



Roland van Hauwermeiren admitted sexual misconduct with young women in Haiti

Aid charities urged to join scheme that vets sex predators

Sean O'Neill, Chief Reporter

Tuesday February 25 2020, 12.01am GMT, The Times

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Aid agencies should sign up to a new vetting system that aims to stop sexual predators “moving from job to job to avoid detection”, the international development secretary said last night.

A pilot scheme involving 15 charities was set up last year with 2,600 checks carried out and 36 people rejected for jobs in the humanitarian sector because of information about previous misconduct or because details about past jobs were inexplicably absent.

The vetting regime was established after the scandal of sexual misconduct by some Oxfam aid workers after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti emerged. An investigation by *The Times* disclosed that Oxfam had covered up information about the scandal, allowing suspected predators to take jobs with different NGOs without passing on any warnings.

[Roland van Hauwermeiren](#), Oxfam's former country director in [Haiti](#), admitted sexual misconduct with young local women but was allowed to resign and quickly moved to a senior post with a different NGO in Bangladesh.

"It is sickening to think perpetrators of sexual misconduct continue to play the system," said Anne-Marie Trevelyan, who became international development secretary this month. "I want to see all UK aid agencies signed up, so together we can work to stop vulnerable people being exploited, abused and harassed."

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The NGOs using the scheme include Oxfam and Save the Children, which are both still recovering from sexual misconduct scandals, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Islamic Relief, Plan International and World Vision.

Charities have been reluctant to exchange employee information because of data protection concerns. Criminal records are checked but often the conduct of rogue employees is not illegal in the country that they are deployed in or there has been no effective investigation. Perpetrators have used tactics to avoid detection including regularly moving between countries on short-term disaster zone deployments, lying about their work history, avoiding organisations that require criminal records checks and changing their names.

The new scheme is run with UK government support by the Swiss-based Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response and has developed a legally safe method for data exchange.

Helen Evans, who resigned as head of safeguarding at Oxfam over a lack of resources devoted to the issue, said the new scheme was a welcome start. She added: “The checks must go hand in hand with investment in detecting and investigating allegations against aid workers. So much more still needs to be done to build the confidence of beneficiaries to report these crimes.”

Steve Reeves, director of child safeguarding at Save the Children, said: “This scheme is an important step towards collaboration at minimal cost and a valuable tool in preventing those with a history of sexual misconduct gaining access to the sector.”

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Stephanie Draper, of the NGO umbrella group Bond, said that the system would be effective only if more NGOs signed up, “as well the private sector, academia and donors”.

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