

# International Development Committee

## Oral evidence: Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector follow-up, HC 1973

Tuesday 7 May 2019

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

Mrs Maria Miller, Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, was also present.

Questions 1– 69

### Witnesses

I: Frances Longley, Chief Executive Officer, Amref Health Africa UK, Representative from the Bond NGO working groups; Tracey Smith, Chief Executive Officer, British Expertise International, Representative for private sector suppliers.

II: Rory Stewart OBE MP, Secretary of State for International Development; Peter Taylor, Head of the Safeguarding Unit, Department for International Development.

## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Frances Longley and Tracey Smith.

**Q1 Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this session, which is a follow-up to the International Development Committee's published report last July on the very important issue of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in the aid sector. I am delighted that we are joined today, under the new guesting arrangements, by my colleague, Maria Miller, who chairs the Woman and Equalities Select Committee, which has done very important work in this area. We have two panels, if I can welcome Tracey and Frances. We have half an hour with you and we are seeking to cover seven questions, so it is going to be snappy questions and nice snappy answers.

I will kick off with my first question, which is to Frances. If we look at the commitments that the NGO sector made at the global Safeguarding Summit last year, where are you finding challenges in making progress? What are the barriers and how are they going to be overcome? Please introduce yourself.

**Frances Longley:** Good afternoon. I am Frances Longley. I am chief executive of Amref Health Africa in the UK and I co-chair the working group, which is focused on leadership and culture. Looking at the key issues we have been tackling, I suppose areas that have gone very smoothly, just in brief, would be that we are working on a tool and key indicators around developing safeguarding cultures in organisations. That will be piloted in the coming months. Last year we published a report called "Eight principles for building trust through feedback", which is about putting beneficiaries and their needs at the centre of programmes and making sure that reporting is effective through them, all the way up through the organisations.

We've published guidance on safeguarding and good governance for trustees. Safeguarding is now part of the Bond charter, which the 400-plus members have signed up to, and we are working with DfID on the development of a reporting and complaints toolkit. Those things have made very good progress and I am really delighted, on behalf of colleagues, that we have managed to make good progress there.

As for where we have had more challenges, the biggest challenge we face is that, as UK-based NGOs, we cannot solve this on our own. We need to work across the whole range of actors within international aid and development. We certainly look to DfID to continue to have a leading role on that and to be taking perhaps a more advanced role in convening. We have struggled to make progress on bringing DBS checking into our sector. That is something where we would really welcome active engagement from DfID to try to make our entire sector a regulated sector, which would give us access to the full DBS provision.



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Finally, we have sought and not yet been able to find funding from DfID to commission research about ways to work more effectively in safeguarding, and particularly in terms of reporting and whistle-blowing in other countries.

**Chair:** We are going to return to a number of those issues in a moment.

**Q2 Mr Evans:** Tracey, my question is aimed at you because I want to look at the private sector contractors, and particularly the commitment document that was presented to the global Safeguarding Summit. I am going to combine a few questions together just to save time. Who does this document apply to? Who has ownership of the document? Are the members of the safeguarding leads network now signed up to all the commitments? Who is going to monitor the processes of this commitment document and ensure all the commitments are upheld? If they are not, will you be calling out organisations that are dragging their feet or not giving 100% commitment? Will they pay any penalties?

**Tracey Smith:** I am Tracey Smith, chief executive of British Expertise International. It is worth pointing out that British Expertise is a private sector organisation and we work with a lot of DfID suppliers. The response I am going to give you represents 30 of those companies, which between them represent 63% of contracted projects for DfID in the year 2018-19. To your first question about the document, at the moment there are those 30 companies that we are working with on the cross-sector safeguarding network, which is what we have set up with the private sector, with DfID also.

We had our first official meeting last week, following the summit six months ago. At that session, there was enormous input from all the companies present and a real sense that they wanted to contribute to this. The challenge for them is signing up to another document, when they feel as though the safeguarding issues that it contains are already in the DfID code of conduct, which is a contractual document that they have to adhere to. In answer to your question about a penalty, if a private sector company is working on a DfID-funded project, it will be adhering, legally, to the code of conduct set by DfID. If it is found not to be participating against that, the funding will be withdrawn by DfID, so therein is the penalty.

Since the code was introduced, which was in the latter part of 2017, we believe it has raised standards across the board. In particular, those companies that are our members are very familiar with the code of conduct now. Those companies meet with us on a regular basis. At the meeting last week, it was unanimously approved to continue the safeguarding network we have set up with the private sector. We will meet quarterly. We will share best practice, discuss areas of challenge and feed that back to DfID. DfID was present in that meeting, and it was a very productive and co-operative session.

**Mr Evans:** Chair, I am not asking another question, but I hope DfID will



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be transparent, particularly if it withdraws funding for particular reasons where people are not complying by the code.

**Chair:** We will return to the follow-up from that meeting in a later question.

**Q3 Mrs Miller:** This is really a question for Frances because it is to do with NGOs. When it comes to changing organisational cultures, addressing power imbalances and a lack of diversity, particularly at senior level, is really critical. What progress have you made on this, particularly given it was one of the recommendations made in the Committee's report? It is also something my Committee has recommended.

**Frances Longley:** As I mentioned, I co-chair the group that has been working on organisational leadership and culture. The thing that has been clear to us from the outset is that, if you want a culture where safeguarding is at its core, you have to look at the power imbalances that exist within your organisation and within the context where you are working. We have spent a year looking at the best existing evidence and practice across different sectors, bringing in some expert advice, and we have now reached a point where we have identified indicators that people can measure their organisations against if they want to understand the culture that exists within their organisation in relation to safeguarding.

From that, they can identify where they are on a continuum, which we are describing as being from non-compliance, through to compliance, and then across to having a really healthy safeguarding culture across your whole organisation. You can work out where you are in that continuum, and then you can learn how you can tackle any particular issues in your organisation that are preventing you from moving across to where you would wish to be. We are developing training to accompany that, so there is a tool for self-assessment. There will be training to support change.

However, we know that is only successful, and a good safeguarding culture is only present, where every person in that organisation, and every person that organisation comes into contact with, is aware and fully embracing the knowledge that they can speak out, they can do so safely, they will be heard, they will be listened to, what they say will be investigated and acted upon, and they will be protected. That is a big change.

It is interesting you direct this question to me, as somebody representing the NGO sector. That question has to be asked of every link in the chain in aid and development, whether it is my private sector colleagues, whether it is DfID, whether it is the Foreign Office, whether it is multilaterals, whoever it might be. Otherwise, we can have what we hope will be very strong safeguarding cultures in the NGO sector, but people who want to abuse will just go to other parts of the aid and development world, so it is really important we all embrace that.

**Q4 Mrs Latham:** I was quite shocked when you said you do not have any



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DBS provision. That would be a good step forward for the sector, completely. DfID has told us, following our report, that it has not conducted a systematic audit of whistle-blowing practices across the sector as planned because the NGO working groups had deemed this unnecessary. In light of other research being conducted on effective reporting practices, why did the NGO working groups feel it was not required? We know there is underreporting of rape and abuse of women and children, and there certainly have not been a lot of prosecutions on this.

How can we get it better, for the women and children in particular? When people are working in the aid industry—and it is a big industry; it is a huge industry—how is it that the NGO working groups thought it was not necessary to have this systematic review, so you knew what was happening? Surely, there should be something commissioned for a complete review of underreporting and exactly how big the problem is. What we know about could just be the tip of an iceberg.

**Frances Longley:** I appreciate your focus on the reporting aspect of it. It is absolutely central. It is important for us to distinguish between a couple of different things. In our practice, we would distinguish between reporting and whistle-blowing. Reporting is what should happen. If somebody abuses you, you should feel able to go to a relevant person in the organisation and say, “This terrible thing has been done to me”. That is different from whistle-blowing. Whistle-blowing is really about going and saying, “There is a systematic problem in this organisation. There is a failure of a structure. There is somebody who is being allowed repeatedly to get away with things”—that kind of thing.

