

International Development Committee

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

Tuesday 5 June 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 5 June 2018.

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

Questions 362 - 413

Witnesses

[I:](#) Sarah Blakemore, Director, Keeping Children Safe; Paula Donovan, Co-Director, AIDS-Free World and its Code Blue Campaign; Natalie Samarasinghe, Executive Director, UNA-UK.

[II:](#) Rt Hon Clare Short, Former Secretary of State for International Development; Rt Hon Mr Andrew Mitchell MP, Former Secretary of State for International Development.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sarah Blakemore, Paula Donovan and Natalie Samarasinghe.

Q362 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this evidence session as part of our inquiry into sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector. Welcome to our three witnesses here this morning. Our usual practice is that we go straight into questions, but please feel free to give a brief introduction when you first answer a question.

I would like to start with a question to Paula. We know this issue has been on the agenda for a long time, including the 2002 UNHCR and Save the Children report. What is your view of the work and steps that the UN has taken since then in responding to these issues?

Paula Donovan: Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to be here, although it is not a pleasant topic. My view is that the tendency of the United Nations organisation and the member states is to look at these issues in retrospect and review them historically to try to improve policies, practices and procedures on paper, but never to address the accountability issues that absolutely are essential in order to send a message, to the organisation, the world and the people that the UN is mandated to serve, that when policies are not followed and procedures are lacking there will actually be individuals held to account.

Q363 **Chair:** Natalie and Sarah, can I ask whether you agree with that assessment?

Sarah Blakemore: Yes, I do. There is more work that can be done on policies and procedures and making sure that they are in place, but critically that they are implemented.

Natalie Samarasinghe: Thank you for the invitation. I am really grateful that the Committee is giving priority to this issue. I have just two small points of clarification: UNA-UK is a UK-based charity and we do not receive any funding from the UN, nor do we speak on its behalf; and our work—our Mission Justice campaign, in particular—focuses on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse—SEA—by UN peacekeepers, so most of our evidence is framed in that context and in the context that we believe that peacekeeping is a very important tool for the UN.

In terms of your question, it is fair to say that the UN has been grappling with this for over two decades. It is now moving from a more reactive response to a more proactive response in terms of prevention in some of the standards around deployment and so on. However, there is still a huge gap on accountability and we believe that it is really now time for member states to step up to the plate, because the UN has constraints in terms of communal jurisdiction, especially over military and police troop contributors, but also in giving political leadership to help the UN use the



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powers it already has. The UN office is in a very difficult position, because it needs to raise troops for peacekeeping missions.

Q364 **Mr Evans:** Sarah, on your website you talk about doing some child safeguarding audits. How many do you do and how do you do them?

Sarah Blakemore: In terms of UN missions, we have done two, with the missions in Liberia and Haiti. In terms of other organisations, our tools and particular audits have probably been done with thousands of organisations around the world, some of which are implementing partners that operate in those areas.

As part of this piece of work on child safeguarding in UN peacekeeping, we first went and did that in Liberia. We actually have a quite comprehensive audit tool with the different elements, systems, policies, procedures and practices on accountability at all levels through an organisation that we would expect to see, and we have quite a comprehensive way of assessing that data through interviews, document review and comparison with our assessment of good practice.

We have also just returned—and have not published the report yet—from doing the same assessment in Haiti with the mission there, but also, for example, with implementing partners in Haiti.

Q365 **Mr Evans:** You do it via lots of interviews. Do people come forward with information?

Sarah Blakemore: Yes, and there is also quite a comprehensive document review. The audit has limitations. It tells you what we can find in terms of evidence of what exists on good practice. It does not necessarily tell you that it is being implemented. We try to test that. We interview and we test, but the idea is to get a useful baseline of what exists and what does not exist, to be able to share good practice from other organisations and to be able to then make some very specific evidence-based and pragmatic recommendations for what we would like to see in terms of effective child safeguarding.

Q366 **Mr Evans:** If one of the audits that you take shows serious failings, what do you do then? Can you give us an example of where this has happened?

Sarah Blakemore: In terms of the missions that we have done, we certainly report it. We publish reports on that and we make very specific recommendations about how that could be improved. If, for example, you do not see a specific policy on child safeguarding that addresses the particular needs of children, we would make a public recommendation to all of the actors involved that this is missing, in our opinion, and then we go back and offer support in order to implement and assess that.

Q367 **Mrs Latham:** This is a specific question to Natalie and Paula. You both identify poor reporting as a difficulty in responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, with UNA-UK calling for greater



assessment of performance by DPKO. How can reporting of these incidents within the UN system be improved?

Natalie Samarasinghe: With regard to improving the procedure around true performance—and that is a wider issue than SEA—it is incumbent on states to give political support to the Secretariat. We know from our colleagues who work in DPKO and other areas that they would like to see more stringent performance measures applied and they have that information, but it is what is done with it. That is when you get to the important role of the Security Council, which mandates missions and oversees them. The UK's role is important here in saying, "Is there a way that we can use this information when it comes to the decisions around who is deployed?" and, crucially, refusing to allow states to contribute troops.

We would like a system to be developed that is similar to the one for, say, children and armed conflict, where there is a list of parties that have not done enough to address allegations and where accountability has not materialised. There are already precedents for this: the Secretary-General produces a report on sexual violence in conflict that lists parties. The Secretary-General has asked that these parties are then not invited to contribute troops, but it remains a very pressurised situation for UN officials to be making a very political decision in the context of a shortage of peacekeeping troops. Again, the UK could do more by providing its own troops to broaden the pool.

Q368 **Mrs Latham:** Is there a case for country A—say, in Africa—providing peacekeeping troops for country B, country B providing peacekeeping troops for country C, country C providing peacekeeping troops for country D, and country D providing them for country A, so that all of those troops are paid for by the UN, not by the Government? It is a way of Governments in developing countries paying their troops when they do not bother normally.

If the UN were to say, "But if your troops are seen to be wanting and creating situations with sexual abuse and harassment, you will not be allowed to do that", would that be a way of stopping it, by saying, "That country cannot do that, so therefore those troops would not be paid"?

Natalie Samarasinghe: Absolutely. It is important to note that SEA has not just been an issue with developing countries. France and others have been involved in allegations as well and it has not been satisfactory. Countries are not just contributing troops out of the goodness of their hearts, to help; there is a financial element involved. That goes to the heart of the tricky position that the UN is in. It does not have the luxury of lots of troops that are very well equipped and trained to perform the functions it needs.

If there was leadership from member states to say, "No, we will refuse," that would be an important step. We also think it would be a good idea to have a general baseline. For example, if a country's troops are under



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allegations of mass atrocities, and maybe under investigation by another part of the UN system, that should really be a bar to them contributing troops, so that there are two steps in response to allegations that are not addressed and a general baseline.

Paula Donovan: The Code Blue Campaign that my organisation, AIDS-Free World, has run for three years is concerned about the fact that the number of reported so-called allegations is obviously quite a bit lower than the number of actual cases, but that is not our primary concern. Our primary concern is what happens between the time that someone comes forward and reports an allegation and the time that the United Nations declares that that allegation has been resolved in one way or another. That is all done behind closed doors.

