



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

East Asia and Pacific Department
King Charles Street
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Burma Campaign UK
28 Charles Square
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Dear Burma Campaign UK

Thank you for the letters received from your members regarding Burma, the use of sexual violence in conflict areas and the situation in Rakhine (Arakan) State. I have been asked to reply as the Desk Officer responsible for correspondence about Burma in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I hope your members will accept my apologies for not replying to everyone individually, and I would be most grateful if you could make this reply available to them by posting it on your website.

UN resolutions 1325 and 1820.

The promotion of the rule of law and protection of human rights are central to our relationship with Burma. As the largest aid donor to Burma, we are in regular contact with ethnic groups and NGOs and remain concerned about reported human rights abuses particularly in ethnic areas.

The human rights situation in Burma and its compliance with UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 remains a serious concern, particularly in the areas where there is ethnic conflict. Limited access to these areas makes the provision of humanitarian assistance and assessment of the situation problematic.

We continue to receive reports of gender-based violence by the military in conflict areas. The Burmese government has done little to investigate these cases. During Burma's Universal Periodic Review session at the UN, we urged the government to prosecute human rights violations. We strongly supported a UN resolution at the Human Rights Council in March which called on the Burmese government to take urgent measures to end the targeting of civilians in military operations, and rape and other forms of sexual violence.

Resolution 1820 follows up on Resolution 1325 (women, peace, and security), and confronts sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. Through their project programme our Embassy in Rangoon supports several groups and projects that

encourage respect for women's rights, and supports their participation in peace negotiations and post conflict reconstruction.

The Foreign Secretary announced on 29 May a new initiative to prevent sexual violence in conflict. It includes the establishment of a dedicated UK team devoted to combating and preventing sexual violence in conflict. This team will be able to be deployed overseas at short notice to gather evidence and testimony that can be used to support investigations and prosecutions.

Please be assured that we will continue to raise the issue of human rights abuses at every opportunity directly with the Burmese government, both at Ministerial level, and through the British Embassy in Rangoon, with our international partners, and in international institutions, such as the UN.

Rakhine (Arakan) State

We very much share your members' concerns about the situation in Rakhine State. The British Government has been a strong supporter of those in Burma pursuing democracy and respect for human rights and continues to be active in raising the serious issues affecting the Rohingya communities. During their respective visits earlier in the year, both the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister met with representatives of ethnic communities in Burma, including the Rohingya, and heard their concerns first hand.

The UK remains one of the most active and vocal members of the international community in raising these concerns with the Burmese authorities, and we will continue to do so. We have repeatedly called for the government to put an end to the violence, to allow unhindered humanitarian access to the areas affected, to resolve the issue of nationality and to grant the full respect for human rights to all the people of Burma, notably the Rohingya.

Following the recent outbreak of violence, Minister Browne issued a statement on 10 June which expressed my deep concern about the situation and urged all groups to open a dialogue to end the violence. On 12 June our Ambassador met Burmese President Thein Sein and urged the President to make every effort to resolve the situation peacefully. The issues affecting the Rohingya were also raised during Aung San Suu Kyi's recent visit to the UK. Most recently, our Ambassador raised our concerns with the Vice President during a meeting in Naypyitaw in mid-July.

We are deeply concerned by the reports of refugees fleeing the violence being turned away when attempting to cross the border from Burma into Bangladesh. The Foreign Secretary raised the issues affecting the Rohingya with the Bangladeshi Prime Minister during their meeting on 28 July.

On 1 August, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's (FCO) Director for Asia Pacific met with the Burmese Ambassador to discuss the situation, and again repeated our concerns, including the need to resolve the issue of nationality.

We also believe it is important to ensure that multilateral organisations such as the European Union and the United Nations take an active role. Our Ambassador raised the UK's concerns with EU Heads of Mission in Rangoon on 16 July. EU Ambassadors subsequently agreed to reinforce our support to the UN's efforts, including securing improved humanitarian access. On the 17 July FCO officials raised the Rohingya in Brussels and requested that the situation in Rakhine State be addressed during the monthly meeting of senior EU Member State officials.

The UK also continues to raise the situation in Burma at the UN Security Council. At our request, we have had three separate briefings in the last eight months from Mr Vijay Nambiar, the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Burma. We have also strongly supported a UN Human Rights Council resolution on Burma this year, which included an extension to the mandate of the UN's Special Rapporteur for Burma, Mr Quintana.

Mr Quintana visited Burma recently, travelling to Rakhine State to see the situation for himself. In a statement released on the 13 August, following Mr Quintana's visit, the Foreign Secretary highlighted our concerns and stated that the UK stood ready to assist the government of Burma in its efforts to develop Rakhine state as Burma continues on its path to democracy.

Following the Foreign Secretary's statement, the government of Burma announced that it would establish an independent Investigative Commission to probe the violence in Rakhine State. The government also released a number of UN and NGO staff detained in connection with the violence. In a statement released on 20 August, we welcomed this development, but made clear that for the Commission to be credible, it needed to involve a consultative process with all of the affected communities including the Rohingya.

Our attention is now focused on the upcoming UN General Assembly session in September. We continue to stress to the Burmese government that unless they resolve the many outstanding issues, we will press for a UN resolution which highlights the strength of our concerns.

We have also noted with appreciation the public statements issued by a number of other states, notably Indonesia, concerning the situation in Rakhine State. We continue to urge Burma's neighbours, particularly Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states, to raise the issue of the Rohingya with Burma directly, and to draw on their own lessons of democratic reform to support Burma's transition.

Our judgement is that the goal of achieving lasting change in Burma stands more chance of being realised if we and the international community engage with all parties in Burma to help embed reform. Aung Sang Suu Kyi agreed that suspension of EU sanctions, except the arms embargo, struck the right balance between recognising the positive steps we have seen, and providing the Burmese

government with the motivation to continue the process of reform. EU sanctions were lifted in April, and will be reviewed in October.

We have not forgotten the many other issues that remain unresolved in Burma. As well as the ongoing ethnic conflicts already discussed, a significant number of political prisoners remain in prison and legislative reform in a number of areas is necessary and pressing. We believe that should President Thein Sein accept the Prime Minister's invitation to visit to the UK, it will be a valuable opportunity to continue the Prime Minister's dialogue with the President and to stress the need to resolve the many issues outstanding.

Yours sincerely,

Joseph Horbacki

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