



New Zealand aid charities have zero tolerance for abuse

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It is deeply shocking to read of cases overseas where some aid workers have taken advantage of the people their organisations exist to help.

“New Zealand aid agencies have zero tolerance for any form of abuse, and continue to hold themselves accountable to the CID Code of Conduct,” says Josie Pagani, Director of the Council for International Development (CID), the umbrella organisation for New Zealand’s international aid charities.

She was responding to historic reports of individuals in aid organisations in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, who have used prostitutes or sexually abused local people receiving aid in countries like Haiti and Chad.

The CID Board discussed these events as a matter of urgency this week, and agreed to consult with its members about what the New Zealand sector can learn - and swiftly apply - from this appalling situation.

The CID Board includes members from New Zealand agencies such as Tearfund, Oxfam New Zealand, Childfund, Amnesty, Family Planning and others.

“The vast majority of aid and humanitarian workers do life-saving work in some of the most challenging places in the world, and uphold values of integrity, accountability and respect in everything they do. It’s devastating that the behaviour of some individuals potentially undermines the good work that our organisations do,” says Ian McInnes, Chair of the CID Board and CEO of Tearfund.

In New Zealand, members of the Council for International Development must sign up to the CID Code of Conduct.

“Although there is no guarantee that similar kinds of abuse won’t happen in New Zealand-led organisations, the Code gives everyone a layer of assurance that systems are in place to prevent, or identify and stop abuse as quickly as possible,” says Josie Pagani.

The Code, in conjunction with strict Government requirements and New Zealand law, provides a strong risk management regime in relation to these issues. But there is always room for improvement.

The Code requires CID members to have the following:

- Guidelines for staff and volunteers that clearly define unacceptable behaviours, with specific reference to sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Robust policies on the protection of children, covering vetting and recruitment of staff and volunteers, behavioural guidelines, background checks, training of all staff and volunteers, and safe reporting mechanisms for any incidents.



- Whistle-blowing procedures that allow for the safe reporting of wrongdoing by anyone within or outside the organisation, and for prompt, firm corrective action to be taken where wrongdoing is identified.
- Public complaints mechanisms which are fair, responsive, transparent and accessible to all stakeholders. Information from complaints to be systematically reviewed and analysed.
- Training for all staff on the CID Code, as well as any other standards that may be relevant to their roles.

CID also has an independent complaints mechanism for reporting concerns about any of our members, and policies in place for investigating complaints or referring them to the appropriate authority.

CID will work with its members to identify areas that can be improved, for example more explicit guidelines on recruitment and reference checking between agencies, and to explore if more safeguards are needed, says Ian McInnes.

The Council for International Development (CID) is the peak body for New Zealand's international development and humanitarian aid sector.

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