It is crucial for the United Kingdom and everyone involved in this issue to understand that the United Nations is unique. The United Nations is the only entity that has immunity, so that its staff and the organisation's words and deeds are subject to immunity and therefore not subject to the scrutiny of the global public. Although international best practices can be identified around the world, they will never be comparable to what happens within the United Nations once a case is reported. That all happens behind closed doors, and it is incumbent, of course, upon the member states, which are the governing body of the United Nations institution—the organisation itself—to provide the only system of checks and balances that can be provided throughout the UN system.

Only the United Kingdom and the other member states are allowed to insist that the United Nations open its books—that the organisation that you govern and oversee makes it clear to the member states what kinds of investigations are going on; what sort of vetting is undertaken to ensure that when someone reports, someone of appropriate authority and experience is conducting the investigations; that they are not interfering with the rights and obligations of Governments with jurisdiction to bring on criminal charges if necessary; that cases that are closed for lack of evidence were actually substantiated in a way that would bear up to the standards of the United Kingdom here, within your own country, and so forth.

It is everything that happens from the point that a report is made, until in perpetuity—things remain pending according to the UN's public information—but what is going on behind closed doors is of absolutely critical importance. That is why the Code Blue Campaign is proposing that a temporary, independent oversight panel be struck by you, the member states, in order to ensure that there is neutrality—that is completely missing, at this point, in the adjudication of these issues and the disposal of these cases—and that a group of experts without any conflict of interests is watching what happens from the moment a person reports right to the end and the disposition of the case.



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As far as your question about troops being contributed by one country to another country is concerned, Burundi is a perfect case in point. In the Central African Republic the member states, including the United Kingdom, insisted that the United Nations organisation conduct a review of what had happened in 2014-15. Children reported to the United Nations at that time that they had been sexually abused by French peacekeeping personnel. That information was suppressed, and it became a global issue on the front pages of newspapers around the world when my organisation and the Code Blue Campaign revealed to the public that the UN had been sitting on this information and had done nothing with it. A review ensued and the report of that review was tabled in December 2015.

Since that time, Burundi has continued to contribute troops to the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic. Burundi is simultaneously under review by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, including rape. The Government of Burundi are using their military to perpetrate rapes that are suspected to rise to the level of crimes against humanity at home, and they are being paid by the United Nations—contracted by the United Nations—to send about 775 troops, as of April 2018, from Burundi who are under investigation for crimes against humanity in their own country, including rape. Those troops are now being sent to the Central African Republic, an area of the world where there is absolutely no oversight and no accountability whatsoever, and people are the most vulnerable in the world.

Each of those soldiers is paid roughly USD \$1,400 per month by the United Nations to conduct this so-called peacekeeping, and overseeing the people who are on both the military and non-military side in the Central African Republic is a group of people—civilian and military personnel, again contracted by the United Nations—including one man who was found to be guilty of abuse of authority by the Central African Republic review panel that the UK and others insisted that the Secretary-General of the United Nations commission after the incidents in 2015.

Q369 Mrs Latham: It appears to me that there should be no immunity for these personnel. It should be out in the open and they should have no diplomatic immunity whatsoever, if they are overseeing all of this. That is something that we as a Government, and other countries, should be talking about.

Paula Donovan: That is right. It is both the obligation and the privilege of the Secretary-General to waive the immunity of any individual, but it so rarely happens that that is where the member states again have to move in with their own oversight.

Q370 Mrs Latham: If France is part of this whole business, it should be sanctioned as well.

I have one final little bit, which you have probably partially answered.



What specific challenges does the UN face in reporting incidents, and why is there such under-reporting?

Sarah Blakemore: Specific challenges are all sorts of things: inadequate reporting systems; lack of reporting systems; lack of accountability in terms of following up on those reports; reports that are not followed up perhaps by the troop-contributing country or within the UN; barriers around reporting SEA in terms of stigma, the fact that you are a child or the fact that you are too frightened to go and report something; barriers around the fact that these organisations operating in those contexts are not making it clear what is and is not acceptable behaviour; the fact that children are being groomed; the fact that children are being offered medicine, food and the very basics of survival; and the fact that these are men with guns in their community. Fundamentally, it is about the enormous imbalance of power.

Q371 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Are aid workers themselves adequately protected from sexual violence that is conducted against them while employed by the UN?

Paula Donovan: Do you mean by other aid workers and members of the so-called United Nations family, or do you mean by the civilian population?

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I think I mean by members of the UN family, but you can answer both.

Paula Donovan: Focusing on the United Nations, because of the unique nature of the United Nations, no, they are not adequately protected. No one is adequately protected from sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or sexual harassment by anyone who works for the United Nations. That is because the fundamental problem is that if you should report, you are reporting to the wrong entity. You are reporting to an entity with no neutrality and with a built-in bias.

The United Nations has a three-way conflict of interest. It has a conflict in having to defend three different interests whenever anyone comes forward, whether that is an aid worker, a member of the population that is supposed to be served or a co-worker of the United Nations. It has a duty of care towards the person who has been reported because that person is an employee and is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty. It has an obligation towards the person who is coming forward as a victim to make sure that justice of some sort is pursued and served, and it has an overriding obligation to the organisation itself—to the United Nations world body—which will remain in perpetuity well beyond this individual case, so there is the reputation and wellbeing of the organisation.

These three things work in direct conflict with one another, and it is not possible for anyone who reports any sort of sexual misconduct by a member of UN personnel to assume that the people to whom they are reporting can somehow step back and become neutral and rise above



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that conflict of interest. It must be reported to, investigated by and adjudicated by the member states that will remain neutral and do not have the conflict of interest that the United Nations, as an employer, has.

Natalie Samarasinghe: I agree with much of that. I just wanted to add a slight note of caution. Member states are part of the solution, but they are also part of the problem. Especially when it comes to senior appointments, they are hugely politicised. We know that states will support their particular candidates, so a political dimension also comes into protection. That is even worse than for the victims of abuse, because they cannot necessarily rely even on the member states, especially if they are powerful member states, to support them.

Again in terms of immunity, when it comes to police and military troops, immunity really stems from the agreements and memorandums of understanding that these countries have with the UN, and member states are not willing to give this up. Resolution 2272 gave the Secretary-General power to repatriate troops when allegations of SEA have not been addressed. There was huge resistance in the Security Council to the adoption of that resolution, from both Russia as a permanent member and Egypt as a major troop contributor.

These things are not happening in a vacuum. It is clear that the UK and others have to play a role in solving them, but there has to be a recognition that not all states are really approaching this in the best possible way.

Q372 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** With the immunity issue, I was under the understanding that the new Secretary-General—not so new now—had said that he would lift immunity for cases where there was sexual abuse or sexual assault. Has he actually followed up on his word? That is one of the things that he pledged in his selection—that he would get a grip on this. Were they empty words?

Natalie Samarasinghe: I do not think they were empty words. There are two forms of immunity, and that is partly why it is so difficult. There is immunity with troops and then there is immunity of UN personnel, which rests on this old 1946 convention. The Secretary-General has made that commitment. It is a recent commitment. He came to power last year and his major report was put in place last year, so we still need to see whether that is going to be put into practice, and there are cases now where you could argue that it should be. We need to wait to see whether that happens.

