

21 October 2013



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

From the Secretary of State

Burma Campaign UK
28 Charles Square
London
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Dear Burma Campaign,

Thank you for the thousands of letters and campaign postcards you delivered on 12 September supporting your campaign for action to end the use of sexual violence against women in areas of conflict in Burma. I would be grateful if you would share this response with your supporters.

I share your concerns on this important issue as we continue to receive deeply troubling reports of the use of sexual violence in Burma's conflict areas.

Both the Prime Minister and I discussed with President Thein Sein the full range of our concerns on human rights and ethnic issues during his visit to London in July 2013. The President welcomed my initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict. We continue to call for an end to the use of sexual violence in Burma. At a minimum there must be strengthened accountability and better access to justice for victims of sexual violence. More widely, tackling sexual violence will be central to reducing tensions and the peace process.

Through the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), the UK is spearheading a high-level political campaign, supported by a range of practical measures, to help conflict-affected countries address the issue.

At its outset, the Initiative identified countries, in consultation with the UN and other partners, for initial deployments including to Bosnia, Libya, the DRC, and the Syrian border. Over recent months the Initiative has extended to a number of other countries -including Burma.

During the UN General Assembly in September, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and I launched a joint high-level political declaration on preventing sexual violence, which expresses a shared commitment and determination to see an end to the use of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war. We continue to invite all countries, including Burma, to join 134 nations and endorse the declaration.

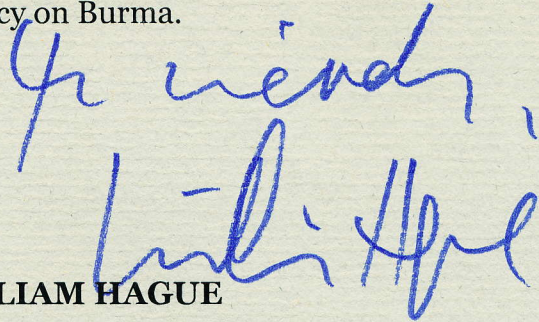
Our Embassy in Rangoon is looking to incorporate PSVI activities in to new and existing work by funding a project that will help to improve access to justice for victims, develop community-based preventive mechanisms and promote wider legal and policy reforms.

We are also funding local NGOs to give technical support to the Burmese Ministry of Social Welfare. On 3 October, the first ever Burma National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women was launched, which prioritises tackling violence against women and girls. The Plan was developed with UK funding support by Action Aid.

In order to tackle the human rights record of the Burmese army, including incidents of sexual violence in conflict zones, it will be essential to engage with the military. The British Government, supported by Aung Sang Suu Kyi, appointed a Defence Attaché to Burma in February 2013. The focus of our defence engagement in Burma is on adherence to the core principles of democratic accountability and human rights. We want to see a Burmese army that respects, and is respected by, the Burmese people.

We are under no illusion as to the scale of the challenges that remain in Burma. Please be assured that we will continue to raise human rights abuses in Burma at every opportunity with the Burmese government. We will also continue to work with our international partners and UN to address these concerns.

I would like to thank BCUK and your members for your work to highlight human rights issues in Burma. Human rights—including preventing sexual violence in Burma—will remain at the heart of British policy on Burma.



WILLIAM HAGUE