We know that, in many of the cultures and contexts where we work, whistle-blowing is not part of that culture. If you try to whistle-blow as such, you can find yourself ostracised. You can find yourself subject to criminal prosecution. You can find yourself losing your livelihood, needing to leave your home. It is not something that is part of many cultures where we work.

**Q5 Mrs Latham:** These crimes are very underreported and many of the people who have been abused do not know they can report it, or are terrified because it means their aid will be cut off.

**Frances Longley:** Yes, absolutely. It is not my working group but, from what I understand from my colleagues who were leading that group, their choice was to say that they wanted to focus on making it easier and more effective for people to report.

**Q6 Mrs Latham:** How?

**Frances Longley:** If I can just explain, rather than looking at systems that currently exist or things that have existed in the past, they wanted to focus on asking, “What will actually work?” That is absolutely about the “how”. In my opening remarks, I mentioned that last year we published “Eight principles for building trust and feedback”, which is a quite detailed



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document that looks at the steps organisations need to take in order to place beneficiaries and communities at the heart of project and programme design, and to work with them to identify reporting mechanisms and feedback mechanisms that will work in their particular context.

You are absolutely right that these things are underreported and that not enough has been done to prosecute, although, in fairness, I would say we face exactly the same issue in the UK just within the main judicial system. The evidence we have globally is that, when it comes to sexual abuse, sexual assault, rape, those crimes are typically underreported everywhere and under-prosecuted everywhere. As a sector, we are passionately committed to making that reporting better and more effective, and we absolutely stand side by side with you on that.

- Q7 **Mrs Latham:** That sounds wonderful. That sounds like motherhood and apple pie, but it is not changing things. It is not getting to the people who would report it and would come forward, because they still do not feel they can. They do not know what the mechanism is to get to the front. They really do not understand, so I think the sector is failing miserably. It sounds wonderful, but it is not happening.

**Frances Longley:** Can I ask you what you base that on?

- Q8 **Mrs Latham:** I have no evidence at all to see where this reporting is happening. It is not happening.

**Frances Longley:** There is a difference between saying you do not have evidence of where it is happening and then being able to assume from that that it is not happening.

- Q9 **Mrs Latham:** Tell me how many prosecutions there have been, then, since last year, or potential prosecutions.

**Frances Longley:** That is outside my field of knowledge. I am sorry; I would have to direct that question elsewhere. That is not part of my remit.

**Mrs Latham:** I have not seen any evidence that this is happening, which is why a study should be commissioned to find out the extent of the abuse that is happening. Until we get that, we are not going to know.

- Q10 **Chair:** Pauline's original question was about whistle-blowing and you were making a distinction I did not entirely recognise, suggesting it was only whistle-blowing if it was structural and systematic. Surely whistle-blowing could be about one person's behaviour, could it not, if it was not dealt with properly by the organisation?

**Frances Longley:** The distinction I am making is that whistle-blowing is typically a resort you take when you feel the standard processes within a system have let you down. If, for example, I had been trying to report the abuse of a senior member of staff and I had gone through the channels, or I felt very strongly that, even though there were channels



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there in principle, they were not working, I had seen somebody else try and fail, or I could see that person was just being protected, whether that be formally or informally, at that point the whistle-blowing comes around the outside and straight up to the top. That is different from standard reporting. If you are going to have a healthy organisation and a healthy culture, you really want a system where you can report it and something is done.

- Q11 **Chair:** What about if that does not work? Pauline's original question was that the working groups, we are told, had deemed it unnecessary to conduct an audit, even though that was something that had been pledged at the summit.

**Frances Longley:** Again, it is not my working group, but my understanding from the co-chairs of that group is that that was a piece of work DfID was interested in doing. We had no problem with DfID wanting to do it. I think the working group merely said, "That is great if you want to do that. It is not hugely urgent for us in the piece of work we are doing, because we are looking at reporting and what can be put in place now, rather than what has been in place in the past".

- Q12 **Mrs Latham:** It is hugely urgent for the victims.

**Frances Longley:** I do not think any of us have any challenge to it being done.

- Q13 **Mrs Latham:** Except you have said it was unnecessary.

**Frances Longley:** As I understand it, it was a piece of work that DfID was going to do, not the NGO sector. If DfID wants to do it, we are very happy for it to do so. I think all the working group said was that it was not an urgent piece of work. When work was being prioritised, particularly in the run-up to the October summit, I think we said that was not urgent for the work we were preparing, rather than it being something where we said, "No, we are not interested in it". There is an important distinction between those two things. The work was for DfID to do, rather than the NGO sector.

- Q14 **Chair:** We were told by the Government, by DfID, that it was the NGO working groups that had said it was not necessary.

**Frances Longley:** Would DfID not still have the opportunity to say it felt it was— When we said it was not necessary, it was not necessary to the piece of work we were doing, rather than not necessary at any point. We had focused on producing a toolkit.

- Q15 **Chair:** Your view is that the audit should be conducted by DfID, rather than by the NGO sector itself.

**Frances Longley:** As I understand it, it was not considered to be particularly urgent or pertinent to the piece of work they had been asked to do in that working group. Let us understand: these working groups had very defined criteria, defined roles they were being asked to tackle,





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which were things that had come out of the meeting held at the beginning of March last year. There were four strands and they were particularly asked to tackle those, and the October summit was given to us as an important deadline to meet. In that context, all we said was, "That is not on our critical path for delivering the things that working group had been asked to tackle", rather than the entire NGO sector throwing it out. There is a conflation there that is perhaps not helpful.

- Q16 **Mr Sharma:** Frances, to follow up on the working groups, what efforts have been made by the working groups to bring in voices and expertise from outside the UK and your sector, such as frontline national NGOs and civil society partners who have relationships with the affected communities? In addition to that, how could the work of the working groups be made more applicable outside of the UK context?

**Frances Longley:** As NGOs that are working in aid and development, we are working every single day with colleagues from national and local organisations in the countries where we are operating, so we are learning from them all the time. We have taken steps in the last year to work closely with colleagues who are doing excellent work in some of the countries where we work. We brought practitioners to a Bond event in the summer of last year from Kenya and Tanzania, who shared their experiences and their expertise around safeguarding, both within organisations and in terms of campaigning and raising standards across the whole sector within Tanzania.

One of the challenges we have had in some respects in this work is that there has been a focus, at times, on an assumption that the NGO sector can fix all this. As I was saying earlier on, we absolutely cannot fix everything, because we are one part of a continuum that is the aid and development sector. We are already working informally with our colleagues in the private sector. We are working very closely with DfID and we have welcomed that partnership, but it is a huge sector. For us, it is not only the importance of having local and national voices and participation. It is also about getting that breadth of sector engagement.

When it comes to those local and national voices, one of the things we would love to see is some engagement with DfID around the research and support hub, which is one of the activities it is going to be funding. We really welcome that. That is intended to be a kind of best practice first point of call. We had originally hoped that would be something that organisations here and organisations in implementing countries would both be able to access, where we could share really good practice in both directions, and share challenges and learn from each other.

In the current terms of reference for that hub, we are advised at the moment that it will be available only to national and local organisations in implementing countries. We think, both philosophically and practically, that is a shame. It risks perpetuating the idea that the only good ideas come from here, and we know that is not true. It also risks reinforcing some of those power dynamics we were touching on earlier. We would





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love to all share good practice and be working together collaboratively, internationally.

- Q17 **Richard Burden:** Tracey, you said the private sector contractors safeguarding leads network, which was established after the October Safeguarding Summit, met for the first time last week. Why did it take seven months to convene the first meeting?

