



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

A summary of Burma-related issues
in the British Parliament and Europe

APRIL
2010

House of Commons Debates on Burma

6th April 2010

Jim Cunningham: What is his most recent assessment is of progress towards democratic reform in Burma. [325360]

Ivan Lewis: Forthcoming elections in Burma will be neither free nor fair. Election laws published in March are restrictive and unfair.

Jim Cunningham: What discussions has my hon. Friend had with our international partners regarding the release of political prisoners in Burma? In particular, what role has China been playing?

Ivan Lewis: My hon. Friend has a long track record of raising issues to do with Burma. It is important that the House continues to shine a light on events in Burma. As our Prime Minister said recently, the new election laws are totally unacceptable. The targeting of Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy is particularly vindictive and callous. As a consequence of those new laws, the NLD has now said quite rightly that it is unable to participate in elections that will be illegitimate. Of course, we work with our international partners, especially those countries that have the biggest capacity to influence the situation in that country, and we continue to raise Burma with the Chinese.

Keith Simpson: The UN special rapporteur on human rights in Burma has made the unusually strong recommendation that the UN should consider establishing a commission of inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Burmese regime. Last month, the UK ambassador to the UN said that Britain would support the establishment of a commission of inquiry. What steps are the Government taking to build an international coalition to take that forward, particularly by working with countries such as Australia that have already expressed strong support?

Ivan Lewis: First, we are pursuing an arms embargo against the regime in Burma with our international partners. We want the UN to take action as soon as possible on that initiative of our Prime Minister.

We support a commission of inquiry in principle, but it is important that we do not propose a vote at the UN on such an issue when we do not have sufficient international support for it to be successful. If that were to happen, it would give false comfort to the regime, so a lot of work must be done to build sufficient consensus to ensure that there is maximum international support for establishing such an inquiry.

Barry Sheerman: Does my hon. Friend realise just how much frustration is felt by those of us on both sides of the House who have campaigned on Burma for many years when we see so little progress? In his response to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham), he did not say when we will ask China to face up to its responsibilities in the region and the country.

Ivan Lewis: Mr. Speaker, this is an opportunity to pay tribute to your personal role in ensuring that the issue of Burma continues to be a high priority for parliamentarians inside and outside the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary recently visited China, and this was one of the issues on his agenda. We make it clear in our bilateral and multilateral discussions, including with ASEAN and China, that everything possible must

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be done to put pressure on the regime so that it understands that until it is committed to democratic reform and free and fair elections, its isolation in the world will inevitably continue.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

EDM 238 REPORTS OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY IN BURMA

25.11.2009

Carmichael, Alistair

Signed by 185 MPs

That this House expresses severe concern at the escalating systematic human rights abuses being perpetrated against the people of Burma by the Junta military dictatorship; notes that there is well documented evidence over many years of widespread torture, forced displacement, sexual violence, extra-judicial killings and forced labour with civilians being deliberately targeted; further notes that these actions constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes; and calls on the Government to urge the United Nations to establish a Commission of Inquiry into these crimes in addition to supporting the International Labour Organisation's calls to refer the use of forced labour to the International Court of Justice.

EDM 391 INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

08.12.2009

Evans, Nigel

Signed by 109 MPs

That this House welcomes International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2009; condemns those countries where human rights abuses occur on a daily and systematic basis; notes that on Monday Iranian authorities ordered foreign news outlets not to cover the protests that came on National Student Day, which were reportedly dispersed with the use of tear gas and militia brutality; further notes that in Burma, the case of Aung San Suu Kyi highlights the cruel suppression of democracy and perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the military junta; and calls on international agencies, including the UN and EU, and each sovereign state, to refocus their attention on human rights violations wherever they occur throughout the world.

EDM 955 THAILAND AND THE RETURN OF ETHNIC KAREN REFUGEES TO BURMA

26.02.2010

Opik, Lembit

Signed by 42 MPs

That this House condemns the actions of the government of Thailand, which is threatening to deport 3,000 ethnic Karen refugees back to Burma; is appalled that on 5 February 2010 thirteen refugees were forced to return against their will to an area which is infested with landmines, and occupied by a military force, allied to the dictatorship in Burma, which is likely to use the villagers as slave labour and children as child soldiers; expresses deep concern that the government of Thailand has made false claims to the international community that the refugees want to return; calls on the government of Thailand to turn its temporary halt of the deportations into a permanent one, and to end the harassment and intimidation of the refugees; and calls on the British Government to make the strongest possible representations to Thailand on this matter, and to examine whether the actions of the government of Thailand in forcing refugees to return could break international humanitarian and human rights law.

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