

End UK tax havens's role in global corruption, charitie...

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The chief executives of 17 charities and campaign groups have written to the Prime Minister today, urging him to stop UK tax havens from enabling corruption and tax dodging around the world.

The letter, signed by the CEOs of organisations including ActionAid UK, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Global Witness, comes less than two weeks before David Cameron's international Anti-Corruption Summit in London on 12th May.

"The UK's reputation as a leader in the fight against corruption is on the line," the letter warns, following the latest revelations in the Panama Papers about the role played by UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies - especially the British Virgin Islands - in enabling corruption and secrecy around the world.

The letter urges the Prime Minister to tackle the problem by introducing public registers of the real owners of all companies in UK tax havens.

It states:

In 2013 you set the UK on a path to greater transparency in these territories and have continued to make the case for public registers ever since. While we welcome your announcement that the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies will adopt central registries of beneficial ownership available to UK law enforcement, we do not believe this is enough to achieve your own stated ambition or strike a decisive blow at the UK's role in facilitating global corruption.

As you yourself have recognised, both the authorities and the public need transparency to empower the fight against corruption worldwide; and this is particularly true in developing countries which have the most to gain from transparency, yet this announcement does nothing for them.

As such it is vital that you introduce public registers of beneficial ownership in all the major offshore jurisdictions, including the Overseas Territories and

Crown Dependencies. We urge you to use all the powers at your disposal to achieve this vital reform, and to ensure that the UK shows true leadership in both words and deeds.

The full text of the letter and full list of signatories is below:

28 April 2016

Dear Prime Minister,

As leaders of organisations that have been fighting corruption in its many guises for years, we eagerly anticipate the Anti-Corruption Summit on 12th May in London, and the 'Tackling Corruption Together' conference the day before. We thank you for this initiative, and look forward to participating fully. We hope that these twin conferences will mark a decisive step to end the scourge of corruption.

We applaud the UK's commitment to tackling corruption during your time as Prime Minister, from the first Bribery Act to the imminent implementation of a public register of beneficial ownership in the UK. We hope that following this example, more countries will decide to adopt similar public registers by May's summit.

The public in many countries around the world have been shocked by the international network of corruption revealed in the Panama Papers. Even more shocking has been the revelation that the UK — through its territories and dependencies, especially the British Virgin Islands - plays a central role in enabling and facilitating secrecy and corruption around the world. Now is the time to put that right. The public expects decisive action. The UK's reputation as a leader in the fight against corruption is on the line.

In 2013 you set the UK on a path to greater transparency in these territories and have continued to make the case for public registers ever since. While we welcome your announcement that the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies will adopt central registries of beneficial ownership available to UK law enforcement, we do not believe this is enough to achieve your own stated ambition or strike a decisive blow at the UK's role in facilitating global corruption. As you yourself have recognised, both the authorities and the public need transparency to empower the fight against corruption worldwide; and this is particularly true in developing countries which have the most to gain from transparency, yet this announcement does nothing for them. As such it is vital that you introduce public registers of beneficial ownership in all the major offshore jurisdictions, including the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. We urge you to use all the powers at your disposal to achieve this vital reform, and to ensure that the UK shows true leadership in both words and deeds.

The British public, across the political spectrum, strongly support such a move. Recent polling conducted before the Panama Papers scandal showed that 77% of British adults

agree that you have a moral responsibility to ensure that the UK's Overseas Territories are as transparent as possible, and this rose to 80% among Conservative supporters and 85% among people aged 45 and over. More specifically, 81% of British adults agree that all companies, whether they are registered in the UK or its Overseas Territories, should be legally required to reveal their ultimate owners — again, support is higher among Conservative supporters (87%) and people aged 45 and over (89%).

With such overwhelming public demand, now is the moment for you to take decisive action and secure the credibility of the UK in hosting this potentially ground-breaking Summit. There can be no excuse. We offer you our full support if you choose to do so.

Given the level of public attention on these issues, and the need to highlight the importance of the conference to the public, we are making this letter publicly available.

Yours sincerely,

Loretta Minghella, Chief Executive, Christian Aid

Andrew Feinstein, Executive Director, Corruption Watch

Gillian Caldwell, Chief Executive, Global Witness

Chris Taggart, Co-Founder and CEO, OpenCorporates

Richard Murphy, Director, Tax Research UK

Blair Glencorse, Executive Director, the Accountability Lab

Rupert Simons, Chief Executive, Publish What You Fund

Akaash Maharaj, Chief Executive Officer, Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption

John Christensen, Director, Tax Justice Network

Chris Bain, Director, CAFOD

Ben Jackson, Chief Executive, BOND

Mark Goldring, Chief Executive, Oxfam GB

Elisa Peter, Executive Director, Publish What You Pay International

Girish Menon, Chief Executive, ActionAid UK

Daniel Kaufmann, President and Chief Executive Officer, Natural Resource Governance Institute

JosÃ© Antonio Ocampo, Chair, Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation

Manzoor Hasan, Chair, UNCAC Coalition