**Tracey Smith:** It met previously before the session.

- Q18 **Richard Burden:** Before October?

**Tracey Smith:** Yes, and it was an informal group that came out of the Safeguarding Summit.

- Q19 **Richard Burden:** That one before the Safeguarding Summit was the one that ended up drafting up the commitments document.

**Tracey Smith:** It was an informal meeting. Yes. Since the October 2018 session, it is the first time we have met officially to discuss safeguarding. Last week was the first official meeting with DfID and with colleagues from Bond. However, British Expertise has met with many of those private sector organisations prior to that and there were two volunteers from two of the private sector companies that were engaged at the international Safeguarding Summit to represent the sector. This was the first time we met officially.

- Q20 **Richard Burden:** I think you would probably be able to see that it is kind of difficult to know what has happened. There was a meeting, which I think British Enterprise International convened, before the Safeguarding Summit, in September of last year, to draft up a set of commitments that were then presented at the Safeguarding Summit, but it was also said at the time that nobody had actually signed up to these commitments at that stage.

**Tracey Smith:** The sector believes that those commitments do not replace the commitments in the code of conduct.

**Richard Burden:** Yes, I understand that.

**Tracey Smith:** That is why those have not been signed up to specifically. The code of conduct from DfID supersedes that.

- Q21 **Richard Burden:** I hear what you say, but donor Governments, NGOs, all sorts of other people, did not seem to have a problem with sitting alongside commitments they make to DfID and other donors—their own set of commitments—to guide their action and to monitor what they themselves are doing. My question is this. If a draft set of commitments was drawn up in September, presented in October but without anybody signing up to it, but they were still labelled as commitments, what happened on those commitments between October and May, just one week before this meeting? You say you have met, but what tangible results have come out of those commitments?



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**Tracey Smith:** The sector has decided that the commitments represent a suggestion for improvements, but it felt they were more of a guidance for the private sector.

Q22 **Chair:** This does not feel like urgency, does it? This is supposed to be something we are all united in being focused on. A set of commitments that are not enforceable when you have not met for seven months does not sound like this is being given any urgency at all.

**Tracey Smith:** The commitments are all contained in the code of conduct.

Q23 **Chair:** That is from two years ago.

**Tracey Smith:** Yes, it is, but the code of conduct from DfID was amended. It was updated in August 2018 to explicitly include safeguarding. By the time of the conference in October 2018, the DfID code of conduct reflects all those commitments, and that is what the companies are signing up to.

Q24 **Richard Burden:** If there is one message that has come through to us time and time again, through our inquiry last year and the work we have done since, it is that it is all very well to write stuff down on paper, but, if you do not do anything, nothing happens. To ask my question again, what actually has been done, collectively, between October and May?

**Tracey Smith:** The companies have shared best practice. They have looked at the way the sector operates. They have collaborated together, but it is felt that those specific, strategic issues, the support for survivors, cultural change, minimum standards, organisational capacity and capability, are covered by the code of conduct.

Q25 **Richard Burden:** I have to say I am still having difficulty working out exactly what has happened over the past seven months, but, okay, let us say that has been a preparatory phase and the doing is going to come after that. What actually are the plans for taking the commitments forward in the coming period, over what timescale, and how is implementation to be monitored?

**Tracey Smith:** As I said in the response to the first question, the code of conduct has raised standards contractually for everybody who works for DfID, but that has now spread out to all donors as it becomes custom and practice. Companies that do not comply have to report to DfID on those issues, and that will be the monitoring process for it. The safeguarding network we will run, which will engage with the private sector, will also include Bond and DfID. That will meet quarterly from now on, and we will discuss issues raised in your meetings. We will work with Bond. We are looking at adapting the Bond training exercises, adapting those to the private sector and perhaps rolling that out, and looking at other ways that we as British Expertise can help.

Q26 **Mrs Latham:** You just mentioned there that you have been collaborating.



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What exactly does collaborating mean? How does it move the process forward? How does it change things for the vulnerable women and girls we are talking about?

**Tracey Smith:** It is about discussing best practice and thinking about—

Q27 **Mrs Latham:** No, practically, what are you doing? You can discuss until the cows come home. It is not going to make it better for the women and girls who are vulnerable.

**Tracey Smith:** The way the private sector is working is to use the code of conduct from DfID as its basis for change. That is what it is working to.

**Mrs Latham:** That is not working. That is not throwing up anything, is it? You have hardly met. Nothing has changed, except that something has been inserted in the code of conduct, and then you said DfID will monitor it. Surely somebody else should be monitoring this. It should not be left to DfID to check up on every single thing that private contractors do. You should be monitoring yourselves and throwing up where the holes are. It strikes me, apart from one thing they inserted last year, nothing has changed, which is exactly what I have been worried about all along.

Q28 **Paul Scully:** Sticking with Tracey, we had heard in our Committee the fact that people were saying reports would have to go up before they went down. That was one of our recommendations, that the increase in the number of reports would be considered an indicator of improved reporting mechanisms. Have the private sector contractors in the safeguarding leads network seen an increase in the number of reports?

**Tracey Smith:** We do not see them specifically ourselves. Those incidences are reported to DfID. It would be inappropriate for those companies to come and tell British Expertise what those things are. They report those directly to DfID.

Q29 **Paul Scully:** The sector itself is not collectively monitoring and tracking the situation.

**Tracey Smith:** There is not an industry body that represents the sector. With British Expertise, I represent a number of the key players, but I do not represent the whole sector. There is no organisation that does.

Q30 **Paul Scully:** Do you think it would be a good idea if they did?

**Tracey Smith:** Yes, I do.

Q31 **Paul Scully:** How could you make that happen?

**Tracey Smith:** We would have to work much more closely with Government to make that happen. At the moment, membership and belonging to British Expertise is not a mandatory thing.

Q32 **Paul Scully:** But you cannot work with your members to get the numbers from them.



**Tracey Smith:** We could, but there are a number of conflicts there, in terms of information and GDPR for a start. We would have to have permission from people to record that information and to pass it on.

**Chair:** I am going to bring this session to an end. I have to say that this evidence is completely unsatisfactory. We only have half an hour with the two of you because we have a new Secretary of State, who has an hour with us, and he can only stay until 3.30, so I am going to move to the second panel, but I intend that we invite both groups to come back. I think we had some concerns with the evidence from Bond, but, frankly, the concerns about the private sector are enormous, and nothing you have said today has served to reassure me, in terms of concerns I had prior to today's session. Thank you both for coming.

## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Rory Stewart and Peter Taylor.

Q33 **Chair:** Welcome back. Let me kick off, on behalf of the Committee as a whole, by congratulating you, Secretary of State, on your appointment. We look forward to working with you as well as obviously scrutinising your role. Today, we want to focus the hour we have with you and Peter on this very important issue of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, but we look forward to an early opportunity to have you before us to range more widely across other areas of your responsibilities. I am very pleased that you have fulfilled this commitment within your first week in office.

Let me start by referring to a statement made by your predecessor in February, in which she said that the Department is working with others across the sector to develop appropriate accountability mechanisms arising from the Safeguarding Summit. Can you tell us what accountability mechanisms the Department has now developed to ensure that all parts of the sector meaningfully monitor and report back on progress? Do you have plans for something to mark the anniversary of last October's summit?

**Rory Stewart:** Before I get on to the specifics, could I very quickly say how grateful I am to be able to appear on what is basically my first real day as a Cabinet Minister? I did a climate summit at breakfast time and then my first Cabinet meeting, NSC, and now I am with you.

I am very pleased we are talking about this particular issue. It is an issue that I know the Committee has taken very seriously, and I want to pay tribute to your excellent report. I also feel that we should pay tribute to my predecessor, Penny Mordaunt, who has put a huge amount of energy into this, and reassure you that I take it very seriously and I will be pushing it forward with absolute energy.