Q373 **Paul Scully:** Natalie, your written evidence raises concerns over UN Resolution 2272, as you have just expressed now, holding troop-contributing countries to account. Does it need revision to provide for some central authority?

Natalie Samarasinghe: Yes. It was a big step forward, because this was the Security Council, so member states, saying "This is a priority for us."



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It really empowered the Secretary-General to do three things: first, send home troops where allegations have been made and not addressed; then send home all the troops from a particular country that has not made progress in addressing them; and, potentially, also bar that country from contributing troops in the foreseeable future.

They are all very positive steps, but when it comes to implementation, it gets political. There is huge pressure on the Secretary-General, DPKO and the rest of the Secretariat not to get caught up in politics. They are not just liaising with states on peacekeeping; they are liaising with them on a host of other issues. It is never going to be a perfect process. What needs to happen, as Paula and Sarah have made very clear, is that member states need to assume that responsibility and say, "This is our decision. We are not going to let these states that have not addressed allegations contribute troops." The leadership has to come from them.

There are lots of ways in which Resolution 2272 can be built upon using existing mechanisms; there is always least resistance in the UN to things that have already been adopted. The annex to Resolution 1612 on children and armed conflict—again, it is a politicised exercise when it comes to naming and shaming states, as we have seen, but it would be a step forward—and the annex to the 1960 resolution on sexual violence in conflict are two mechanisms through which you could have in the public domain a list of countries that have not done well. More work then needs to be done on creating this baseline of who actually should not be contributing troops because there are existing allegations against them in the ICC, or from other parts of the UN system.

Across the board, lots can be done to various other practices, from vetting to training, to strengthen each of these measures itself, but it has to be political leadership from states.

Q374 Paul Scully: Would a similar resolution be viable for civilian personnel? Would it be practical and is it needed?

Natalie Samarasinghe: Yes. There is more ease and clarity in terms of moving forward immediately and addressing the issue where troops are concerned, because countries have that jurisdiction over their own troops, because there is momentum on this area and because it would possibly be easier to construct criminal accountability on the basis of precedents from the ICC and so on in defining acts of sexual violence. That is more low-hanging fruit in that sense, but yes, of course; this is the next big scandal waiting to happen. It would be incredibly wise not just for states but for the UN itself to be looking more proactively at that area.

Q375 Paul Scully: Paula, do you have a view on that civilian personnel question?

Paula Donovan: Yes, I do. I hate to say that I disagree with Natalie, because I agree with almost everything she says, but I disagree that the



civilians are the low-hanging fruit. They are the treetops that no one can reach. There is no route to accountability for the non-military personnel.

Where the jurisdiction of the troop-contributing countries is concerned, there is a path—whether or not it is followed is a matter of hot debate—but there is no path to justice for civilians who are accused of sexual misconduct of any kind in the United Nations. It is all shrouded in secrecy. While there is naming and shaming of the Governments that are providing troops, when you look at the UN's published data it simply says, "Civilian". You cannot find out where that civilian is from, whether it is a national of the UK, Sri Lanka or the Maldives. You have absolutely no idea where that person is from.

These issues are then treated as though they were administrative matters, and as though the person had broken the rules of the UN rather than the laws that we should all be held subject to. No one can find out who investigated this person or whether an investigation was conducted, whether it was thorough, by whom they were investigated and what the reasons were. Everything is behind closed doors and generally, at the end of long, involved cases that are filled with more delays than actual action over the course of months and years, the case is simply dismissed or closed. Even individual member states cannot insist on looking at what happened behind those closed doors to see whether or not they agree with the determination about what happens to the civilian.

Q376 Virendra Sharma: In your written evidence, Paula, you said that the civilian personnel employed by the UN have committed more sexual exploitation and abuse per capita than military personnel. What are the main issues with civilian involvement and how can this be remedied?

Paula Donovan: We will start with the remedy. The remedy is to remove this entire issue from the hands of the United Nations organisation and put it where it belongs: in the hands of the governing body and in the hands of the 193 member states, which can create different bodies that are impartial, regionally representative, truly expert and qualified to conduct investigations and to receive complaints, vet them and determine whether or not immunity applies.

Let me just mention, if you do not mind, Mr Russell-Moyle, that immunity is not to be waived by the Secretary-General in cases where crimes are committed; it is to be acknowledged that there never was immunity for crime. UN immunity does not apply to criminal conduct, so there is no immunity to waive, with the one exception of the very most senior people in the United Nations who have absolute immunity, and in that case the Secretary-General is obliged to waive the immunity unless it would be to the disfavour of the world body. The remedy for the situation is to take this issue out of the hands of the institution so that it is not policing itself or making judgments on itself.

As some of you may have seen recently in the newspaper I was quoting, the head of the UNAIDS programme co-ordinating board—who happens



to be British, because that board is now chaired by the United Kingdom—was saying that Governments have no appetite for looking at individual cases and so forth. If the organisation itself is fraught with conflicts of interest and cannot police and judge itself because of those conflicts of interest, and if the member states who govern the institution and the bureaucracy have no appetite for looking at individual cases and finding out where policies and procedures are flouted and where authority is abused, one has to wonder where that leaves victims current, future and past. Where does it leave people when there is simply no remedy that allows for accountability, and that would send a message throughout the world: “If you are a perpetrator or would-be perpetrator, do not come to work for the United Nations because we will find you, prosecute you, throw you out and give you a record that will follow you for the rest of your life”? That is exactly the opposite of what is happening now.

Q377 Chris Law: While some of the reputational damage to the UN that you are describing today is really revealing, I am just looking over your report about the poisonous culture of impunity, discrimination against women, retaliation and cover-ups. You describe it almost like a patriarchal boys’ club, in the way this has been treated. How can you carry out effective reporting and take action in an environment like this when it comes to things like sexual abuse and exploitation?

Paula Donovan: You cannot. That is the simple answer. You simply cannot, because of the conflict of interest and the overriding imperative of the organisation and its senior officials to protect themselves, to avoid rebuke of any kind and to sustain a reputation they do not deserve for upholding the very same principles that they espouse to member states and populations around the world. These cannot exist. The reputation of the United Nations cannot exist and be sustained by an institution that is faced with various allegations that its standards are being flouted, its authority is being abused and its personnel are abusing one another and the civilian populations they are mandated to serve.

They seem unable to wrestle with the fact that it is possible to acknowledge this sort of wrongdoing—there are 90,000-plus personnel who work for the United Nations—and then have the humility to say, “We do not have the mandate, authority or capacity to police and judge ourselves. Please, we are looking to our governance body—to the member states of the United Nations—to move in and make sure that these issues are dealt with by a neutral party and that accountability is brought about, and we will step aside and recuse ourselves because we are fraught with a conflict of interest. We will go about the business of doing the good work that the United Nations does and making sure that the people who do deserve to work for the United Nations continue to work there. You, the member states, should put together a temporary oversight panel to make sure that while we are figuring out a way to have a complete shift of authority from the institution bureaucracy to the governance body, at least you will be able to see in real time everything



that we are doing and find all the problems that are inherent in the way that we are conducting our business.”

Chris Law: I know Natalie wants to come in on this, because you mentioned earlier that member states need to step up to the plate. It echoed what Paula was saying. In terms of who has stepped up to the plate so far, is the UK in the top 10 in terms of leading on this? Where are we in the balance?

