



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

APRIL
2012

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Trade Unions

23 April 2012 Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment his Department has made of the human rights and working conditions of workers in Burma; and what steps he is taking to persuade the Burmese Government to allow workers to form trades unions. [104110]

Mr Duncan: In recent months there has been progress made with regards to labour rights in Burma, such as the Labour Organisations Bill that came into force on 9 March which allows the free formation of workers organisations. However, the human rights and working conditions of workers in Burma, particularly the use of forced labour, remains a serious concern.

Department for International Development and Foreign Office officials are in close contact with international and civil society organisations, including the International Labour Organisation and Trades Union Congress, and local bodies on these important issues.

Political Prisoners

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to persuade the Burmese Government to release political prisoners. [104111]

Mr Duncan: During their recent visits to Burma the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) and the Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), have all pressed President Thein Sein, and other senior Ministers, for the release of all political prisoners. UK officials also regularly raise the issue of political prisoners with the Burmese authorities.

Rohingya

23 Apr 2012 Baroness Cox: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will make representations to the Government of Burma about granting citizenship status to the Rohingya ethnic national people. [HL16607]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): Our ambassador in Rangoon raises regularly the ongoing discrimination of the Rohingya with the Burmese Government, including most recently with the Home Minister. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) urged the Burmese Government to recognise the full citizenship rights of the Rohingya when he met his counterpart during his visit in January.

We regularly talk to Rohingya groups both inside and outside the country to monitor their situation, and are in contact on the ground with UNHCR (the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). We will continue to raise this with the Burmese Government and to discuss with international partners.

Aid

Baroness Cox: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the countries providing investment and aid to Burma to ensure that the ethnic national peoples of Burma receive adequate compensation for any resulting loss of land or livelihood, and to ensure that any negative impacts

on those peoples and the environment are minimised.[HL16608]

Lord Howell of Guildford: We believe that any investment in Burma should be responsible and take account of the local people and environment, so that the positive effects of that investment will be felt across Burma. Our policy currently discourages trade with Burma. However if that were to change in response to future progress, we would expect UK companies to lead the way in terms of responsible investment and to encourage others to invest in the same way. We are also ready to work with the Burmese Government to help them implement international guidelines on responsible investment.

We are committed to working with other development partners to support efforts to build peace in ethnic areas and to ensure that development assistance reaches those most in need.

Our hope for Burma is that it will become a peaceful, prosperous and democratic country in which all citizens have increased access to economic opportunities, healthcare and education.

ANSWERS TO SPOKEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Sanctions

18 April 2012 Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): I, like the Prime Minister, welcome the strides towards democracy being made in Burma, and I welcome also his efforts to achieve a controlled suspension of sanctions. With a decision on his proposals due next week, will he ensure that measures to monitor human rights in Burma are included in the discussion? [102691]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. While it is clear that the Burmese regime is making some steps towards greater freedom and democracy, we should be extremely cautious and extremely careful. We want to see the further release of political prisoners, we want to see the resolution of ethnic conflicts and we want to see that democratisation process continue. That is why we are pushing across Europe for the suspension of sanctions, excluding the arms embargo, which should stay, rather than for the lifting of sanctions. We now have support for that position from most other leading European countries, and I hope that we can deliver it. That would be the right thing in demonstrating to the regime that we want to back progress, and it would also strongly support what Aung San Suu Kyi has said is the right approach. By-election

17 April 2012 Steve Rotheram: Will the Foreign Secretary join me in congratulating Aung San Suu Kyi on her election victory, and does he agree with claims by the Chindits—the lions of the jungle—that they have been abandoned by the UK Government in their fight against Burma's ruling dictatorship?

Mr Hague: Of course I very much congratulate Aung San Suu Kyi on those victories. We are pleased that such change is taking place in Burma. We will discuss at the EU Foreign Affairs Council in Luxembourg next Monday what we now do about sanctions on Burma. The Prime Minister had a very successful visit there last Friday. We are not abandoning anybody as we improve relations with Burma. In fact, we have stressed throughout the importance of the release of political prisoners, the upholding of human rights—far more effectively, we hope, than in the recent past of Burma—and the ending of regional ethnic conflicts. All of those are equally important.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

19 April 2012 The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 April. I will attend the General Affairs Council on 24 April. Both meetings will be held in Luxembourg.