As you are aware, the fundamental structure through which we are looking at this is to get, first, the prevention angle right, so trying to make sure we have as few of these cases as we possibly can; secondly, in the horrible situation in which a case like this appears, learning how to really listen and work out what on earth has gone wrong; thirdly, working out what we can do to protect victims or survivors; and then finding what on earth we can do to learn lessons. You will be aware of the various steps we have taken. We are setting up now a new £20 million resource hub. We have a safeguarding unit, which is run by Peter, who can talk in more detail about some of the work of the unit.

We are driving this through our conversations with a huge range of partners. You will be aware that we are driving particularly your question around accountability with the UN, with IFIs like the World Bank, with UK NGOs, with the other major donors, with research partners. All of this responds to the stuff that is in the core of your report, which is how you get the sequence right and, in particular, the thing that interests me most in this, which is not the theory of it but the gap between the rhetoric that you would apply here in the United Kingdom and the reality of what is happening on the ground in South Sudan if you get an allegation in a protection of civilians camp on the edge of Malakal, and what is really involved in dealing with somebody else's legal system, somebody else's security challenges, as opposed to what we do here. On the more specific side, let me hand over to Peter.

**Peter Taylor:** I have a few things to mention. Last year, we chaired a summit steering group in preparation for the summit on 18 October. Since then we have changed that into what we are calling a cross-sector steering group, with representatives from all the organisations that made the commitments in October. Together, we are working to track progress on those commitments, to share lessons about what is going well and some of the challenges we are facing. In our last meeting, we discussed how we might report back as we head towards the one-year-on anniversary of the October summit.

We are trying to do something together to provide a sense of collective effort and progress, or otherwise. Also, as the Secretary of State says, for each individual group that made commitments, there are their own accountability mechanisms. For example, for the United Nations, fairly recently, in February, the Secretary-General published his latest report on progress against their commitments. We can push through and ask some quite searching questions about that through the standard UN procedures and committees we are represented on. As donors, we will also be presenting a one-year-on report. I was not here for the earlier session, but you may have heard from other groups about what their plans might be.

**Chair:** Not a lot, to be honest, but we will come to that in a moment.

Q34 **Mr Evans:** Secretary of State, as you know, everybody around this table



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is committed towards the international development sector. It is a £14 billion project and helping the most vulnerable people throughout the world, including on the topic that is under conversation today. You have a lot of work on your plate, and yet, three and a half days into the job, you are telling Sophy Ridge you want to be Prime Minister. How can we be absolutely convinced that you are committed totally to the job you have just been put into, because we could be in a leadership election in a few weeks?

**Chair:** Nigel, I am going to stop you there, because we expressly said we wanted to devote today to this important issue of sexual exploitation and abuse. I will allow the Secretary of State to reply to what is essentially a party political question.

**Rory Stewart:** I completely understand where you are coming from. I have some advantages in taking over this job. I am probably the only Secretary of State who occupied every Commons junior ministerial role in this Department before I took it over. I understand, therefore, our programmes in the Middle East, Asia and Africa in enormous detail, in a way that people would not. In addition to that, without being too defensive, I have spent much more of my working life in international development than, I assume, anyone else who has taken over this job, so I have some advantages.

It is true that the Prime Minister has signalled she is stepping down, and therefore I and at least half a dozen other Cabinet colleagues have expressed an interest in succeeding her. I am sure they, like me, will remain entirely committed to doing our jobs as powerfully as possible. I want to be judged on how well I do this job. It is a Department I am deeply proud of. I feel very well equipped to take it over and I think I can make an enormous difference, particularly on issues like climate.

Q35 **Mr Evans:** I wanted to give you the opportunity to at least respond to what people would be thinking, and you have done that today. Specifically on the question that is under consideration today, we are looking at the commitment document, which DfID has now said to the private sector that it would not be called to sign up to. What do you think is the utility of the commitment document if we are not really asking everybody to sign up to it?

**Rory Stewart:** The logic with a lot of the strategy we are pursuing here is getting the balance right between providing protection for the most vulnerable and being realistic about the types of control that an organisation like DfID can actually exercise. This goes maybe to the heart of some of the ways in which we agree and, in other ways, only partially agree with your own report. Your point about the private sector is part of a general pattern of arguments that are being made in this report, asking us why we are not doing more on whistle-blowers, why we are not doing more with special investigators, why we are not putting stiffer requirements on individuals.





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I think the answer is this. To understand the role we are trying to play here, it is not to be an international policeman or pretend the Department for International Development can micromanage and control what other people are doing. We are trying to make it absolutely clear, for anybody who works with us, the standards we are holding them to, doing our very best to influence other major donors, and IFIs and the UN, to make sure they meet our same standards. So when they are giving grants to people, the same applies, whether it is the private sector or the NGO sector, and then making sure, through our resource hub, we can provide the training, information, protection and processes of learning how to do this for the people who do not necessarily work with us.

I suspect we will come back to this through the course of this hour. We have a slightly different sense, I guess, of how we view our role in relation to other people. Our emphasis is, for people who take money from us, an absolute direct requirement that we will hold them fully to account. For the rest of the people, it is about influencing. It is about shaping the way they do it and bringing them along with us, because we believe the best way of achieving this is to bring these people willingly to accept these ideas and throw themselves behind it, rather than trying to compel them to sign up to documents.

**Q36 Mr Evans:** I think we are getting a sense from even the evidence we have taken today that there seems to be a lack of urgency about it. My goodness me, in the past we have had the chief executives of some of these charities, who have actually helped to burn the charities by the lack of urgency and almost disregard for what was going on under their watch. We have all seen that. The real sense for us is this. We have heard that many in the private sector are not even looking at these commitments. What faith can we have that there has now been an absolute sea change, since this news broke that so many vulnerable people were being abused?

**Rory Stewart:** On the sense of urgency, my predecessor moved very rapidly, as soon as she came into office, to grip this situation. I have been away from this Department for about 15 months. The changes I have seen in this Department during the short period I have been away have been very dramatic. Whether it is the creation of Peter's position and that entire unit, standing up that whole facility, the emphasis that has been put on the international statements, the £20 million that we are now putting into this resource hub, all this stuff has got off the ground very quickly. You have seen what has happened to Oxfam. You have seen what has happened to Save the Children. In quite a slow-moving sector, the impact made within 12 to 15 months has been pretty dramatic. I can see Peter is keen to come in, so I am going to defer to him.

**Peter Taylor:** Briefly on that, I know the point you are referring to from the statement. There are also other points in there saying how much people have moved as a result of DfID's work. For me, the summit and the commitments that came out of there were a point in time. They were



an incredibly important point in time, and have shifted the debate and shifted people's focus on to this. We are now trying to hardwire the changes and commitments made into things that are going to last longer and have more of an impact. As you may have heard earlier, but I think it comes out in the statement they provided to you, the supply partner code of conduct probably has more teeth than a document that was presented to the summit last year.

**Q37 Mr Evans:** Have you no faith in the commitment document yourself?

**Peter Taylor:** We have absolute faith in it, but the way it will have longevity and last for many more years is to build the key points from that into other processes. We are doing this with the donors as well. We have a fantastic statement from the October summit, but we are now, through the DAC, in the process of agreeing a recommendation, with a capital R, which will mean that all donors' performance on safeguarding is assessed through the regular peer review process over the years to come. That will have a much greater effect than just a summit document.

**Q38 Mr Evans:** Can I ask you this, then, Peter? Are you on top of this completely, such that you can give us a commitment that we are not going to have a repeat of the exercise we saw just over a year ago, which hit the news headlines? Can you also give a commitment that, if any examples of this abuse are still going on, you will be completely transparent about it? You will not just withdraw the funding from the charity or the organisation, the private sector organisation, but actually expose them for the deficiencies that have taken place.