Natalie Samarasinghe: I have three quick points. First, just to clarify, I did not mean civilians were the low-hanging fruit—quite the opposite. There is momentum behind troops and police; civilians, as you described, are much harder.

Secondly, we have seen from recent revelations in lots of sectors, including these Houses, that this issue is not just a UN problem. This is a problem of society, and that is partly why it is so difficult to address. It would not be reasonable to expect a large organisation such as the UN to be immune, although that does not mean that it is good enough. I just want to put that on the record.

Thirdly, it is important to recognise that there has been some progress made, whether it is in data collection, vetting, training, the sheer priority given to the issue, the fact that we are talking about it, the fact that the UN is talking about it, the slew of reports in 2015, the Security Council resolution or the SG’s report. There has been an attempt to get this right. The problem is that there are still gaps. That is when member states step in. As Paula put it, having an independent capacity is important here, because the UN does not have the resources and often member states will not have the willingness or resources to respond. There is a gap.

In terms of how the UK is doing, it has done well in terms of pushing for more accountability. It was a supporter of Resolution 2272. It pushed very constructively for the voluntary compacts to be as strong as they could be, given that it was a political negotiation around this. The UK could do more. It could take the lead by publishing its own MOUs and could publish its own voluntary compact. There is a lot of leading by example it can do. The UK is in this crucial role, because of its membership of the Security Council, where it can take the lead, and I think it actually has the pen on peacekeeping as well.

One thing that is important to note is that it should have skin in the game. If the UK contributes more troops, that will strengthen its influence in this area. From a UK perspective here, it is also a way for the UK to give some teeth to the Global Britain project. It is a way for it to engage with countries that might like to have relationships post-Brexit. There are lots of benefits, from both a UK and a UN perspective, to the UK doing more on this. It has done considerable things behind the scenes; it could do more.

Q378 **Mark Menzies:** Natalie, you stated in your written evidence that there



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were shades of grey within definitions of sexual exploitation and abuse. What are the main difficulties with definitions in this respect?

Natalie Samarasinghe: I will not read the definitions because you have them in the evidence, but both sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, in the way the UN defines them, are quite broad and peppered with difficult phrases—"differential power"—and so on, that could be interpreted in different ways. There are merits to having broad definitions because you want it to be a catch-all, but when you put on top of that the UN zero-tolerance policy that says no acts are allowed, the difficulties in implementing that on the ground are huge because it could cover anything from consensual relationships between staff to what are clearly criminal acts of sexual violence.

From our perspective, we think it will be really important, if we are going to get more accountability, to look at sexual violence as a definition. There is much more consensus in international law over what that means. More member states have criminality in their own legislation that defines what these acts are, so that is a much better basis than the broader definitions that are used and may be important from an administrative point of view. I am thinking about this as an employer myself: you want that flexibility, but when it comes to criminal accountability a tighter definition would probably be more appropriate.

Q379 **Henry Smith:** Paula and Natalie, you agree on the need for an independent body. How would you envisage this working and what would the UK's role, in your concept, be in that?

Natalie Samarasinghe: Our approach is looking at where the gaps are now and how we can make progress immediately before building up to something that is a proper system of accountability. I have already talked about some of the measures through the Security Council. Here is the clear role for the UK: pushing for this resolution, publishing a list of countries involved, creating a baseline of standards and giving some cover to empower the Secretariat to do more. Those are all steps that could be taken.

Of course we would have to see whether those steps are actually working. Our feeling is that they are likely not to work. It would take the pressure off of member states and the UN Secretariat to have an investigative body that is independent. This is something that lots of people have called for. In 2005 Prince Zeid, who was Jordanian ambassador to the UN at the time, called for it. The Resolution 1325 study in 2015 called for it. The House of Lords IR Committee called for it.

It is about looking at how we can make progress to fill in as many gaps as possible on accountability now, and looking at a better system in parallel. The UK's role is absolutely crucial on both of those things.

Q380 **Henry Smith:** Paula, if I may come to you more specifically, I understand that you have talked about a special court mechanism. How



would you see that working within a wider independent panel?

Paula Donovan: The special court mechanism that we are proposing would be operational in peacekeeping countries where, as I just described, the military personnel do have a path to justice, but what happens is when a woman walks into a peacekeeping office and says, "I was raped last night", the UN organisation is immediately in a role of interfering and determining whether or not they believe her and whether or not that case will go forward; deciding whether or not immunity applies, and to whom the case should be referred, if to anyone at all; informing the troop-contributing country, if they determine that it was a soldier from X or Y country; and categorising the allegation as far as whether it is sexual exploitation and abuse, and so forth.

Right away, there is interference on the part of the institution. That should be handled instead by a special court mechanism that would exist in every peacekeeping country, which that particular person who walks in to report a crime would face immediately. It would be an impartial person who would accept the report and then, if it was determined that the allegation was levelled against a civilian member of the United Nations, then there would be a path to justice. The court itself would conduct the investigation and would have a trial right there in situ so that people could not only know that justice was being served, but see that justice was being served. The special court mechanism would handle all the criminal cases of sexual abuse committed by civilian personnel and would ensure that the member states and troop-contributing countries are both getting the referrals and following up on them. They would be responsible from beginning to end.

Q381 **Henry Smith:** You are basically saying that the UN is judge and jury at the moment when it comes to these cases.

Paula Donovan: That is right.

Q382 **Henry Smith:** Who would effectively administer and staff an independent court mechanism?

Paula Donovan: The member states themselves. Some body within the 193-member General Assembly.

Q383 **Henry Smith:** Would that be a body of the United Nations?

Paula Donovan: That is right. They would not be employed by the United Nations organisation. They would have absolutely no attachment whatsoever to the Secretary-General or to any entity within the organisation itself.

Q384 **Henry Smith:** Its authority would come from the United Nations?

Paula Donovan: From the political side; that is right. They would report to the member states only.

Q385 **Mrs Latham:** Sarah, you present a toolkit for dealing with sexual



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harassment, exploitation and abuse in your new project on protecting children in conflict. How is it used and enforced in practice, and how are the four central standards communicated and enforced?

Sarah Blakemore: The foundation for having effective safeguarding mechanisms in place is to do a risk assessment, so to look in your organisation—and that can be any type of organisation—at the risks that it may present to children or to the adults that you come into contact with. That might be an assessment of the legal system or an assessment of prevalence of a particular type of violence. It might be to do with your organisational practice or your organisational culture and difficulties within that, and then developing a set of mitigations around that.

We have based this on international child safeguarding standards, which are around policy, so it is about setting out very clearly what is and is not acceptable behaviour around children. That is something that is missing, we found, in almost all of the places we did our child safeguarding audits. It is also around people, so around vetting and training. It is around training on reporting and whistleblowing mechanisms; training on, if a child reports to you, how you deal with that report; and training on, if you hear your colleagues talking about that kind of offence, what your responsibility and accountability is in that. We focus a lot on perpetrators and we could perhaps focus more on the bit that is about the people who have not done their job within the organisations, who have not investigated or upheld the rules and who have kept quiet—all of those sorts of things

It is also about procedures. It is about effective reporting procedures that are suitable for all types of people. We focus particularly on children, so having procedures that are child-friendly, robust, transparent and open, and all of those sorts of things, but also it is around prevention. We talk a lot about accountability, and rightly so, but any person who is abused is one person too many. What would really benefit us is identifying what “good” looks like across the whole spectrum, from risk assessment to prevention and then following on for accountability.

