

Joint response to BIS Transparency and Trust Discussion Paper

All of the undersigned share a desire to stamp out fraud, tax evasion, corruption and money laundering in the UK and abroad. Both developed and developing countries alike face criminals who steal, engage in corruption and distort a fair business environment. Too often these criminals can cheat legitimate businesses, evade the law and hide their illicit funds through anonymous shell companies.

We are pleased that the UK, as it leads the G8, has decided to focus on this issue and to introduce a register of the beneficial owners of all UK companies.

All of the groups and individuals who have signed this submission agree that such a registry must be made public. This is in line with the Prime Minister's personal hope that "the whole world will move towards public registers of beneficial ownership".

We note that legitimate British businesses themselves are often victims of shell companies established purely for the purposes of defrauding other businesses and citizens. Businesses and citizens deserve a higher degree of confidence in the authenticity and ownership of the businesses they may interact with.

It is only through making the registry public that its full benefits will be realised. These benefits are many, including: reducing the cost of law enforcement investigations, improving banks' ability to carry out checks on their customers; giving businesses information on their partners, suppliers and competitors; allowing many eyes from around the world to see who really owns and controls the companies operating in their societies, to check for any inaccuracies and to root out corruption. The costs are small; making the register public will be of minimal extra cost to creating and maintaining a non-public register, and will impose no extra burdens on businesses.

A public registry should be established in close dialogue with all stakeholders, especially businesses, to ensure that the system is a simple and user friendly as possible, and provides reliable and accessible open data to all who wish to use it.

We strongly urge the UK government to make the register of company ownership public, and to advocate for such registries in the EU and in other countries. This will ensure that those who seek to abuse the privilege of company ownership for secrecy purposes are left with nowhere to hide.

Signed:

Christian Aid
Global Witness
CAFOD
ONE
Oxfam GB
Tax Research UK
Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR)
Open Corporates
Transparency International UK
Open Knowledge Foundation

Publish What You Pay UK
Save the Children UK
Tax Justice Network
Share Action
War on Want
UK Sustainable Investment and Finance Association (UKSIF)
Paul Blomfield MP
Sir Peter Bottomley MP
Lord Browne of Ladyton
Sir Tony Cunningham MP
Mark Durkan MP
Lady Sylvia Hermon MP
Martin Horwood MP
Lord Judd
David Lammy MP
Catherine McKinnell MP
Ian Murray MP
Fiona O'Donnell MP
Anas Sarwar MP
Hywel Williams MP
Marian Thompson – Investor