**Rory Stewart:** Mr Evans, if it is a question of making commitments, I feel that is something that I, rather than the civil servant, should be doing. The answer is yes. To develop that, there has been a very dramatic change in the way in which the entire sector looks at these organisations. What happened with Oxfam and Save the Children has set a fire under the entire sector. Even very small NGOs are now falling over themselves to generate these policies on safeguarding. They are looking at all their staff in a completely different way. The number of cases coming forward is far larger than it was before.

To caveat, as you would be aware this is a huge sector. People are spending many tens of billions of pounds around the world. They are operating in over 100 countries and they are operating in very tough places. The question of what exactly is going on day by day in Equatoria province of South Sudan, or in Kasai in DRC, is tough. The challenge has to be brought down to the level of an individual abuser and an individual victim or survivor, often in a remote rural area in a country at war.

Some of this relates to the way we need to think about domestic abuse in Britain. In making this commitment, it is important to understand it. It is the same as what would happen if you put a Secretary of State up and said, "Can you promise there will be no more domestic abuse in Britain?" The answer of course is this: the horror of this is that it is about whether



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people feel the confidence to come forward, whether they feel their legal system is going to protect them, whether their security is going to be protected, or the nature of these abusive, bullying relationships, which may lead the individual to be shy to come forward.

The difficulty you would have, for somebody who was suffering domestic abuse in a home in Britain, in making sure they came out of that home, accessed the legal system and had confidence are multiplied 100 times if you put it into a village in Kasai in southern DRC. We have to get the right combination of idealism and practicality here and not try to pretend to you that we have instant answers to this.

We are trying to work with some of the most experienced, dedicated aid organisations in the world to say, "You really have to up your game. You have to stay on top of your staff. You have to train your staff. You have to make sure they are aware, from the moment they begin working, of the dangers of the fact that, if you are giving a lot of money to someone and you are providing them with health and education, you are in a position of power, and if you are in a position of power you are potentially in a position of abuse. The people you are potentially abusing are people who are going to find it very difficult to push back. They are going to find it difficult to access the media. They are going to find it difficult to access ombudsmen. They are going to find it difficult to access the donors, much more difficult than they would in a British context, but we know in a British context how difficult it is, even at home".

**Mr Evans:** Thank you for that answer. I think we have the commitment that you see this as a primary issue, not a secondary issue.

**Q39 Chair:** On the original line of questioning, and this is probably more for Peter, what I think frustrated all of us in our earlier session was the sense that the commitments made by the private sector did not have signatories or organisations that had to follow that up, whereas the commitments made by others did. Why was the private sector treated differently?

**Peter Taylor:** One of the challenges with the private sector is that there is no sector-wide body that can represent all of it, as we have Bond for the NGOs. All organisations, all the NGOs, felt comfortable for Bond to co-ordinate their preparations and to present that. There is not an equivalent and each private sector organisation is a private entity in its own right, so there is not the same locus there. Hopefully you have a sense that all those organisations that are working in the international field are taking this incredibly seriously. They know that, if they do not, we will not fund them.

I mentioned the supply partner code of conduct. DfID has a team dedicated to ensuring compliance with that, and it is doing very regular checks. We added a new language in August on safeguarding into that, and the team is doing regular checks. If any contractors are found to be wanting, they are very unlikely to receive funding from us.



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**Q40 Mrs Latham:** DBS checks are for people working with vulnerable adults or underage children. The aid sector, we heard today, does not have to have DBS checks. Would that not be something DfID could insist on, that all the people in the NGOs, all the private sector organisations, could insist on DBS checks? It is only relevant on the day it is issued. I accept that, but, if somebody has a history of abuse, they may have had some dealings with the law, so that might help the situation, but it is not something that I think DfID has suggested it could do. I would like to know about that.

We know what we hear about is just the tip of an iceberg, or suspect it is only the tip of an iceberg. Would it not be a good idea for DfID to commission a study of exactly how widespread this abuse is? If it is the tip of an iceberg, we need to know how much is under the water, not just the bit we can see. Again, it would help if we had somebody looking at that.

My main question is this. We have talked to the private sector suppliers today. They have only had one collective meeting since the conference last year. I do not think they felt it was urgent enough. It only took place less than a week ago, I guess because they knew they were coming here and they had better do something. Do you think this is a high enough level of follow-up? Why has DfID not pushed for a faster and more rigorous collective response from them?

**Rory Stewart:** I will take these things in reverse order. First, I am shocked to hear that. I will undertake to get these private sector suppliers in and work out what on earth is going on. I agree with you that, on the face of it, that seems very disappointing, so we have to hold their feet to the fire.

On research, I agree, and I will get the research team to make sure that we really focus on understanding this. We have quite a substantial research budget and it is quite a good way of using some of that budget to look at this.

The DBS issue we can reflect on. That is perhaps more challenging, simply because of the scale you are talking about. In a big intervention in Afghanistan, for example, at the height of it, there were over 100,000 international civilian consultants on the ground and over 1 million Afghans working directly or indirectly in the NGO sector in Afghanistan. Trying to work your way through these sorts of checks, they are pretty—I do not want to say onerous—significant things even within the context of the United Kingdom if you want to work in a school, or work with vulnerable adults. Imagine putting that into a developing country. It is going to be tough. That is my instinct, but I am very happy to look at it and report back to you.

**Q41 Mrs Latham:** Thanks. In terms of the private sector suppliers, we have been shocked today at the lack of movement, really, that they have had since the conference. They kept talking about how, before the



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conference, they had done this and that, but not since the conference. The NGO sector working groups appear to have been doing a better job, but I am still not convinced that it is good enough. You said you will tackle it, and I am really pleased to hear that, because this disparity cannot be justified, really, can it?

**Rory Stewart:** I will start, in essence, by saying to them what you have just said to me. I need to get them in, round the table, and say, "You have to do better". Frankly, this seems disappointing to me. It is certainly disappointing to the International Development Committee. I cannot see any reason why these individuals who work with us and are deeply dependent on us for their contracts should not be doing more, because it is a huge priority for us. We want them to signal that they have really got that.

Q42 **Mrs Latham:** The Charity Commission has some locus over serious incident reports from the NGOs. There is nothing for DfID's private sector suppliers. How are you assuring yourself on an ongoing basis that the private sector suppliers are responding to the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse appropriately, including having disclosed these to DfID? They talked also about people's privacy and how they could not disclose things. Surely they have to be able to disclose it to you; otherwise, how can you monitor? They are saying you should be doing the monitoring, not them.

**Rory Stewart:** Yes, those are very good points. I do not accept the argument that they cannot disclose. Insofar as charities can disclose, the private sector can also disclose. The same data rules apply in both, so there is not an argument for some sort of exemption for the private sector. This division between the private sector and NGOs, in relation to international development, is misleading. Many of our implementing partners are private sector organisations, not NGOs. Therefore, really importantly, if we are saying, "This is a DfID project, funded by our taxpayers in somebody else's country, with a flag on it", it does not really matter whether the person doing it is KPMG or Oxfam. Our responsibility to vulnerable people on the ground is the same, and our expectations from that organisation are the same.

Q43 **Mrs Latham:** You mentioned the fact that things have changed in the aid sector. I think it is probably as a result of our report last year. There have been lots of incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse happening in the past, and people have said, "Oh no, this is terrible", and then it has all died down and everything has gone back to normal. I think our report has probably stopped it going back to normal, which is good, but DfID has to take the lead on this, really seriously take the lead, worldwide.

**Rory Stewart:** You have done an enormous amount. Again, to praise my predecessor, Penny Mordaunt was very serious about this.

**Mrs Latham:** She was excellent.

**Chair:** We are halfway through our time and only about 30% of the way



through our questions, so I am going to encourage shorter questions and shorter answers.