The final standard is around accountability, and that is accountability at all levels within an organisation, from the people on the ground to the most senior levels, in terms of, “Are those individuals upholding those standards around child safeguarding?” That would be around acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, but it is also around these other things that I have been talking about, so whistleblowing, reporting, making sure that the rights and dignity of the victim are at the heart of what they do, and making sure that those policies, procedures and practices are rolled out and that we have evidence of that and are clear that that is happening in an ongoing way.

It is also about leadership and transforming structures of power so that every single individual understands their responsibilities and the sanctions that they will face if they fail to comply.



To go back to your question, the foundation is the risk assessment and the mitigations. It is then about implementing a broad range of policies and practices that are context-specific and that are very practical and pragmatic, which we can identify to ensure that every individual knows what their responsibilities are and what will happen to them if they do not comply.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Can I thank the three of you for your evidence today? We have covered a lot of ground in 45 minutes and it is immensely helpful. I know that you have provided us with written evidence as well. We are going to move to the second panel, but do feel free to stay if you wish to listen. Thank you very much indeed.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Clare Short and Rt Hon Mr Andrew Mitchell.

Q386 **Chair:** Good morning. We move on to our second panel. I am delighted to be joined by two former Secretaries of State, Clare Short and Andrew Mitchell. We have initially some questions for Clare, then some questions for Andrew and then some for both of you.

Clare, when you took office as the first Secretary of State for International Development in 1997, how far was this issue of sexual exploitation and abuse of aid recipients, be they children or adults, an issue at that time? How far was it a priority at that time?

Clare Short: It was not an issue in any way, shape or form in my time in office, except the child sexual abuse in the Pitcairn Islands, which had been going on for a very long time as part of the distorted community and everyone had been looking the other way. When I took it up, people in the Foreign Office were very irritated with me.

I just want to say this one thing: the way the *Times* covered this allegation about one man in Haiti was completely distorted and out of all proportion. It does not mean that what he did was acceptable, but I graduated in 1968 and university lecturers used to come on to young students. When I was an official in the Home Office there was a senior official who tried it. I think if you went to the *Times* newspaper there would be people who misused their power. Certainly in my time in DFID there was an ambassador who was having affairs with lots of different people. You get to this point: is that abusive? Is it consensual? It is not very good. The whole of Government needs to have codes and so on. It is not a special problem in international development. In fact, people are probably better morally motivated, generally, but of course this is a human weakness. I know of Ministers and MPs, and I knew of some officials in my Department who were having affairs, but it was consensual even though they were married.



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My biggest sexual abuse question was Pitcairn, and that was an extremely serious, longstanding, entrenched sexual abuse of children that had clearly been not addressed for a very long time.

Q387 Mrs Latham: During your time as Secretary of State, you knew nothing about the joint investigation by UNHCR and Save the Children that uncovered allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia.

Clare Short: No—this is UN peacekeeping forces, is it?

Mrs Latham: UNHCR and Save the Children.

Clare Short: They did the inquiries. Is that about their own stuff? There were allegations in the media a bit after my time about UN peacekeeping forces.

Q388 Mrs Latham: There was a report in 2002.

Clare Short: I do not remember it. I left in 2003 and I was probably rather preoccupied with other things at that time. There was press reporting on UN peacekeeping forces. I was very close to the UN operation in Sierra Leone because it was collapsing, with us trying to prop things up and get some reform. If there was much talk of such things I would have heard of them, because week to week I was very engaged.

The thing I would say about UN peacekeeping is that soldiers notoriously abuse sexually. We all know about the Russians after the Second World War, but I have read things about Allied soldiers giving food in return for sexual favours in very humiliating ways to hungry women in Italy, for example. There were allegations about Iraq and so on, though not Kosovo because that was mostly an operation from the air. There is something about power, soldiers, violence and abuse.

No, I had not heard of those. I read of things afterwards. I am afraid I was not surprised, but then there was some tightening up within the UN, I believe.

There is one other thing I would like to say about UN peacekeeping operations, which is that the UK, like others, votes for them and then allows some of the poorest countries in the world with some of the least well-trained soldiers to staff those peacekeeping operations. It would be good if the UK would put more forces in with logistics, discipline and organisation. We could improve the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations.

Q389 Mrs Latham: Maybe I could bring you back to the report in 2002, which contained allegations aimed at the NGO sector, including British charities. Were you satisfied with the investigations carried out by UNHCR? You were not aware of them or any other parts of the UN at the time, so if you were not aware of them you could not have been satisfied with them.

Clare Short: No, quite. Nor dissatisfied.



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Q390 **Mrs Latham:** When you talk about Ministers and people in the Foreign Office having affairs with other people, we are talking here about some of the most vulnerable people in the world, in today's world—not 1945, 1950 or 1960, but now—where men, mainly, are abusing the most vulnerable people in the world, and you think, "It happens everywhere so it does not matter."

Clare Short: I do not think that it does not matter. I said that I do not think it is a particular problem of the development world. It is a problem across the world and across all institutions. Men—and probably increasingly women; I do not know—who have power misusing that power to get sexual favours is a general problem. Things are changing since I was a young woman, I am glad to say, and there is more to be done. I am just saying that all Departments should have codes and make sure it does not happen in their Departments, and I do not think it is a special problem of the Department for International Development.

Mrs Latham: No, but within NGOs it seems to be a problem of white, middle-class men, who have power and who are abusing people within their own organisations and some of the most vulnerable people in the world, and I think that is a disgrace.

Clare Short: Of course it is a disgrace. I am saying that I do not believe it will be confined to that sector. It should always be dealt with, always be addressed and never permitted. Yes, that is what I am saying, but I was not aware of that report, no.

Q391 **Chris Law:** I am quite shocked, actually, that you have not seen this report. That smacks, to me, of its having potentially been covered up within the Government of the time. Do you feel, now that we are talking about this, a little bit surprised, like this Committee, that you had never heard about this report or seen it? Some of the allegations are pretty serious. For example, were any alarm bells raised at DFID? Were there any conversations about investigating this problem? More to the point, the report contained allegations against British peacekeeping forces.

Clare Short: Andrew has just passed me a note, I presume from DFID, saying, "Formal advice was provided to Ministers on the 2002 report at the time of publication." I was a very, very hands-on Minister. I read everything that moved. I have no recollection of this. On the other hand, I have recollections of allegations against UN peacekeepers. My timing of memory could be faulty, because I am saying that I read it in the press but I might have read it here.

Q392 **Chair:** Clare, do you recall specifically British peacekeepers being criticised, which was part of that report?

Clare Short: I do not, and there were not very many. The UK soldiers were training the army in Sierra Leone. They were not part of the UN operation in any significant numbers. No, I do not remember that allegation, but of course it would be for the Ministry of Defence if that was alleged.



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There is one other thing I would like to say about this. People probably quite rightly expect more of people working in development than they do of people working in other fields, so I am not in any way trying to belittle taking it seriously, but I did think that the hysterical response to the *Times* reporting, as though everyone working in development was morally disgusting and everyone was sexually abusing everyone, was way exaggerated and disproportionate. That is what I am saying.