Foreign Affairs Council (FAC)

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton of Upholland, will chair the Foreign Affairs Council.

We expect conclusions that recognise positive progress in Burma against the EU benchmarks agreed at the Foreign Affairs Council of 23 January. These benchmarks include the release of political prisoners, a number of initial ceasefire agreements with some ethnic groups, and the generally positive conduct of by-

elections on 1 April. We will also push for the suspension of EU sanctions except those relating to export of military equipment. The Prime Minister set out our approach during his visit to Burma of 13 April. The conclusions may make reference to remaining issues, such as the lack of humanitarian access to conflict areas and a number of remaining political prisoners. We would also like the conclusions to stress that any commercial engagement by EU companies should promote the highest standards of integrity and corporate social responsibility.

26 April 2012 Mr William Hague:

I wish to inform the House of the Government's intention to reopen the British embassy in Vientiane, Laos, and to establish a British Interests Office in Naypyitaw, Burma. This forms part of the shift in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's diplomatic network aimed at strengthening Britain's influence and contribution globally. These are the eighth and ninth new posts I have announced since May 2010.

The United Kingdom last had an embassy in Laos in 1985. Today there is a need for one once again. Laos takes up the chair of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2016. It remains the only ASEAN country where the UK is not currently represented. Reopening the embassy will strengthen our bilateral relations with the Laotian Government as the country's role and influence in the region continues to grow. Trade between our countries has more than doubled in the last year. An embassy will play a vital role in helping more British businesses access this emerging market. Laos' popularity as a destination for British visitors is rising too. The embassy will offer vital assistance to British nationals in need.

In Burma, a British Interests Office in the administrative capital Naypyitaw would strengthen the work of our embassy in Rangoon and demonstrate our intention to step up engagement with the Burmese Government and people. The office would provide enhanced access to Government interlocutors who are based in Naypyitaw. This access would be vital for UK/Burmese relations, and for encouraging further democratic reform in the country.

These decisions reflect this Government's commitment to extending the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's global reach and to boosting British influence. Forging stronger relations in Laos, Burma and across the ASEAN region is our response to the rapid change under way in South East Asia and firmly in the interests of the United Kingdom.

26 Apr 2012 Lord Howell of Guildford: My right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (William Hague) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement.

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EARLY DAY MOTIONS

EDM 2961 - AUNG SAN SUU KYI

17.04.2012

That this House offers sincere congratulations to Nobel peace prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi on the electoral success of her party in the Burmese elections; encourages the National League of Democracy in

its attempt to bring peace and stability; and offers the support of this House in the establishment of a truly democratic process in Burma.

Total number of signatures: 32

EDM 2942 - BURMA (No. 2)

16.04.2012

That this House recognises the enormous sacrifices made by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi throughout her long confinement and congratulates her and the National League for Democracy on their success in the by-elections in Burma; welcomes the reform steps taken so far by President Thein Sein; supports a limited relaxation of EU sanctions, in order to encourage further reform while maintaining trade and investment sanctions, until the unconditional release of all political prisoners and an end to military attacks against ethnic minority civilians are met; expresses concern that hundreds of political prisoners remain in jail and that the International Committee of the Red Cross is still being denied access to assess conditions and the number of prisoners; and calls on the British Government to ensure pressure is maintained on the government of Burma to begin repealing repressive laws and making sustainable democratic reforms.

Total number of signatures: 57

EDM 2949 - AID FOR BURMA

16.04.2012

That this House welcomes the political reforms already taking place in Burma and the election of Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League of Democracy to the Burmese Parliament; still recognises that there are huge humanitarian and political problems in Burma that need to be addressed; supports the fact that the UK is working together with non-governmental organisations to provide assistance to 27,500 internally displaced people in Kachin State as well as with the UN to provide basic aid to families involved in the conflicts; and urges the Government to do more to help provide the peoples of Burma with the basic aid they need as well as to encourage more political reform and a handover of power from the military to the democratically elected parliament.

Total number of signatures: 30

EDM 2800 – SANCTIONS RENEWAL

29.02.2012

That this House is aware of the significantly different approach adopted by the rulers of Burma over the past year; remains however cautious until such times as action is actually taken by the regime to bring irrevocable and lasting change to the country; believes such actions must include the unconditional release of all political prisoners, announcement of an immediate ceasefire, agreement to begin the process of political dialogue between parties involved in the present conflicts, the ending of strict censorship, abolition of repressive laws and the setting of timescales to hold free and fair elections in the country; and calls on the Government to maintain the present arrangements of sanctions beyond the April 2012 renewal date, until such times as actual changes take place, rather than simply undelivered promises being made.