- Q44 **Mr Sharma:** How is DfID identifying which UN agencies are making tangible progress on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, and which are weaker? How are you using donor power to bring the weaker agencies up to standard?

**Peter Taylor:** There are a number of ways in which we are doing this. We carry out central assurance assessments on all our major partners. This is a form of due diligence. Since last year, we have extended that to include safeguarding as one of the areas that we look at. DfID is in the process of carrying out central assurance assessments to test all the UN agencies' capability and capacity on safeguarding, so that is one way in which we are doing that.

There are also annual executive-board meetings for most of the major agencies. We work with other donors; for example, last year we had joint statements with up to 50 other donors to really put pressure on individual agencies to say, "We know you are trying to do a lot on this". To give them credit, many of them are taking this very seriously but you are right that progress is patchy.

We have also written specific language into our funding agreements with them to say, "We will only give you money if you are performing well on this", so we are using a combination of things. We are also working with the UN system to put internal pressure, and with other donors to put more external pressure, on them.

- Q45 **Mr Sharma:** In response to a written question on UNAIDS from the IDC Chair in January, Minister Burt told us that DfID would be assessing how well UNAIDS had implemented the recommendations of the independent expert panel on harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of power at UNAIDS as part of your regular review of funding. Have any assessments now been made?

**Peter Taylor:** We are in the process of doing an assessment. It is not complete yet. A lot has happened since last December and since that statement was made. UNAIDS has introduced a management action plan to respond to the findings of the independent expert panel that reported in December, and a series of actions were agreed on that. We have made sure that we are on a working group, which is tracking progress of that. At the moment, there is no answer to that. We have not completed anything. It is an ongoing process. I do not lead on this but my colleague who sits in Geneva engages on this, and, in a couple of months' time, we will be in a better place to answer that question.

**Chair:** Secretary of State, we are joined today by Maria Miller under the guesting arrangements, and Maria will ask the next line of questions.

- Q46 **Mrs Miller:** Secretary of State, in your responses this morning you have talked consistently about victims who are in remote locations, in very





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difficult circumstances, but the reality is that the victims who have spoken to me live in European cities, working for household charities and names that we all know, spending UK taxpayers' money. You have not addressed that. With that in mind, we know from all our experience across Government that giving victims of sexual violence and abuse a voice is really important, yet the focus of your initiatives is predominantly about preventing perpetrators from getting involved in projects, not in helping victims report the appalling crimes that they may have been subject to.

Earlier, you addressed this in terms of people on the ground and how difficult it would be in South Sudan to report these things, but it is not as difficult if you are working in a European city. Why are you not focusing on this, or do those victims not matter as much as those who are on the ground?

**Rory Stewart:** Clearly, any victim or survivor has an equal right and matters equally. I just think that much more work has been done in the developed world and in Britain in practice around this issue, from a whole range of different angles, than has happened in most of the developing world. In other words, the knottiest, most difficult problems we face are of people who do not begin to have the legal structure, the security structure, the employment laws, the protections or the media that exist here. In terms of trying to get our head round a very tough issue, we absolutely have a commitment to people who work for charities in Britain, just as the British Government have a commitment to anyone working for the civil service in Britain or to anybody working for a business in Britain.

We have a general moral obligation towards victims and survivors of abuse of any sort in this country, but in terms of specifying the specific issues that relate to this Department that make it different from the general form of obligation that you would have for somebody, whether they were working for Shelter, Mencap, Alzheimer's UK or Oxfam, in Britain on the one hand, and the types of issues that you have dealing with the kind of abuse that we have seen recorded in Haiti, Sudan or Somalia, those are different issues that need to be approached in different ways. In the former case, we have a much more developed legal and political framework than exists in these other countries.

Q47 **Mrs Miller:** How much new money are you spending on these initiatives that you are putting in place to deal with these problems, not only domestically but on the ground in these difficult places?

**Rory Stewart:** We are putting approximately £20 million into the initial response, and an additional £20 million into research, to respond to Mrs Latham's challenge, so approximately £40 million is going into this.

Q48 **Mrs Miller:** Is that new money?

**Rory Stewart:** That is new money.

Q49 **Mrs Miller:** How much have you done to work with those organisations



that are outside of the mainstream or, indeed, not even contractors to the UK Government at the moment?

**Rory Stewart:** For that, we are setting up a resource hub, which is exactly designed for this. One of the challenges is that, whereas a large NGO with a turnover of hundreds of millions of pounds a year and thousands of employees, such as Save the Children, Oxfam, CARE and Mercy Corps, has very developed policies in place and an enormous number of staff to develop these issues, can put a lot of energy into writing project proposals, and has the funds in order to provide the safeguarding policies and the lines in their administration, if you are dealing with charities that we want to be working much more closely with—in other words, the sorts of NGOs that you will have in your own constituency, which might have a turnover of £200,000 or £300,000 a year and might have four or five staff—they really are very likely to be lacking the resources, the expertise, the policy documents or the procedures, particularly on safeguarding but also on a range of other issues. That is why we are creating a resource hub, which is designed for these people to be able to reach into us.

One of the things that we and the Charity Commission can provide, and, indeed, some of the other international NGOs have been very good at offering to provide themselves, is that first, off-the-record, private advice to talk through some very tricky issues of how you work your way through these situations. As I said, in a domestic UK context, the route is pretty straightforward: the route will, almost certainly, be a legal route almost immediately. In an international context, in 30 or 40 of the countries in the developing world, the reality is that, if the victim or the survivor attempts to take a case to a local court, they could get themselves killed. There is absolutely no confidence at all that the court would find in their favour; therefore, the victims are very reluctant to come forward.

This adds another problem, which is that, because no legal process has taken place, there is no fully complete evidence around the perpetrator. This is the issue that the small NGO has to deal with: that perpetrator then moves on to another job. You have a strong suspicion, based on an allegation, that they have committed an abuse. You have not been able to bring a legal case forward because the victim or the survivor wishes to retain their anonymity and is too scared of this individual to bring it forward. You then have to work out: do you list them? What kind of reference do you give them? How do you let them continue in a way that also respects their rights? They might protest that they are innocent.

**Q50 Richard Burden:** You have spoken very eloquently about the situation of a victim or survivor in South Sudan or in DRC. Could you say a little more about how the resource hub, as is planned, will, in practice, be able to reach them? To your point about the fact that they wish to retain anonymity or that they probably do not have an easy or any kind of legal system to go to, or one that is still there, what, in practical terms, will the



resource hub do?

**Rory Stewart:** In practical terms—and this is the heart of the problem—a huge amount depends on the policy and the practice of that NGO on the ground in DRC. Realistically, what would happen is that, if you were the victim or survivor of abuse, you would have to find some way of contacting the management of that NGO or that UN agency, and say, “Richard, I suffered abuse from this individual”. Then you would have to put a lot of confidence in the fact that you, as a senior manager, are going to take that allegation seriously, that you have the right policies in place, that that individual is going to protect your anonymity and your security, and that they are going to take action against the perpetrator.

All of that can only come about, really, through a total change in culture of these NGOs. One thing that is changing quite quickly is that I suspect that, two years ago, you would go to the senior manager and it would be much more likely to be swept under the carpet. Today, if you go to an implementing partner of Oxfam, Save, UNDP or UNHCR, it is much more likely now that people are alert to this, will act and will be very conscious that, if they are a British NGO, they have an obligation to report this to the Charity Commission, they have an obligation to report to their senior management, and they have an obligation to report to their board, all of which should be included in their safeguarding policy document. In the end, it is that kind of thing. It stands or falls on the culture and the policy of that NGO on the ground.

Q51 **Richard Burden:** The kinds of problems that adult victims and survivors face would be magnified several times when it comes to children, but they themselves will often be the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. How do you feel that that issue can be addressed? Will the Department be providing any resource specifically to target that area?

