at the moral leadership that they are able to show. That is a judgment that she will be making in the future.



Q137 **Richard Burden:** The current Secretary of State, as you say, said that she is prepared to review funding if any agency falls below the standards that are required. There are others who have suggested that, actually, funding for Oxfam should be withdrawn. If it was going to be withdrawn, what do you think the impact of that would be on beneficiaries around the world?

Matthew Rycroft: That is the sort of judgment that the Secretary of State will be making in the future in relation to future funding decisions. We need to wait to get that sort of evidence in order to make that sort of judgment. It will be a complex judgment to make and it will be based on actions in the future as well as an assessment of the recent past.

Q138 **Richard Burden:** I understand the issues that would be brought to bear in making a judgment about whether that was the right thing to do, but presumably the department has already got some assessment of what would happen around the world if funding to Oxfam was withdrawn.

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, we do, and that is part of the assessment that we will be making in the future.

Q139 **Richard Burden:** Do you have any thoughts on that at this stage?

Matthew Rycroft: It is a very complex question to answer. It will be specific to individual countries. In some parts of the world, there will be a variety of partners that DFID could choose to work with, and in others it will be harder to find an alternative to an existing partner. It is very difficult to give a global answer to that hypothetical question just at the moment.

Q140 **Chair:** Can I give an example? I should declare an interest because I went with Oxfam to Jordan in 2015 and saw the work they do in the Zaatari refugee camp with Syrian refugees. Were there to be a decision to withdraw all or some of Oxfam's funding, presumably you would only do that when another partner was put in place, so that the water and sanitation currently provided by Oxfam is still provided whomever you choose to provide it.

Beverley Warmington: Clearly, Oxfam are a big partner on water and sanitation. We would need to take contingency planning quite clearly into account when we did that, and we would need to look at what other partners there are on the ground that we could operate through. We would need to do that contingency planning. As you know, they are a big partner on WATSAN.

Q141 **Richard Burden:** Would it be fair to say that there would potentially be a major hole in a lot of really important development efforts around the world, particularly in water and sanitation?

Beverley Warmington: We would do our best to make sure that there was not. We would do our best to make sure that there were other partners there that we could operate through. It is something that we would look at quite clearly and we are looking at in a number of ways on



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the existing projects. There are also new projects that would be fine because we would just take bids from different partners. On existing projects, we would look to mitigate as much as possible any kind of impact on beneficiaries.

Q142 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Am I right in understanding, Gerald Howe, that you are now the head of the safeguarding unit that the Secretary of State promised to be established?

Gerard Howe: Yes.

Q143 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** If that is the case, can I just ask: why do you think it took so long for such a unit to be set up, seeing that a number of colleagues and the Committee as a whole have been raising these issues for quite some time?

Gerard Howe: I can answer that and perhaps Matthew would also like to respond. It is not that DFID has not thought about safeguarding over the past period of time. Again, as you take forward your broader inquiry, you will see this. For example, in December 2017, we issued a smart guide to safeguarding, which was the product of a lot of work, looking at how best to do safeguarding. We have safeguarding written into some of our policies and procedures, including due diligence, where we look at the capability of organisations to both have safeguarding policies but also to operate them. Until this point, safeguarding was a responsibility across the organisation.

What we have decided to do, as Matthew has said, in response to this crisis is to draw that together to catalyse further action. The responsibility of the safeguarding unit is not to replace safeguarding and the responsibility of safeguarding across DFID; it is to actually set and to raise standards on safeguarding right across the international sector, including DFID, and to make sure that we are responding to that responsibility that we discussed earlier on. The work that our internal audit does, the work that our country programmes do, the discussions that we have with our violence against women and girls team all continue. This is about consolidating and rising to the challenge that we know that we all collectively face.

Q144 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Yes, and I suspect that it is welcome. We all know that "mainstreaming" is code for not doing it if you do not have someone that is leading in the centre. Having someone leading in the centre and mainstreaming the work is very good. Just so I am clear, who will you on the unit report to? Is it directly to the Permanent Secretary or the Secretary of State? What level is it considered at?

Gerard Howe: You will understand that the Secretary of State announced the creation of this unit and we have been working that through. Currently I report to Beverley. Beverley reports through to Nick Dyer as our Director General and then through to Matthew. We will review those arrangements as we consolidate and consider the further functions of the safeguarding unit within DFID.



Matthew Rycroft: When the Secretary of State announced the unit, she said that it was reporting directly to her and to me and my executive committee, so there is that dual chain. As Gerard said, we deliberately put together 16 people—at the moment—in one place in a central unit to provide that central impetus. However, I would not want anyone to have the impression that before last Monday when the unit was created there was no focus on safeguarding. That is not the case at all. This is a new phase given the scale of the crisis.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Just so I am clear, Gerard, you report to three. You report to Beverley, Matthew and the Secretary of State.

