

# The UK government is defending the tax haven secrecy th...

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*I thought I might share this press release, from Christian Aid, out this morning:*

*[Today's revelations](#) that British Virgin Islands companies helped Russian mobsters launder tens of billions put the UK Government in a highly embarrassing position, Christian Aid is warning.*

*The revelations — from [Global Witness](#) — come before an MPs' vote on Tuesday about secrecy in UK Overseas Territories such as the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands.*

*Ministers face a Parliamentary rebellion as cross-party support gathers for a reform that would help end secrecy in the such tax havens, amid the growing evidence that it enables serious crime globally.*

*"The latest revelations about Russian mobsters using the [British Virgin Islands](#) to launder billions put ministers in a highly embarrassing position. Are they really going to keep defending the system that enabled this, in the face of powerful, cross-party demand for change?" asked Simon Kirkland, Christian Aid's UK Parliamentary and Political Advisor.*

*"And if UK tax havens are washing money for the Russian mafia, who else are they doing it for?" he added.*

*Tuesday's Parliamentary rebellion is being led by Dame Margaret Hodge MP, former Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, and supported by Andrew Mitchell MP, former International Development Secretary. Supporting it so far are 18 Conservative MPs, eight serving Select Committee Chairs and 14 former Cabinet Ministers.*

*Simon Kirkland added: "Over the years, a clear and shameful pattern has emerged, in which UK tax haven secrecy has helped the corrupt to [steal vast sums from poor countries](#) and to launder cash generated through [horrific crimes](#).*

*"While ministers [persistently obstruct reforms](#) that would help clean up our tax havens,*

*it is hard not to conclude they are on the wrong side, despite their [warm words](#) about the rule of law and justice.”*

*Christian Aid has campaigned for years for UK tax havens to have to publicly reveal the real owners of the myriad companies they host, because of the evidence that secrecy harms people in developing countries.*

*The UK itself has already introduced a public register of companies' real owners and former Prime Minister [David Cameron tried and failed](#) to persuade UK tax havens to follow suit. The current government, however, has been more ready to defend the status quo.*

*Christian Aid strongly supports the cross-party MPs who have said they will vote for transparency in the UK's Overseas Territories in Tuesday's vote on the [Sanctions Bill](#). The vote is on an amendment which would require UK Overseas Territories to introduce public registers of companies' real owners by 2020.*

*“We are delighted to see how senior MPs of all parties have stood up to support this welcome amendment and we urge many more to join them,” added Mr Kirkland.*

*“The British Virgin Islands claims that its existing private, non-centralised register of companies' real owners is adequate but a recent [review of the evidence](#) by Christian Aid suggests otherwise.*

*“One acute problem is that because it's a private register, developing countries cannot see the information in it. Furthermore, because it's not a centralised register, information may take a long time to reach the authorities that need it.”*