**Rory Stewart:** That is a very good challenge. As we do this research project—and a £20 million research project is a pretty significant research project—we can make sure that we focus hard on that issue of the protection of children. Without overdoing this, that is a huge issue worldwide, setting aside the actions of the NGOs. Protection of children in Afghanistan, for example, unfortunately, from rape and sexual abuse is an issue that goes a long way beyond the NGO community and people working on children’s rights are struggling with these issues. You are right: let us make that central to our research project.

Q52 **Paul Scully:** Can I welcome you to your position and offer you my congratulations as well? We have been talking about the resource and support hub. What are you doing to ensure that the hub does not duplicate work or resource that is already there for other organisations such as IASC, the CHS Alliance and those sorts of organisations?

**Peter Taylor:** We did an initial mapping and study last year to see what was out there: first of all, to see whether there was a gap in the market and whether there was really a need for this. That was quite thorough



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and we have published that, and the overwhelming consensus from everybody we spoke to and the evidence was that there is a need for this. That is not to say that there is not anything out there, and you mentioned a few things there.

As for what we are trying to do with the resource and support hub, it will probably be a consortium of a number of organisations. We are going to go out to tender fairly soon. The exact value of the contract is to be determined. We are looking for a one-stop shop, where any organisation, whether it is working primarily to benefit aid workers in organisations, or individuals and smaller organisations in remote areas, can have access and can have some confidence that, by going to that hub, all the key information and resources that it can draw on, in terms of training and learning et cetera, are there.

The other thing we want to do with that is to make sure they have access to quality-assured services. It might be that they do not have any investigative capacity in their own organisation to deal with the type of scenario that has been mentioned, so we need to make sure that they are aware of what the access routes might be to that sort of thing. The other thing we want to do with the resource and support hub is to develop innovation and more data about what works in this field. We need to join up with what is happening in the existing research and the planned research that is going on as well. It will build on what is there but not duplicate it. It will complement it.

**Q53 Paul Scully:** How do you make sure that they are resources that have impact rather than just a repository?

**Peter Taylor:** This is the point about what we want to do with the consortium: to make sure we have the world-leading experts in this area who can really say, "Yes, this is something that is going to add value", or, "This is something that is perhaps a bit weaker". It is this idea of quality assurance. If small organisations say, "We want some more help on this", we can be sure that the advice they are being given and the tools they are being pointed towards are the very best.

**Q54 Paul Scully:** Who oversees the resources on it?

**Peter Taylor:** It has not been created yet, so we are going to go out to tender soon and we expect it to be up and running by the autumn, once the tender process has happened. It will be overseen from within DfID, if it is a contract, through our procurement and commercial department, and the safeguarding unit. The overall responsibility and accountability will sit with my team on this.

**Q55 Paul Scully:** Would they look at it on a day-to-day or month-to-month basis, or whatever it is?

**Peter Taylor:** Yes, absolutely. We have a huge amount of contact on an ongoing basis with lots of different groups, and we have done since the summit and before, and, I should say, even with the private sector, even



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though they had their first six-monthly gathering last week. That is coincidence because they said, back in October, that they were going to do that.

Q56 **Chair:** It is still unsatisfactory, is it not?

**Peter Taylor:** Indeed, but we have had a lot of contact with them in between times. I would not want you to go away with the impression that they have not done anything over the last six months, because there is the supply-partner code of conduct and very regular contact from our procurement teams as well. We absolutely need to get them in and get them really focused on it.

Equally, going back to the issue of child safeguarding, we work very closely with our child hub in our education department and with experts such as Keeping Children Safe to work out how best we can really help and focus on this area. We reach out a lot to representatives of victims and survivors, whether they are children, women or people with disabilities, to understand better how we can engage them and how we can support them as we go forward.

Q57 **Paul Scully:** You mentioned, in the response to our report, having access to specialist investigators within the hub. Is that still the case?

**Peter Taylor:** I cannot pre-empt it. As I say, we have to go out to market.

Q58 **Paul Scully:** It is something you have in your tender document.

**Peter Taylor:** It is still a possibility, whether they are housed in the hub or whether the hub goes out and works out where those people sit, and whether it is a question of signposting rather than people sitting in the hub. For example, OCHA has said that there is a \$1 million fund to help organisations with investigations. Again, we do not want to duplicate but it may be a case of making people aware of what is there and saying, "You might want to go and talk to OCHA, and use that funding that is there", which will pay for specialist investigators, who might sit in the hub or might sit somewhere else.

Q59 **Paul Scully:** The tender has the capacity to have that within it, if it is not decided that you are duplicating it.

**Peter Taylor:** We will wait to see what the bids are and what people say, but it is certainly an option.

Q60 **Paul Scully:** How much emphasis are you going to be placing on supporting organisations to conduct robust, victim-centred investigations, as recommended in our report originally?

**Peter Taylor:** We will try to strike a balance between the different needs, whether it is investigations or whether it is capacity-building. There will probably be a range of needs. We do not want to box ourselves in to say that the resource and support hub will just do this or primarily



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that. We want it to be a flexible resource because every person's or every organisation's needs will be slightly different.

**Chair:** We have 12 more minutes with you and four more questions.

**Q61 Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** In our report, we identified that improving complaints mechanisms was one of the key things in bringing down barriers in reporting to get to the root of the problem. How are you enabling NGOs in the private sector to build high-quality, content-specific complaints mechanisms? I guess you have already touched on some of that with the hub. How are you making sure that that money does not end up eating away the money that is meant to go to frontline aid? Are you putting more money in? Are you making sure that it is ring-fenced and not eating away at other things? What protections are you doing there?

**Rory Stewart:** Let me take the second and then I will come back to the complaints mechanism. The money we are putting into this will come out of our overall ODA spend, so it will come at the expense of frontline aid. However, the sums of money we are talking about, compared to a £14 billion ODA budget, are about £40 million, so it is relatively small. But yes, every time we take on an additional responsibility of this sort we end up diverting money away from the frontline.

It is also worth bearing in mind that, every time we take on a responsibility of this sort, we implicitly, understandably and necessarily, in this case, add a compliance burden on the people who are working with us. That is only relevant because we have to be very thoughtful about how we ensure that we continue to have small, active NGOs and volunteers in this sector and do not create a system where the only people who can ever get a DfID contract in the future are people with thousands of employees, huge policy documents and massive compliance mechanisms. We have to find the right balance in that.

**Peter Taylor:** Again, we do not want a plethora of complaints mechanisms. We are not necessarily saying that every organisation has to have a fully developed complaints mechanism. We are looking for developed whistle-blowing policies in every organisation. That is part of our due-diligence assessment of organisations. DfID has strengthened its own complaints and reporting lines, so it is much easier for anybody who may feel, within their own organisation, they do not have a route, or maybe they do not want to report within their own organisation, to come to us if they want to. We have done that as well.

Also, it is not just upon us to do all of it; we are also trying to think about what the architecture is in a different place. Where you have a humanitarian emergency, the UN will be co-ordinating that and you will have a humanitarian co-ordinator, so we need to think about how they build community-based complaints mechanisms. For example, a member of our team went out to South Sudan in December and was working with





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the UN, DfID and other partners on thinking about how we could extend those mechanisms to make it easier for people.

- Q62 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** On both of those points, are you offering anything off the shelf for the small NGOs that Rory mentioned, if they come to you and say, "We do not really have much developed here but can you just provide us with the process that we need to go through that will be stage I, II and III"? Secondly, are we involving the survivors and victims in country in that process?

