

Written evidence submitted by NGO Safe Space

Submission to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee in the House of Commons

Submitted by:

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Organisation: NGO Safe Space, a voluntary organisation campaigning on #AidToo

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1. We note that the Charity Commission, under the leadership of Helen Stephenson and Baroness Tina Stowell, has performed a huge act of public benefit by taking seriously claims by women of sexual harassment, abuse, violence and exploitation in the international development charity sector in 2018.
2. Most importantly, the Commission launched statutory inquiries into events reported in UK media to have taken place at Oxfam GB and Save the Children UK, both large and powerful organisations with a huge global reach.
3. We commend the Chair and CEO for responding effectively with limited tools available to them, as a quasi-judicial body representing an enormous remit
4. We recognise the scale of the challenge presented to the Commission in its work to respond to increased whistleblowing and safeguarding matters reported, with a reduced budget provision from central government. The worldwide #MeToo campaign also stimulated many women to report information to the Commission that increased its workload and required sexual harassment expertise, a highly sensitive and specialist area of work. We consider the Commission to have performed as well as could be expected with such resources. We also consider the Commission to have acted with sensitivity and professionalism.
5. We know that the current range of powers and expertise is too limited for the Commission to fully exercise its duties with regard to the international development and humanitarian aid organisations headquartered or represented in England and Wales. The quasi-

judicial role is insufficient to allow full scrutiny and accountability for a sector that operates in a very distinct way around the world.

6. We call on the DCMS Committee to support our advocacy for a global, independent ombudsman which could be financially supported by contributions from international aid organisations (UK sector income noted as £4bn in 2016, source BOND) This body would hold the increased legislative powers necessary to regulate organisations that operate in 120 countries in extremely unique conditions. The Commission would thus be better supported in its work to regulate UK-based operations, and could target resources to ensure charitable work in Britain is under sufficient protection.

7. We note that this new DCMS Committee is 82% male, an imbalance which is very likely to reduce the Committee's ability to discharge its duties of scrutiny and oversight of listed portfolio. The charity sector workforce is over 60% female. The Charity Commission has investigated Oxfam and Save the Children for gendered harm against women and children, which cannot be effectively reviewed by a mainly male panel without a feminist lens. We recognise this structural inequality and hereby call into question the work of the Committee in its current form. We challenge this Committee to do better and ensure gender balance and fair representation of class, race, disability and sexuality / gender identity in the future.

8. We further note that racism, misogyny and class discrimination is inherent in all British institutions of power, including the House of Commons and all legislative bodies. These systems of oppression are also the root cause of #AidToo harms and we acknowledge that any UK governed organisation will ultimately be limited in its ability to tackle sexual harassment, bullying and other related behaviours until we dismantle whiteness, patriarchy and colonialism in British structure and societal norms.

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