Q393 Chris Law: Just going back to this report in 2002, I appreciate that you were not made aware of it. Do you think there was a culture in your own Department, or indeed other Departments at the time, of cover-up? You said yourself that you were hands-on and read all reports; I trust that to be absolutely correct. Is there a possibility that somebody or some Department decided not to give you that?

Clare Short: No, I do not. I think you will find that the NGOs got less funding in my time. I was very focused on trying to build the capacity of state rather than use the NGO sector as a substitute delivery agent. We did reorganise how they got resources and the conditionalities to try to get them to be complementary to the objectives of the Department's policies, but I was not responsible for those organisations. DFID is not running them. We have a responsibility for making sure any money provided is properly used.

I do not believe that there was a culture of cover-up. The Department was very open with me about all sorts of difficult questions, but remember Pitcairn. There must have been people before me when it was going on, and no one brought it up. People find these things very difficult and uncomfortable. On the question of child sex abuse, it is pretty easy to see that you have to act. In terms of people using their power in order to have affairs or sexual relationships, there is that line about consent or abuse that is quite difficult to deal with.

I do not think the Department covered things up. They were a brilliant Department and very straightforward with me. That is my experience.

Q394 Chris Law: Does it not strike you as odd, though, that you never saw this report during your time as Secretary of State?

Clare Short: This note from Andrew says it was referred to Ministers in 2002. I do not recall it, but I remember press reports and I might be muddling that up in my mind. Of course, if it was about UK or UN military forces, it was for the Ministry of Defence to be dealing with. I do not believe it would have come as a strong report or I would have acted.

Chair: This was a UNHCR and Save the Children report that was about broader issues relating to the protection of children in West Africa that unexpectedly highlighted issues around—

Clare Short: Abuse of children. I remember these from the media.

Chair: It is striking how little coverage of this report there was at the



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time. When we have dug into it, there actually was not a lot of coverage compared to more recent allegations.

Clare Short: There were not allegations of UK troops abusing children.

Chair: That was included within it, yes.

Clare Short: UK troops? Good heavens.

Q395 **Mr Evans:** Clare, you say that you were aware of the Pitcairn issue and nowhere else, but the 2008 Save the Children report, *No one to turn to*, talked about the fact that there was chronic under-reporting, and this actually reinforces the point you were making. Whether it is stigmatisation or fear of retaliation or retribution, people were just not reporting these things. Could that have been the issue: that it was going on but people were just failing to report it?

Clare Short: I was a Member of the House when there was the scandal of child sex abuse. Where was it in the north-east?

Chair: Cleveland.

Mr Evans: There was one in Wales.

Clare Short: You will recall it. At that time, for Cleveland, there was massive press vilification of the social worker and the doctor who were alleging it. Britain did not confess to itself in public life that there was a big issue of child sex abuse. It is remarkable how relatively recent facing up to all that has been. If anyone goes back to the Cleveland stuff, you will recall that there were massive attacks on the social worker and the doctor who were alleging that this was taking place. I was involved in organising a meeting here to try to get people to face up to the reality.

I assume that that is part of it. The cover-up of child sex abuse used to be very, very widespread; that is shocking, but it was.

Q396 **Mr Evans:** It was not restricted to Cleveland either, I recall. Andrew, do you agree with Clare that this was the reason why it was under-reported?

Clare Short: I am not saying I know, by the way.

Mr Evans: No, you can only guess.

Mr Mitchell: Yes, that probably is right.

Q397 **Mr Sharma:** You have stated that when allegations surrounding Oxfam workers in Haiti surfaced, you were informed of the allegations but not in great detail, so these were not escalated to your attention. Could you outline the process by which the information originally came to you?

Mr Mitchell: Good morning. What happened was that letters, of which I think the Committee has a copy, dated 5 August and 18 August 2011 were sent to the Department. I have a copy of both those letters with names redacted from it. If you read the letters carefully, Mr Twigg, you



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will see that Oxfam did abide by the letter of the rules but it would be a fair comment to make that they did not abide by the spirit of the rules.

I knew when this issue broke in the *Times*—indeed, I was interviewed on “Newsnight”—that I had not been aware of it at the time because I would have remembered if I had been. What happened, of course, was that the letters from Oxfam abiding, as I said, by the letter but not the spirit of the rules, failed to mention the words “sex” or “sexual abuse”. Had they done so, there is no question but that the officials would have known they were holding a hot potato and would have sprinted into the Secretary of State’s office. But because there was no mention of sexual abuse or abuse of power in that way, it was filed by the Department, effectively, as a routine infraction. The wording in those letters, of course, encouraged officials to file it under a routine infraction, which Oxfam itself was dealing with.

That is why I was not informed at the time. Diligent NGOs will always inform their funders of issues that arise and wish to reassure the funders—in our case, on behalf of the taxpayer—that the money is not being misspent and that the money being committed by the taxpayer is being spent on the purpose for which it was intended. That is why it was not escalated to Ministers. That is why I did not know, as Secretary of State, but I make no criticism of the Department at all, given the information that they had, for not escalating it.

Clare Short: Could I just add that I did not have any sense that I was responsible for the management of NGOs? We are talking here as though the Department that funds has to scrutinise management and the quality of management. I never had that sense. I always had a sense of responsibility for the funding and the management of the money, but I did not know much about the internal management of those organisations, which I think is normal.

Q398 **Mr Sharma:** Andrew, you partially hinted at this, but I will just carry on as a follow-up. With hindsight, do you believe that more detail on the issue should have been presented to you?

Mr Mitchell: On the basis of what officials were told, no. Officials acted entirely properly. Oxfam were very careful. They clearly understood this landscape very well and they were careful to abide by the letter but not by the spirit. That was their intention, and they have rightly been pilloried for that since. It has done, of course, a huge amount of damage to Oxfam and the work that Oxfam are doing, which is tackling poverty in some of the most difficult parts of the world.

Can I also add, Mr Chairman, that I am very sorry indeed that Mark Goldring has decided to resign as the chief executive of Oxfam? Many of us know Mark Goldring from his brilliant work on mental health and from his time at VSO. He came in long after these issues had been addressed, at least partially, by Oxfam. He was part of the solution, not part of the



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problem, and he has been a fine servant of the development sector and a fine servant of Oxfam. I very much regret that he has decided to resign.

Q399 Paul Scully: Clare, when you said you did not get involved in the management of the NGOs, clearly you would not do the day-to-day operational and stuff like that, but did you not feel that, as the person handing over the money on behalf of the UK taxpayer, there was a sense of due diligence that needed to be done in terms of the policies that they had and the care that they were going to then give to the beneficiaries, and so on?

Clare Short: We did a reorganisation of the partnerships—I think it was called a partnership agreement—to try to get what the UK NGOs did in a country aligned with UK policy priorities in a country programme. That was quite a lot of intervention, and the funding was conditional on that kind of co-operation about policy objectives. There was accountability about money, obviously, but I am just saying that I never got involved in management questions for NGOs.