**Rory Stewart:** There are two things. On the first, yes, we would have the resources so that people can see some examples of what we believe to be good-quality policy documents and examples that they can draw out. Secondly, we have now allowed, for the first time, that you can, in your bid to DfID for money, put in a line item in regard to safeguarding. If you are a very small NGO that does not have that kind of capacity, we would welcome your saying, "We have real expertise. We can do an amazing job in this particular place but we are going to need an additional safeguarding officer as part of this". We would be happy to accept that in terms of their budget and their bid, on a case-by-case basis, because there are other very large organisations that we would expect to have that anyway.

On the question of including victims and survivors, that is a really good question and something that this research project is very well suited to look at.

**Peter Taylor:** We did a listening exercise last year, as you know, with representatives of victims and survivors, which we published in October, and we have been building on that work to better understand how we can help them access and how we can better build complaints mechanisms.

- Q63 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** On this independent inquiry that you seem to have accepted, is there any thought about bringing in other organisations that might have gone through other, similar kinds of journeys—FIFA, for example—or others that have might some expertise and are not just from the aid sector, and are able to put an external, slightly more independent look at this? I mention FIFA only because of some of the work that it has done on that, but there are others out there.

**Rory Stewart:** This is a really good point and we need to learn from all these people. We are not the only sector to go through this. We are a sector where, because of the places in which we operate, the problems can be more extreme and more difficult to identify, and it can be more difficult to protect individuals. But this is a problem at the root of our culture and our institutions, which goes a long way beyond aid, because it is in the nature of power, of patriarchy and of hierarchies.

Without overdoing this, we can also learn an enormous amount, without going to FIFA, from the UK civil service. Our own home civil service has gone through a huge journey over the last few years on these issues. If



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you compare—my last job—the Ministry of Justice today, and the kinds of efforts that our Permanent Secretary is making particularly around issues of bullying and harassment in the workplace, to where we were five years ago, it is very different. It is very different in terms of the importance attached to it by managers, the centrality of the training packages, the amount of communication around this issue, and the sense of staff awareness and confidence.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** You said you can—

**Chair:** I am going to have to move this because I am really keen we do not lose the whistle-blowing questions.

Q64 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** You said you can. Is it just that you will?

**Peter Taylor:** I think we are.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I just wanted to check with you.

**Peter Taylor:** We were on a panel with FIFA in March. We are very engaged with DCMS on the domestic side, and with others, so we are looking to learn from outside of the aid sector.

Q65 **Chair:** Really quickly from me: where is the international aid ombudsman?

**Rory Stewart:** We continue to look at it. We have some scepticism about it, which we have expressed in our response to the report. We will look at it carefully. The scepticism is to do with the general sense of creating more international ombudsmen with big sticks and very minimal power. The danger is that it will become an onerous and perhaps potentially slightly toothless type of ombudsman. We really have to work out what it is. We have been through this in my constituency with, to take a much less important issue, the dairy milk ombudsman. The supermarket ombudsman also turned out not to deliver everything that we wanted. We do not want to have a repeat of that. The danger at an international level is that it becomes even vaguer than you can achieve at a domestic level.

Q66 **Mrs Latham:** Can we move on to whistle-blowers? DfID decided not to conduct a systemic audit of whistle-blowing practices among the sector, although it planned to, because the NGO working groups said they deemed it unnecessary. Why did DfID not? It is historical, so I do not think Rory can do it.

**Peter Taylor:** The thing on whistle-blowers is to say we have built it into our due-diligence assessments. The enhanced due-diligence process on safeguarding that was introduced last year includes a very specific section on whistle-blowing. Every time we do a due-diligence process on an implementing partner, we look at its whistle-blowing process. Every time we monitor a programme, we will be looking at that as part of the broader monitoring as well. Whenever we do a central assurance assessment, we look at that.



I should say that, so far, we have done about 16 very detailed central assurance assessments of NGOs and how they are stacking up against the new enhanced safeguarding due-diligence standards. We have seen some really interesting progress on this. One or two have said, "We recognise we were not as strong on this as we should have been", and one organisation, which I am not going to name, has been—

Q67 **Chair:** Is the "this" in that sentence safeguarding or whistle-blowing?

**Peter Taylor:** It is whistle-blowing; apologies for not being clear. They have introduced a specific whistle-blowing policy for their organisation and have written it into their downstream funding arrangements. Anybody who works for them, or whom they subcontract, has to have a very clear whistle-blowing policy. That was the response that we had from others in the sector as well: that was the best way of addressing it in a very practical, applied way, and people are learning as they are going and improving as we go along.

**Rory Stewart:** Sadly, now, in doing our due diligence, we will ask, "Do you have mandatory training in place on how to deal with whistle-blowers? We are giving money to your organisation. Do you have the protection mechanisms in place for a whistle-blower?" Typically, we would be asking those organisations to demonstrate that policy as part of the due diligence in getting any kind of contract from us.

Q68 **Mrs Latham:** Will there be protection, then, for whistle-blowers? Many whistle-blowers we have spoken to do not have jobs now because nobody will employ them, because they have been a whistle-blower. Last October, at the Safeguarding Summit, a whistle-blower came up on stage. She felt excluded from DfID's processes, because the whistle-blowers had not been included in the conference. How has DfID addressed this since the summit and what would you do differently now that would involve whistle-blowers?

**Rory Stewart:** We have set up a new independent reference group, and part of that is designed to learn the lessons from what happened on 18 October and to make sure that whistle-blowers are more included in that. There is an enormous amount more that we can and must do to protect whistle-blowers while bearing in mind that this—and I am afraid I am repeating myself—is not only a problem for DfID. Whistle-blowing in general and protecting whistle-blowers is really tough, and it gets many times tougher when you are a long way from the United Kingdom.

Q69 **Mrs Latham:** How are you assuring yourself of the effectiveness of the whistle-blowing policies at the UN now?

**Peter Taylor:** It is quite interesting. The joint inspection unit of the UN has done a very thorough, quite recent report about whistle-blowing there, and found that there have been improvements but there is still a long way to go. For us, that is one of the ways in which we will track that, to see what has come out of that and follow that through the central assurance assessments that we do of individual organisations, and also



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from the very practical examples that we receive. Again, I am not going to name organisations but our safeguarding investigations team has had some quite detailed discussions recently with one UN organisation, where we found that the protection of whistle-blowers was not as good as we would like it to be. We are following up on very concrete things as well as doing the systemic headquarters-type assessment.

**Rory Stewart:** The final thing, which is really interesting and where we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the Committee, is that you have driven us to do an enormous amount on this and I am picking up that you feel we could do an enormous amount more.

**Chair:** Yes.

**Rory Stewart:** As a new, incoming Secretary of State, I also feel this is a very interesting model for challenging us on other issues and other types of cross-cutting theme. It could be child protection but, sitting and listening to you, I wonder whether we could not also think about issues such as environment sustainability in the same way: providing resource hubs, working with our partners. Human rights could be another example, in general and not just in relation to abuse and harassment.

Insofar as we wish to raise standards across the aid sector in terms of protecting victims and survivors, but also other forms of protection, such as the protection of the environment from degradation, the protection of the planet from carbon emissions, the protection of water from pollution, there are many other protection issues where this type of cross-cutting approach and this attempt to say—

**Chair:** As a Committee, we very much welcome that but I should say that Pauline has been leading on this area for three years now. I think “learn from” was the suggestion.

**Mrs Latham:** This is too important to merge into and say, “We are going to do lots of protection, therefore sexual exploitation and abuse is just one of them”. It is really important in this sector, more than maybe in many other sectors, because it is happening, and it is happening here and now. We must not, under any circumstances, lose sight of that by saying that we are going to protect all sorts of things. Yes, they are important but this is absolutely vital.

**Chair:** Pauline, we are overrunning and that could be a very good note to end the session on, could it not?

**Mrs Latham:** Yes, I will leave that.

**Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. I promised you we would deliver it in an hour. We have overrun slightly, so thank you both very much indeed for coming to give evidence.

**Rory Stewart:** Thank you for having us.