

February 23rd, 2018

## Open Letter from charities committing to better action on safeguarding

As organisations whose core aim is to help the most vulnerable people in the world, we must always confront abusive behaviour and the misuse of power. When it comes from individuals within our sector it is a double betrayal, not just of the people we exist to serve, but of the British people in whose name we operate. Although this is only the action of a small minority of people, it is nonetheless an issue that we will not allow to go unaddressed.

There can be no tolerance for the abuse of power, privilege or trust within our organisations or in our work. We have an absolute duty to our staff, our supporters and, above all, the people we seek to help to ensure we do everything in our power to prevent, detect and eradicate unacceptable behaviour.

As we take every necessary step to right these deep wrongs, we also have a clear responsibility to ensure that the communities we seek to help are not the ones punished for our mistakes. The widespread distress and disappointment that we've heard in the past two weeks demonstrates that people feel profound compassion for those who need Britain's help. We must honour that instinct, and the rights and needs of the communities we work with, by continuing to deliver vital aid but also changing fundamentally.

Safeguarding is something that, as a sector, we have long taken very seriously and all our organisations have systems in place to prevent all forms of abuse and misconduct. However, we can never be complacent. We must do even more to protect the very people we were set up to help.

First and foremost we must continue to create an environment where people feel safe, and confident to report any behaviour that makes them feel uncomfortable or which threatens them or their communities. That is why we are collectively announcing the following series of urgent and immediate measures:

- \* We will all increase the resources we devote to safeguarding – meeting our responsibility to protect our staff and beneficiaries.

- \* We will collectively review our current referencing systems so that people found to have abused their power or behaved inappropriately are not re-employed in the sector – including in INGOs, government agencies, the UN and other associated bilateral and domestic agencies.

\* We will work with the Government to ensure that we can overcome the legal and institutional barriers to rigorous background checks in the UK.

In taking these steps, we are also asking people to come forward to report unacceptable behaviour. We hope these measures send a clear message to those who experience or witness any form of abuse - it is really important that they know that we will listen and we will take action.

These actions are only the first step as, collectively and individually, we do everything possible to ensure that our organisations, our staff and the work we fund meets that most fundamental criteria for all charities - to serve people and not to exploit them.

Our collective mission is to do much more than that – the challenge we face in our own organisations is a challenge for the whole of society. This is something that requires leadership in every sector – and we ask people from all walks of life and all corners of our communities to help us to strengthen safeguards, tackle abuse and stand up for the vulnerable – and to call out inappropriate behaviour wherever we see it.

We are truly sorry that at times our sector has failed. We must and will do better.

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Age International

BBC Media Action

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Global Citizen

Islamic Relief UK

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Muslim Aid

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