Beverley Warmington: That is more civil service process to worry about. Gerard will speak directly to the Secretary of State. He will have conversations directly with the Secretary of State and has done so most days. That is a bit of civil service process that you need not worry about.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I am not really talking about the line management, which I am sure is all in order.

Beverley Warmington: On any issues like this, he has a direct line in, if necessary, to the Secretary of State.

Q145 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Can I check? From the conversations that we have had with Save the Children, they were talking about some of the discussions that they have had with Interpol and struggling to get political capital. Has the department had any discussions with Interpol about trying to oil those wheels? If it has, what were those discussions? If not, is there a commitment to go to Interpol and to possibly even offer whatever the cost of this needs to be to make sure that those wheels are oiled?

Matthew Rycroft: On the forward-looking part of the question, yes, we will work with them in the run-up to the summit on 5 March and, I am sure, beyond. We will be looking imaginatively at how to facilitate whatever good ideas come out of that. In terms of the first part of your question about looking backwards, I do not know the answer to that question—I do not know if either of my colleagues do—about whether we have had contact with Interpol already.

Gerard Howe: I do not believe we have. You will be aware that the Secretary of State met with the National Crime Agency recently, and that is obviously part of that whole process. That is an important functionality as we look towards the Interpol team.

Q146 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Finally, in terms of this idea of “regulated profession” or whatever the term is, so that aid agencies can automatically DBS all British workers, is that a discussion that is happening with the relevant department that would need to bring that statutory instrument in? Has there been any consideration in the department of just unilaterally establishing a register not just of British aid workers but of all aid workers that may get into any touch of British



HOUSE OF COMMONS

money or British NGOs or anything, and extending our jurisdiction to the globe until another agency comes forward and takes that place? Has there been any consideration about whether that would be feasible?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes. As I said in answer to Mrs Latham's question earlier, nothing is any longer in the "too difficult" box. This is an issue that, when looked at when she first raised it, was deemed to be difficult to implement and with some concerns about lines of accountability and so on. Now, in the changed circumstance, we are again looking at it and seeing whether the time is now right to launch it, and we will be using the summit on 5 March for that purpose.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: It will be really interesting to see some of that working out that you do and it will be really useful to share that with the Committee so that we can see that thought process, even if it does not become a goer. That would be useful for us.

Mrs Latham: Could I just criticise you for something you said then? You said, "If the time is right". The time is right. It is not a case of "if". We have to do it. We cannot let this happen again.

Chair: I think you are saying yes to that.

Matthew Rycroft: I am saying yes to that. I do not recall now exactly what I said.

Chair: The time is long overdue—let us be honest—and certainly needs to be dealt with now.

Q147 **Mr Sharma:** Save the Children recently wrote to you giving a number of proposals on safeguarding. You acknowledge that you got it. Will you be implementing these proposals? Do you have any timescale on that?

Matthew Rycroft: Let me give the first part of the answer and then I will hand over to my colleagues. As with previous suggestions in this area, we want to use the summit on 5 March as the opportunity to gather all of those together, to hear from those with the most frontline experiences of these issues, including Save the Children, Oxfam and others in the sector, and there might be other ideas out there as well. We are at the stage of pooling all of those ideas and seeing which ones are most likely to really resolve this issue, because that is what we are determined to do.

Q148 **Chair:** Unless colleagues have any other questions, I need to finish with a closer. Obviously this has been a massive news story over the last 10 days, raising massively serious concerns. As we have dug further into it, we have seen that these are issues that have been known about in one form or another for a very long period of time. Do you recognise the damage that this has done to the reputation of the aid sector? What is DFID's strategy to address that?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, this is a huge crisis for the aid sector. I welcome the inquiry that you have announced today, Mr Chairman, as a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

contribution to turning this crisis around, to learning from it, to rooting out the evil that exists within the sector, and, through those improvements, to grab an opportunity and to create something better as a legacy of this crisis and the awful things that have happened to people in Haiti and elsewhere.

The reputation of the sector, the reputation of aid and the reputation of the 0.7% commitments have all been pulled into the mix. However, as the previous witness was saying, it is very important to consider why the British Government and all the main parties have committed to spending 0.7% of our economy each year on international aid and to do a better job than we have done in the past, between us, of explaining to the British people why that is a good thing to do for our own country, for our own prosperity, for our own security and for our own influence around the world. All of those things are threatened by this crisis but we are determined to act with you, with the charities, with the private sector and with others to turn that around.

Chair: Thank you for that. Let me conclude today's hearing by repeating the decision that we made earlier this morning as a Committee that we will be holding a formal inquiry into the issues that we have addressed this morning, in which we will be looking both at culpability for the past but also, very importantly, on how we can improve in the future. We will consider further witnesses in due course. Thank you.