We did on VSO, because that was a closer relationship and it did a merger with some organisation that used to do managers that were separate and they came together, so I got involved in the detail of that. However, I am just saying that if you go across Government and look at any NGO funded by a Government Department, most Government Departments, apart from ensuring accountability for the money and the policy coherence, would not be involved in the management detail of the organisations they fund. That is normal.

Q400 Chair: Andrew, going to the broader context and pursuing the question that Chris asked Clare relating to the 2002 UNHCR/Save the Children report, there was a subsequent report published by Save the Children in 2008. When you became Secretary of State, were you made aware of these two reports and the issues that arose from them?

Mr Mitchell: Not specifically, but I was aware of them in general terms. Of course, when we came into Government in 2010, as the Committee will recall, we made it clear that you could not begin to understand development, let alone pursue the priorities we had, unless you put girls and women at the centre of everything you do. To be fair, that was something that Clare, when she was Secretary of State, would have very strongly supported, and we reaffirmed that.

I was aware of these issues and, in particular, as a former UN peacekeeping soldier myself in Cyprus, I was horrified by reports that came through about UN peacekeeping soldiers, certainly in the CAR but in other locations as well, where the degree of sexual exploitation and abuse was clear. I raised it on at least one occasion in meetings with Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General, when I was in New York, because I felt very strongly about it in the context of the UN, where often UN peacekeeping soldiers are dealing with people in desperate conditions of violence and despair. For them to abuse that power in this way was truly



appalling and shocking. I was certainly aware of that and I made representations. Using the authority and power of DFID to do anything it could to stop this and deter it from happening was a priority.

It may be helpful if I take the Committee through a number of things that came up during my time. In 2010, there was the Inter-Agency Standing Committee review of the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by UN, NGO, International Organization for Migration and International Federation of the Red Cross personnel, highlighting the challenges of implementing safeguarding policies on the ground.

I asked the Department to look into that and they have advised me that there are no records of any formal ministerial advice provided on this. That may be because it was at the time of the general election and the delay afterwards while the coalition was formed. There was also only limited media coverage of this report. Britain was, however, continuously engaged with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and OCHA from 2010 to 2012. There was the agreement of OCHA, Canada, Ireland and the UK international strategy for 2010 to 2013, and that included a recommendation that OCHA work more closely with the Gender Advisory Team on protection against sexual exploitation and abuse.

In addition, there was the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1960 on addressing widespread and systematic sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. The Security Council requested that the Secretary-General establish monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence. The UK closely engaged with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in response to the 2010 report.

In March 2011, as part of the new Strategic Vision for Girls and Women, which was a key priority for the coalition, we said, in pillar 4 of the document, "We aim to work in at least 15 countries to address physical and sexual violence against girls and women—increasing the numbers of survivors who have access to treatment and advice, and whose cases are satisfactorily investigated".

Also in March, when we published the multilateral aid review, we had a section on OCHA included, which made an assessment of OCHA and what they were doing on gender and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, including the standards produced following the Haiti earthquake. In April, in a letter to the heads of agencies on the Inter-Agency principles, which I signed along with five other donors, we specifically encouraged reform of the humanitarian system of leadership, including enhanced accountability.

There are just a couple of other points that it might be worth making. In the DFID business plan for 2011-15, the plan identifies tackling violence against women as a key priority and commits DFID to the pilot of new and innovative approaches to prevent and address violence against women. In 2012, in public communication on International Women's Day,



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I announced that the UK would drive forward a focus on preventing and supporting women and girls from violence and trafficking, with some specific initiatives including to end trafficking for 60,000 girls and women in South Asia and to prevent violence against 7,000 girls and women in Zambia. Of course, in May 2012, the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, launched the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative.

A lot of that drew from what we knew to be the case in the UN, although, as Clare mentioned, we really had no idea of the difficulties in the sector. I would just like to add to what Clare said in saying that this is a sector that attracts incredibly well-motivated people and it is a sector where people show great bravery. In the House of Commons, we are always—and quite rightly so—quick to salute the bravery of our armed forces. There are very many British men and women, and others, working in this sector, putting themselves in harm's way.

Clare Short: Losing their lives.

Mr Mitchell: They are losing their lives and putting themselves in harm's way in very difficult circumstances. I think today of Yemen, Syria and the DRC. For the tens of thousands who work with Oxfam, the behaviour of a very small number of individuals has tarred them with a brush that they find absolutely abhorrent. As I say, having worked in the sector, as Clare has done, for many years and met truly inspirational people, this is a tragedy for the sector, which they will now have to address and move through.

Clare Short: Could I say just one thing? We were working on violence against women in my time too. There is quite a track record in the Department. In that, there was not much on sexual abuse of children. Maybe this needs more attention. As I said, we were late coming to it within the UK, and maybe everyone just needs to review that and look more.

Q401 **Chair:** Andrew, you outlined a series of very positive initiatives but, in the previous panel, we heard damning evidence about how things are today in the UN in terms of its systems. Do you feel that those initiatives had any impact in terms of the UN system and some of the issues relating to sexual exploitation within the UN, both by peacekeepers, which we have talked about, but also by civilian personnel as well?

Mr Mitchell: I cannot comment on the position today, and your other informants will, no doubt, have had a more up-to-date account. All I can say is that we were very concerned about this. We took action through and with the UN. There was no pushback from Britain's priority to make sure these issues were addressed then. As to the extent to which they have been addressed and whether their foot is still on the accelerator on that, I cannot tell you, but it certainly should be.

Q402 **Mark Menzies:** Clare, during your time at DFID, what work was being done on safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse?



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Clare Short: Do you mean within the Department, in NGOs we funded or in the UN system?

Mark Menzies: Primarily within the Department itself.

Clare Short: I cannot recall. I am sure there were codes. There were some issues of people with drink problems and so on, where we had to change the systems and improve. I cannot recall it being an issue that we had to address or that was seen as problematic within the Department.

Q403 **Mark Menzies:** Andrew, you have already covered this in the note that you read out, but was there anything further that was being done by the time you were in post in order to tackle safeguarding against sexual abuse?

Mr Mitchell: As I set out in the note, those were the steps that we were taking in this very important area, but I would just echo what Clare just said, in that any misbehaviour or malfeasance among civil servants within the Department would not be dealt with by Ministers; they would be dealt with by senior officials and by the Permanent Secretary, and that, of course, is entirely right. You would not have politicians and Ministers dealing with those things. It is for the Civil Service itself to maintain the highest code of ethics and behaviour. In my experience, certainly at DFID, they always did.

Q404 **Mr Sharma:** To both of you, with hindsight, do you believe that the Department should have been doing more while you were both in charge?

Clare Short: It is really easy to be wise after the event. As I have said, this kind of scandalous behaviour goes across different Government Departments and, in my experience, there are events elsewhere that need addressing. The most troubling thing of all this is the allegations of sexual abuse of children, I must say, because they cannot speak up themselves and they are more vulnerable than anybody. As I have also said, however, the facing up to that policy issue has come very recently in policy terms, even within the UK. There was the church, as we all know—horrendous. With hindsight, I would like us to have done more on that but, looking at the reality of how long it took us even to deal with the issue within Britain, it is not surprising, but not good.