Total number of signatures: 19

EDM 2719 - AID TO VICTIMS OF CONFLICT IN BURMA

08.02.2012

That this House welcomes the continued increase in UK aid to Burma and the visit to Burma in 2011 by the Secretary of State for International Development; further welcomes political reforms made by the government of Burma; is, however, deeply concerned that the number of people displaced last year in that country by conflict and human rights abuses doubled to almost 150,000; is alarmed that the government of Burma is continuing to block humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands of people in conflict zones; calls on the British Government to increase aid to populations displaced by conflict, including significant increases in cross-border aid which can be the only way to access large numbers of displaced people; expresses deep concern that refugees in camps in neighbouring Thailand who have fled conflict are facing cuts in rations of 22 per cent. Which could cause increased malnutrition in children; looks forward to free and fair elections with the participation of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party; and calls on the Government to significantly increase funding for Burma to support food and shelter for refugees.

Total number of signatures: 62

EDM 2710 - BURMA

08.02.2012

That this House welcomes the steps taken by President Thein Sein to release some political prisoners, enter into ceasefire negotiations with armed ethnic groups and allow more political space in Burma; further welcomes the visit to Burma by the Foreign Secretary and his meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; expresses continued support for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the people of Burma in their ongoing efforts to secure human rights and democratic reform; notes with concern that hundreds of political prisoners remain in Burma's jails, and that there has been an increase in human rights abuses in ethnic states; further notes that reforms made so far have mostly not been enshrined in law and no constitutional changes have been made; believes that international pressure has played an important role in encouraging reforms so far; and calls on the Government to ensure that EU sanctions on Burma are not relaxed prematurely before substantially more political prisoners are released, conflict is ended and there is an inclusive dialogue process to secure further and irreversible reform.

Total number of signatures: 66

EDM 112 - HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

That this House sends its best wishes to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who will spend her 65th birthday in detention on 19 June 2010; calls for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in Burma; rejects the elections planned by Burma's generals later this year which, due to election laws and ongoing repression in Burma, cannot be free and fair; condemns Burma's new constitution which is designed to maintain dictatorship in civilian guise and does not grant rights or protection to Burma's ethnic minorities; notes that all diplomatic efforts to reform the dictatorship's sham roadmap to democracy have failed; recalls that the United Nations Security Council, General Assembly, Secretary General and Human Rights Council have all stated that the solution to the problems in Burma lies in dialogue between the dictatorship, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, and ethnic representatives; and calls on the Government to support a United Nations-led effort to pressure the dictatorship to enter into such dialogue.

Total number of signatures: 145

EDM 787 - AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND ELECTIONS IN BURMA

That this House acknowledges reports that Burmese political prisoner Aung San Suu Kyi may be released on the completion of her current term of arrest on 13 November 2010; is concerned that, as this date falls six days after scheduled elections in Burma on 7 November, Ms Suu Kyi may not be permitted to utilise her vote; is further concerned that her National League for Democracy party will play no part in the election, having boycotted it on the grounds of Ms Suu Kyi's and others' continued political imprisonment, her exclusion from political office and party membership and the Burmese junta's new election laws, which ban 6 groups including civil servants and Buddhist monks from joining a political party; firmly believes that Aung San Suu Kyi should be released unconditionally as a matter of urgency; and calls on the Government to condemn strongly the Burmese junta's recent election laws as obstacles to the free and fair conduct on democracy.

Total number of signatures: 41

EDM 788 - BBC WORLD SERVICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

That this House considers the BBC World Service to be not only a world-class broadcasting network, but also a lifeline for political prisoners and other suppressed persons; strongly believes that any move to cut this service, for example in Burma, will remove vital access to current and impartial information from those such as Aung San Suu Kyi who have no alternative source of unbiased news; further believes that such cancellation would constitute a failure of the Government to promote or support human rights on the international stage; and urges the Government to strongly oppose any reduction in this important service.

