



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

A summary of Burma-related issues in the British Parliament

MAY
2015

Burma mentioned in House of Commons Debate on the Queen's Speech, which sets out the government's priorities for the coming year

28 May 2015 Richard Fuller: "(...) I am also worried about the fact that the Rohingya Muslims who have left Burma are not even welcome in Bangladesh, and I am worried about the last election in Bangladesh and about how the country will move forward in the next few years. (...)"

For the full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150528/debtext/150528-0002.htm>

Burma mentioned in House of Lords debate on the Queen's Speech (2nd day)

28 May 2015 Baroness Cox: "My Lords, I welcome the Government's commitment in the gracious Speech to play a leading role in global affairs, international security, and economic and humanitarian challenges. I will highlight two relevant areas of concern, namely Burma and Sudan, which are relatively off the radar screen.

First, on Burma, I am happy to report some improvements in regions of Chin State, which I visited in February. Relations between the army, police and civilians have significantly improved, and human rights abuses, including forced labour, have ceased. There is also welcome investment by the Government in infrastructure. It is important to encourage reforms where they occur. However, the Government's continuing assaults on the Rohingya people continue unabated, forcing thousands to flee their land, with many stranded at sea in terrible conditions. As this tragedy has received some media coverage, and as time is limited, I will focus on people whom we visited just last month, whose plight is desperate but not widely reported: the Shan and Kachin people.

Military offensives by the Burmese army continue; in eastern Burma, large-scale military offences in the Kokang region of Shan and Kachin states have occurred almost daily. The Burmese army uses ceasefires to gain ground and enhance its military capability. Meanwhile, expropriation of land and natural resources with derisory or no compensation is associated with large-scale development projects including the building of mines, which displaces thousands of civilians, and dams, which flood thousands of homes. Land grabbing and forced relocations have uprooted people with minimal or no compensation.

When we were there we were told how some development projects begin with photographs being taken of investors handing a cheque to local community leaders. Immediately after the photographs are taken, the cheque is taken back and the project gets under way with no compensation. We met civilians who had lost everything and were forced to live penniless in camps for internally displaced people in Shan and Kachin states. Investment projects are also coupled with an increased military presence and disregard for human rights. Mining projects have caused the environmental destruction of water supplies and crops and have inflicted many diseases, and pollution is damaging the ecosystem and environment. Meanwhile, civilians who have protested have been arrested and in some cases killed.

With continued conflict and displacement for development, the shift by international organisations from cross-border aid to funding the Burmese Government and larger organisations based in Rangoon is deeply worrying, as there is a much greater risk of corruption and failure to ensure that essential supplies reach people in great need in the areas of continuing conflict. The reduction in cross-border aid has already

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resulted in drastic cuts in food rations, which are set to decrease even further. Repatriation proposals are also generating fear. Many refugees who return home find that landmines have been placed in their homes or that their homes have been destroyed and their land sold to business or used by the military.

I therefore ask the Minister whether Her Majesty's Government will encourage DfID and other aid organisations to maintain their previous levels of cross-border aid with partners, like those with whom we in our small NGO, HART, work. They are well-respected and entirely trustworthy, and they make sure that the aid reaches those who are still in need.

I also ask the noble Baroness whether Her Majesty's Government will press the Burmese Government to proceed with a comprehensive peace process rather than intermittent ceasefires, which are used to promote the Burmese army's positions and then broken. Finally, on Burma, will Her Majesty's Government encourage only those development projects which involve full consultation with local people and which are carried out with full compensation and respect for human rights? (...)"

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/150528-0001.htm>

(...) It is the privilege of our small NGO, HART, to be with our partners in these forgotten conflicts, such as those in the Kachin and Shan states and in Sudan's Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile. We return humbled and inspired by their courage, resilience and dignity. I conclude with one story to illustrate the courage of these people. (...)

(...) These courageous people in Sudan and Burma have suffered far too much for far too long. I passionately hope that the Minister will be able to give a message today which will bring them help and hope, and measures to help promote the peace and justice that they truly deserve. (...)

Baroness Berridge: (...) The Queen's Speech also outlined, "an enhanced partnership with India and China", and many people may respond that it is all about trade, really. But in a world of globalised communication, human rights abuses have the potential to damage deeply corporate brands. Perhaps companies are worried about investing in Burma now, and not just because it seems that progress to democracy may have stalled. What will their consumers, especially Muslims, think of a company that invests there while Rohingya Muslims are denied citizenship and when their temporary ID cards are prevented from giving them a vote in the election? Human rights and trade are increasingly interconnected, and I do not just mean the trade in humans that clearly this has led to with the Rohingya Muslims. It goes without saying, perhaps, that it may be the sponsors of FIFA that prove to be more powerful than even the FBI in bringing about similar change. (...)

Lord Alton of Liverpool: (...) Since 2011, more than 4 million Syrians have been killed or forced to flee their homes, with around 30,000 people added every single day to the 140 million people worldwide who are affected by conflict or natural disasters such as that which has occurred in Nepal. Is it any wonder that the desperate, from Rohingya Muslims to Middle Eastern Christians, take to the high seas to try to escape? (...)

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Baroness Anelay of St Johns: (...) The UK will continue to place girls and women at the heart of international development and humanitarian aid. The noble Baroness, Lady Cox, described conditions in Sudan and South Sudan and painted a clear picture of why international aid is necessary. But there are sometimes problems with delivery. She asked me specifically about cross-border aid into two areas, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. We are deeply concerned by the ongoing military activity in those areas and we have consistently called for humanitarian access. But I am afraid that we judge that the risks of providing cross-border support to be high due to the limited number of implementing partners and our inability to assess or monitor the programmes. However, we are keeping this policy under constant review and are working to develop an in-depth understanding of the humanitarian situation. I repeat my continuing admiration for the noble Baroness's work in those areas and in Burma. (...)

(...) The noble Baroness, Lady Cox, raised Burma. We continue to remain supportive of the peace process and welcome the progress made towards a nationwide ceasefire and political dialogue. We have no second

thoughts about how difficult this will be and we are ready to assist where we can. It is a matter on which we are providing expertise to broker a deal between the various parties and we regularly discuss the peace process with the Government. (...)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/150528-0003.htm#15052839000367>

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**for Human Rights, Democracy
& Development in Burma**