



PUBLICATION OF WASS INQUIRY REPORT

Thursday 10 December 2015

The Ascension Island Government (AIG) today welcomes publication of the Wass Inquiry Report into Allegations Surrounding Child Safeguarding Issues on St Helena and Ascension Island, which follows an independent and comprehensive review of claims relating to child abuse on St Helena and Ascension Island carried out by Sasha Wass QC and the Inquiry team. The team visited St Helena and Ascension Island in March of this year. The report was published on 10 December in the UK Parliament, by means of a Written Ministerial Statement by Minister for the British Overseas Territories James Duddridge. Both the statement and the report can be viewed on the UK Government website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-wass-inquiry-report-into-allegations-surrounding-child-safeguarding-issues-on-st-helena-and-ascension-island-redacted-version>

The St Helena Government has also issued its own statement at:

<http://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/wass-inquiry-report-published/>

AIG acknowledges and reaffirms the independence and credibility of this Inquiry - which received its full support and cooperation - and accepts the report's recommendations. AIG will now consider the report's findings in greater detail and discuss the issues it raises and follow up action with the Ascension Island Safeguarding Board and the Island Council.

At this early stage, we note in particular the following broad findings and recommendations:

- The report refutes the claim that child abuse is endemic on St Helena. It states: *'The Inquiry Panel found no evidence that child abuse was either endemic or routine'*
- Nor was there a cover up or corruption. The report *'found no evidence of corruption in the St Helena Police Service, the St Helena Government, the FCO or DFID. Nor was there any evidence of a cover up, as suggested to the public.'*

- The report found no evidence of police corruption or paedophilia on Ascension Island
- The report notes that attention needs to be given to the travel needs of St Helenians living on Ascension Island post-RMS, although this has recently been overtaken by the selection of Comair to provide an air service between Ascension Island and St Helena
- The report observes that an anomaly in the jurisdiction between St Helena and Ascension Island relating to the sentencing of offenders to community orders needs to be dealt with.

Significant progress has been made in child safeguarding on Ascension in recent years. AIG has adopted the Child Welfare Ordinance and Children in Bars legislation, which provide a modern framework for safeguarding on the island. The [AI Safeguarding Board](#) has adopted Child Protection guidelines, a criminal records check policy for adults working unsupervised with children, set up safe houses and the regulation of child-minding, and employed the island's first full-time social worker.

We will continue to work closely with FCO, the St Helena Government and island employers to ensure we do all we can to protect children and the vulnerable. AIG and the UK Government take all accusations of child abuse extremely seriously and we are committed to ensuring that victims are heard and protected.

Of course, it would be naive to think that Government can tackle all of this alone. Everyone on St Helena and Ascension Island has a responsibility to work together to help to protect the vulnerable in our community and anyone with information that would assist the authorities is urged to come forward in confidence.

Notes to Editors

The Inquiry was commissioned by FCO and DFID Ministers to establish the truth of various allegations by carrying out a multi-disciplinary investigation into the claims made, providing an assessment of their genuineness, and making recommendations as appropriate. The allegations behind the Inquiry involved claims relating to child abuse in St Helena, police corruption and incompetence, and a conspiracy by SHG, FCO and DFID to cover these up.

The Inquiry was headed by Ms Sasha Wass QC, an accomplished barrister with substantial professional experience of dealing with these types of issues, supported by a multi-disciplinary team of experts.

The Wass Inquiry report can be down-loaded here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/484129/51735_Wass_Inquiry_Web_Accessible_PDF.pdf

A direct link to the Written Ministerial Statement can be found here

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-12-10/HCWS378/>

AIG

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