Total number of signatures: 57

EDM 989 - ELECTIONS IN BURMA AND ADVANCE VOTING

That this House notes with concern reports of widespread manipulation of advance votes during the recent Burmese elections, boycotted by the National League for Democracy; believes that this is yet another blow to the prospects for democracy in Burma; dismisses this election as no more than a sham to reinforce the ruling regime's power; and urges the Government to make further representations for the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2,200 other prisoners of conscience currently detained in Burma.

Total number of signatures: 26

EDM 1014 RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI

That this House welcomes the unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from her house arrest in Rangoon on 13 November 2010; supports her calls for a peaceful revolution and for dialogue with the ruling regime in order to work towards change in Burma; urges continued international attention to the political system in Burma; and further supports Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's belief that nothing can be achieved without the participation of the people.

Total number of signatures: 46

EDM 1649 - BURMA AND THE EU

That this House notes that despite holding an election in November 2010, Burma has failed to meet the requests of the EU Common Position, last renewed on 26 April 2010, which called on Burma to take steps to bring about a peaceful transition to a democratic, civilian and inclusive system of government, to release political prisoners, to provide for free and fair elections, to engage with the international community and to respect international human rights and humanitarian law; further notes with concern that these requests have not been met; further notes that the November 2010 elections were widely dismissed as neither free nor fair, and that although Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been released more than 2,000 political prisoners remain in detention; and calls on the Government to make representations in support of a UN Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma, ahead of the EU Council Position renewal in April 2011.

Total number of signatures: 37

EDM 1659 - BURMA EARTHQUAKE

That this House notes with grave concern reports of an earthquake of magnitude 6.8 in north east Burma near to the Thai border; sends its sincere condolences to those affected by the fatalities, casualties and destruction of homes and infrastructure; acknowledges the logistical and political challenges of providing assistance in this situation; and calls on the Government to take all possible steps to offer emergency aid and assistance to the people of Burma.

Total number of signatures: 29

EDM 1739 - AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND THE BRIGHTON FESTIVAL

That this House welcomes Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as guest director of the 2011 Brighton Festival; notes that although Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will not attend the festival she plays a significant role in inspiring the programme through her plea to 'use your liberty to promote ours'; congratulates the Festival organisers for their choice of guest director and planning of a wide-ranging and vibrant programme; looks forward to a dynamic celebration of arts, culture and freedom over the three weeks of the Festival; and urges the Government to maintain pressure on the Burmese regime to free the more than 2,000 political prisoners still in detention and to move towards free and fair democracy in Burma.

Total number of signatures: 13

EDM 1966 - BIRTHDAY OF DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

That this House recognises Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 66th birthday and Burma Women's Day, celebrated on 19 June 2011; welcomes Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Reith lectures on the theme of securing freedom, to be broadcast on 28 June and 5 July 2011 on BBC Radio 4; is concerned that despite the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest on 13 November 2010 the human rights situation in Burma has not improved; notes that more than 2,000 political prisoners remain in detention; is gravely concerned by the Burma Campaign UK reports that the breaking of the ceasefire between the Burmese regime and the Shan State Army has resulted in violence including against civilians in the area; and urges the Government to call for a nationwide ceasefire, to support humanitarian efforts to provide assistance in these areas and to call for the release of political prisoners in Burma.

Total number of signatures: 41

EDM 2101 - AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND THE MARTYR'S DAY MARCH

That this House notes that the winner of the Burmese general election and pro-democracy and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been invited to march in the city of Yangon on Martyr's Day, 19 July, to mark the tragic assassination of her father, General Aung San, and eight other independence leaders in 1947; seeks the reassurances of the Burmese government that it will protect the security of both Aung San Suu Kyi and those supporters who are expected to join her; further notes with concern that, despite the release of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2010, the reported human rights situation in Burma has not improved; calls on the

Burmese authorities to permit free speech and peaceful protest; and further calls on the Government to make representations to the Burmese government to ensure these protestors are not exposed to danger.
Total number of signatures: 32

EDM 2241 - RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BURMA

That this House warmly welcomes the release of political prisoners in Burma, particularly that of Zarganar, the comedian and film maker, who was originally sentenced to 58 years' imprisonment for alleged public order offences; and calls on the Burmese authorities to follow up this gesture with the further release of all prisoners of conscience and the introduction of genuine democratic reforms.

Total number of signatures: 43

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**for Human Rights, Democracy
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