

BARNABAS AID – WHAT HAS GONE WRONG AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Dear Barnabas supporter,

This note summarises the shocking problems which have occurred at the Barnabas Group of charities since Colin Bloom took over in April. It then asks you to write one simple letter which could make all the difference in solving the issues.

Colin Bloom's ruinous failings

- Mr Bloom has moved 30 staff out of the Pewsey site in Wiltshire, UK, and moved his family and furniture into the Georgian mansion
- He has spent some £1m of charity money on an incompetent American law firm
- He has stopped support to ministries which i) help desperately needy Lebanese Christians, ii) support 62 Christian schools in Pakistan and iii) pay off the debts of bonded brick kiln workers in Pakistan to set them free
- Overall donations have collapsed by 52%
- Church leaders are furious with him for closing the unique 110,000 book library
- He is refusing to say what he is earning under his five-year contract

The Daily Telegraph has already published four stories on this scandal. We hope that Colin will see sense and turn back from this destruction before it gets even worse for him and, most importantly, for those the charities have been serving.

The cuckoo in the nest

The Nexcus board is an oversight group of trustees including Lord Reading and Michael Hewat. They appointed Mr Bloom, a Conservative politician with no experience of running an international aid agency. No other candidates were considered despite there being dozens of highly capable people who have run charities serving the persecuted church.

What experience does Mr Bloom have?

- In 2006 he ran a small group of nursing homes in Bromley where he was also a local councillor [1]
- in 2021 he was a director of a South African company which The Observer reported was fraudulent [2]
- in 2024 he was castigated in the press for the abject failure of his vetting company [3]

Mr Bloom has also tried his hand in national politics. In 2022 he campaigned to get Liz Truss elected. [4] Then in 2023 he completed a report on faith for the Government which he had taken three years to write. [5] That is around 45 words a day. What caused deep anger was Mr Bloom's bias against Britain's Sikh community. He wrote 11 pages on "Sikh extremism" but only one on "Islamist extremism". His report managed to infuriate both Hindus and Sikhs who described it as "unbelievably biased and offensive". [6]

So what has Mr Bloom done since arriving at Barnabas? The day after he was appointed he locked the international directors out of the Pewsey office – the people who had built the charity up and who are trusted by donors.

He then moved out the 30 staff who were working in Pewsey. And moved his family into the 25 room Georgian mansion at the centre of the estate. [7] Furniture, pets, the lot – across three floors. That listed property had been an office and residential centre for students using the neighbouring 110,000 book library. But Mr Bloom has closed the library and sacked the librarian. Those staff still employed have been moved to an industrial estate in Swindon.

This has been a disaster for Christians from around the world who use the unique library and its study accommodation. Those outraged include Canon Dr Chris Sugden who runs a PhD programme at the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life. He said the library is "vitally important for the work of over 800 Christian research scholars" around the world. [8]

It is extraordinary that Mr Bloom has done this without consulting the board of Servants Fellowship International – the charity which owns the property. He is a cuckoo. He has ousted the rightful occupants and is now feathering the nest he has taken over.

There is an even greater tragedy. For Mr Bloom is also responsible for abruptly ending many vital projects which alleviate suffering among persecuted Christians. These include crucial aid to minority Christians in war-ravaged Lebanon. So too, support for 62 schools in Pakistan. Yet perhaps the most appalling is his stopping paying off the debts of bonded brick kiln labourers in Pakistan. Now the debts will be passed on to their children.

The £1m lawyers

Instead of serving these suffering Christians, Mr Bloom has squandered some £1m of your donations on getting an American law firm to investigate the founders, Patrick and Rosemary Sookhdeo who are both terminally ill.

Mr Bloom has said his role was to “lead” and “supervise” this investigation. [9] He said he was very confident that the Sookhdeos had been responsible for “significant wrongdoing”. Yet despite this hopeless prejudging of the investigation, he pretended that it was “independent” and “impartial”.

So what has it found?

It has accused the Sookhdeos of receiving £1.3 million from charitable funds. [10] What it does not mention is that this was over the course of 40 years – and mostly from ring-fenced love gifts given with the express intention of providing for the Sookhdeos in lieu of salary. If they had been on the minimum wage they would have received £1.6 million.

The American lawyers, whom Mr Bloom has paid so handsomely out of funds donated to help persecuted Christians, have made imprecise accusations. They have bandied around terms like “implicates” and “inappropriate largesse” [11]

However, the most concerning part of the lawyers’ work is that it was based on allegations emanating from one of the most flawed sources imaginable. The lawyers acknowledged that several witnesses said that the complaints against the Sookhdeos were orchestrated by the former Nexcus CEO Noel Frost. [12] The lawyers also knew that Mr Frost had been disbarred as a solicitor for fraud and forgery. They knew that the South African High Court had found him to be “a grossly dishonest individual, who is a threat to the public and a disgrace to the profession.” [13]

And yet these “impartial” lawyers realised that if they had focused on this central fact it would have undermined the rationale for their £1m fees. They were being paid to throw mud at the international directors and the inconvenient facts about Mr Frost got in the way.

The partners of this law firm have clearly not even read their own report. How else do they explain why it is full of careless errors and padded out with vacuous statements like “the petty cash... system may be vulnerable to misuse”?

Their client, Mr Bloom, wants to protect his five-year contract. The international directors could be even more precise in their defence to every allegation he has made against them if they had access to files. But Mr Bloom has locked them out of the charity’s computers and paper records.

The Nexcus trustees

The failing trustees who have appointed Mr Bloom have a lot of explaining to do for the calamity which they are responsible for. Lawyers are becoming rich while persecuted Christians go without vital aid.

The questions these trustees will have to answer include why, when our good friend Philip Richards uncovered the disbarment of Noel Frost, they did not promptly inform the Charity Commission of this extremely serious discovery.