Mr Mitchell: I entirely agree with what Clare has said. We were alert on the issue, as I hope I have been able to explain to the Committee. Had we had any indication at all, steps would, of course, have been taken. As Clare said, it is easy, with hindsight, to make corrections but I am perfectly satisfied that we had the right approach and that, if anything had come on to our radar, we would have taken action immediately. On the Oxfam issue, had it come to me, I am satisfied that we would immediately have reacted in the correct and proper way but, as I said, we did not know. If we did not know—and the Department did not know the extent of this at the time—there was nothing we could do.

Q405 **Mrs Latham:** This was going to be a question to both of you but



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probably is to Andrew now. What communication did you have with NGOs and the UN on issues of sexual exploitation and abuse during your time at DFID? How often were these issues discussed in meetings?

Mr Mitchell: I cannot recall any occasion when I raised these matters directly with the NGOs, but I do know that I raised it directly with the UN Secretary-General and with the UN, for the reasons I set out earlier.

Q406 **Mrs Latham:** Clare, you did say that you were not aware of these reports, but you did answer a question in October 2002, which was a written question sent by Mrs Spelman to ask the Secretary of State for International Development what a) assessment her Department had made to safeguard against, and b) discussions she had had with the UNHCR regarding sexual exploitation of women in refugee camps. You were aware that there was a problem in 2002 because you answered that question, or was it civil servants who answered it?

Clare Short: No, I will have approved every question that was answered. We had a lot of policy on violence against women. I cannot recall that specific question but we were quite advanced on that question. On children, I was not aware of those allegations. My memory is as it is, and many questions go through your hands every day.

Q407 **Mrs Latham:** Yes, of course they do, but you do say at the end of it, "We will, through our close relationship with UNHCR in the field and through our participation in the Standing and Executive Committee in Geneva, continue to monitor progress on all these fronts."

Clare Short: I am sure that was done. The Department did not make undertakings that it did not follow through on.

Q408 **Paul Scully:** Andrew, I just have a quick supplementary on something you said before. You said that you were not aware of the Oxfam situation but that if you had been, you would have responded in the correct way. What would that correct way have been, to your mind?

Mr Mitchell: Our successor, Penny Mordaunt, did respond in entirely the right way, and I think and hope that I would have done exactly the same.

Q409 **Paul Scully:** Given your experiences, what do you both think are the best practical solutions that DFID can take forward—looking forward now—in order to improve its response to sexual exploitation and abuse in the future?

Clare Short: As I have said, we must give more attention to sexual abuse of children, which has been neglected right across the piece for a long time. There have to be codes that are binding on all organisations funded by the Department, and whistleblower-type systems for reporting any abuse and ways of correcting it. I am sure all that is being put in place since the Oxfam story and, as I said earlier, this goes beyond DFID. Other Departments need to put in place such codes and enforcement mechanisms and whistleblowing systems.



Mr Mitchell: We must ensure that we improve safeguarding across the whole sector. We must expect NGOs and those we work with—those that are funded by the taxpayer, of course, but we expect it of everyone—to implement the highest possible safeguards. There is, in October, an international safeguarding conference, which I hope will underline all of this. I also hope that, once DFID is satisfied that these safeguards in partners funded by the taxpayer have been put in place, DFID will immediately continue to fund them, because the work that they are doing is alleviating poverty among some of the most desperate people in the world.

Q410 **Paul Scully:** I have heard you speak, and I totally agree with you. We are both in agreement that you do not want to be interrupting programmes to take away from those beneficiaries.

Clare Short: Could I add one more thing? It is about the military. I do not know whether you are seeing the MOD, but that is the other angle. Because of the peacekeeping force, that should be attended to and there should be codes and enforcement mechanisms. Of course, if you think of eastern DRC, some of the conditions in which people are working are very difficult, so that probably needs even more attention.

Q411 **Paul Scully:** Exactly. This is where we are coming from with the UN peacekeepers and the like as well. I was just going to say that you think that, although you do not want to interrupt current programmes, we should very much be investigating and making sure that we are not continuing to fund NGOs that do not have the right safeguarding policies in place. Do you think that is fair?

Mr Mitchell: The Department for International Development was absolutely right to say that, until it was satisfied that the partners had the right safeguarding strategy, it would not fund them. Both Save the Children and Oxfam agreed not to put in for any funding. What I am saying is that once the Department is satisfied that the safeguarding has been reviewed, revised and implemented, I hope the funding will immediately restart, for the reasons I set out.

I have just one other point. When I was a UN peacekeeping soldier, the developed world provided the majority of those soldiers. Today, it is very different. Apart from a small contingent in Cyprus, Britain does not, by and large, provide soldiers. What it does is a lot of logistics support, which Clare referred to earlier. For example, we do a lot of helping in the forces that are deployed in Somalia, without deploying British forces. The role of the MOD is not so much the codes for its own soldiers; it is giving advice and help to other forces that may benefit from the experience that MOD has.

Clare Short: The UN system needs to have codes and to make sure that they are enforced.

Q412 **Chair:** That anticipates the final question. By the way, on the MOD, we



will pursue these matters with the MOD; that is a very good suggestion. As I mentioned earlier, we had evidence in the first panel today about the situation with the United Nations. Clearly, if this is going to be addressed, it needs to be addressed globally; it cannot simply be addressed in one country. From your experience, how do you think DFID and perhaps the wider UK Government can best use their influence at the UN to push for change in the way the UN itself handles sexual exploitation and abuse?

Clare Short: The UK is a big player in the UN system. Because it is a good funder, DFID has a lot of influence. Now this issue is live and has been exposed, beyond denunciations we then need to get down to real remedies: codes and whistleblower systems. Of course, some troops and so on are sent from extremely poor countries, and some of them are thought not to be proper troops, because you get funding back, so there are real problems. The scale of the numbers of people we are talking about is also enormous, but the UK could take a leading role. It is very much listened to. We have our own experience now—both the good and the bad of it—and it needs to be taken up. It will have to be persisted with over some years to get improvements in practice. We need to look for other countries to be allies in that pressure for change.

Mr Mitchell: I completely agree with that. The way to do it is to make it clear to Karen Pierce, the current UN Permanent Representative from Britain—one of the permanent five—that this is a top priority for Britain, and to ask her to do everything she can in her leadership role to ensure that the UN absorbs this point and takes it on absolutely. In my time, we have always had very senior, very effective diplomats at the UN. As Clare said, we are a very powerful force there, not least because we fund a lot of these agencies, because we strongly approve of their objectives. For Britain, through our Permanent Representative, to make it clear that this is an absolute priority would be a very good thing.

Clare Short: All the humanitarian agencies are in Geneva, so it needs to be taken up there, too.

Q413 **Chair:** Absolutely. We had very powerful evidence earlier suggesting that the member states need to take control of this process and that it cannot be left to the UN institutions. Andrew, do you think that is right?

Mr Mitchell: Yes, and that is why I say that getting our own Permanent Representative to make it clear that it is a top priority of the British Government throughout the United Nations and all around the world would be a key signal to send. It would be heard loud and clear by the other country members.

Clare Short: It is not just a message. It is going to have to be codes, management and enforcement. We are talking about tens or hundreds of thousands of people, often coming from countries where these standards are not enforced, so it is going to be a big pressure that has to be maintained over a number of years to get a big change.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: That is absolutely right. On that note, that brings the evidence session to an end. Thank you both very much.