Michael Hewat, who has just become chairman of Nexcus, will also need to spell out how he can sort out the mess he is making while living in New Zealand.

The media already has deep concerns about what is going on. And so does the Charity Commission – it has launched a statutory investigation.

So what can you do to ensure that the suffering church around the world can be taken care for? Clearly, with donations collapsing, and the £100 million of assets being depleted, action needs to be taken quickly.

If you live in the UK, please email your MP asking them to urge the Charity Commission to immediately replace Colin Bloom in order to protect the charity. You can find your MP's email address

here: <https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons>.

Please write your letter now – and let us know what response you get from your MP.

If you live outside the UK, please email your concerns to Marie Joyce at the Charity Commission at IAEInvestigationsCRM@charitycommission.gov.uk

It is time for this wonderful group of charities to be handed on to a competent generation of new leaders – talented people with excellent credentials for serving the persecuted church.

Your email will make a huge difference. Please write it now. Below this note you will find guidance on how to write your letter.

Yours sincerely,

The Friends of Barnabas Aid

friendsofbarnabasaid@gmail.com

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Below are i) notes on writing to your MP and the Charity Commission and ii) sources for the letter above

How to write to your MP or the Charity Commission

For MPs

- Find your MP's email address
here: <https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons>
- Explain in your own words why Barnabas's work is important to you.
- Include your home address to show that you live in their constituency
- Ask your MP to write to the Charity Commission to urge them to intervene immediately to stop Colin Bloom causing further harm
- Ask to meet your MP at one of their 'constituency surgeries' to express your concerns
- Please email us the response you get

For the Charity Commission

- Email them at: IAEInvestigationsCRM@charitycommission.gov.uk
- Tell them you are writing about "Barnabas Fund, registered charity number 1092935"
- Explain in your own words why Barnabas's work is important to you.
- Ask them to intervene immediately to stop Colin Bloom causing further harm
- Please email us the response you get

We suggest you include some of the following points:

- Colin Bloom has no experience of running a big international charity
- He has a history of ethical failures ranging from his Vetting.com business to his bias against Britain's Sikh population
- Donations have collapsed 52% because he is not trusted by donors
- His decision to turf 30 staff out of the charity's Pewsey estate and then move his family and furniture into its Georgian mansion is shocking
- His decision to pay £1m of charitable funds to American lawyers in an attempt to shore up his job is a disgrace
- The projects he has stopped funding includes help to war refugees in Lebanon, 62 schools in Pakistan and bonded brick kiln labourers in Pakistan
- His closure of the unique 110,000 book library used by scholars around the world is objectionable

- Mr Bloom is refusing to say how much he is being paid under his five-year contract

Please write your letter now. Thank you!

Sources

[1] Colin Bloom was Chief Executive of a small care home provider in Bromley. See: <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/councillor-quits-top-post-over-c-a26560/>

[2] The Observer reported that Bloom was a director of the “shambolic” South African Umuthi healthcare company which allegedly conducted fraudulent financial transactions:

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/oct/24/anger-over-shambolic-phone-app-shares-sale>

[3] Several newspapers have reported that Colin Bloom’s Vetting.com failed in on its contract of vetting candidates for the Reform party. Nigel Farage said “Reform paid a vetting company £144k to carry out candidate checks. Not a single piece of work was delivered.”

<https://www.facebook.com/nigelfarageofficial/posts/reform-paid-a-vetting-company-144k-to-carry-out-candidate-checks-not-a-single-pi/1003196417828803>

Newspaper coverage includes: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13604637/Nigel-Farage-vows-clean-Reform-UKs-act-Newly-elected-MP-announces-taking-legal-action-against-firm-tasked-vetting-partys-candidates-racism-homophobia-scandals.html>

[4] Colin Bloom spoke of his his role working for Liz Truss in this podcast: (at 1h7m50s), Triggernometry, October 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bby5nYQq_uk and https://en.everybodywiki.com/Colin_Bloom

[5] Colin Bloom’s report on faith in the UK: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64478b4f529eda00123b0397/The_Bloom_Review.pdf

[6] Sikhs and Hindus were hugely offended by Colin Bloom’s report: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/fury-amongst-british-sikhs-and-hindus-at-being-branded-as-extremists-in-bloom-review/articleshow/99917726.cms>

[7] Letter from Colin Bloom to Philip Richards in which he acknowledged that he had moved his family into the Georgian mansion. BT 241015

[8] Canon Dr Sugden criticised Colin Bloom's closure of the "irreplaceable world class" library at Pewsey. See BT 241005 Letter and <https://ocrpl.org/blog/save-ocrpl-from-colin-bloom-and-nexcus/>

[9] Colin Bloom claimed that the investigation he was paying America law firm Crowell to undertake was "independent" and "impartial" but also said that he was running it. "The investigation I... supervise [and] lead". Bloom correspondence BT 240930

[10] Crowell report accused Sookhdeos of receiving £1.3 million from charitable funds See paragraph 130: Interim Report from Crowell & Moring, BT 240813

[11] Crowell report "implicates" Sookhdeo's of receiving "inappropriate largesse". See paragraphs 119 and 147: Interim Report from Crowell & Moring, BT 240813

[12] Crowell report acknowledged that Noel Frost "initiated and encouraged" complaints and that he was intent on "weaponising" the whistle-blowing process... so that a large number of complaints would be sent to the Charity Commission at the same time like "bombs going off" See paragraphs 324 and 326: Interim Report from Crowell & Moring, BT 240813

[13] Noel Frost described by South African High Court as being "grossly dishonest". See <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/09/20/christian-charity-boss-splurged-thousands-on-company-card/> and BT 220603 High Court judgment