



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

APRIL
2014

Answers to Written Parliamentary Questions

Proposed Marriage Bill

2 April 2014 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports about the proposed Emergency Provisions on Marriage Act for Burmese Buddhist women, which would take away from women their right to choose whom they marry.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con): We have yet to see specific draft laws, but are concerned about the possible implications of the legislation being proposed and are closely following the ongoing discussions. We have raised our concerns and continue to urge the Burmese government and parliament to ensure all draft laws are in line with international standards, and make clear that respect for the rights of women and freedom of religion and belief must be guaranteed.

The Census

7 April 2014 Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had about the census in Burma and recognition of the Rohingya population.

Mr Swire: The international community, including the UK through the Department for International Development, is providing significant funding to the census in 2014 because it will be a critical step in the country's development process, underpinning better planning and delivery of vital services and infrastructure such as schools, roads and hospitals.

The UK, UN and other international donors argued strongly for the right of all people to be enumerated fairly and to be able to self-identify their ethnicity in the census. In most areas where the census is being conducted, self-identification has been permitted. We are, however, deeply disappointed that the Burmese Government reversed its commitment to allow the Rohingya to self-identify.

I discussed our concerns on the census with the senior Burmese minister responsible, Immigration Minister U Khin Yi, on 26 March, and on 7 April summoned the Burmese ambassador. I made clear that this decision is in contravention of international norms and standards on census conduct. We are engaging in further discussions, together with the UN, as to next steps on this .

28 April 2014: Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 7 April 2014, Official Report, column 139W, on Burma, what commitments the Burmese immigration minister made on conduct of the census.

Mr Swire: On 26 March, I spoke to Immigration Minister U Khin Yi, reminding him of the Burmese Government's assurance that all individuals would have the right to self-identify their ethnicity and that international observers would be allowed to monitor the census across the country. I also made clear that the census must have adequate security. The Immigration Minister acknowledged our concerns.

We are pleased that international observers were invited to monitor the enumeration process across the country. However we were deeply disappointed that the Burmese government went against its long-

standing assurances on census conduct, in particular the right to self-identify ethnicity. The Burmese ambassador was summoned to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 7 April, where I made clear that this decision was in contravention of international norms and standards on census conduct.

Médicins Sans Frontières

10 April 2014 Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response his Department has made to the expulsion of Médicins Sans Frontières from Rakhine state by the Burmese Government.

Mr Swire: On hearing of the expulsion of Médicins San Frontières (MSF) on 26 February, the British embassy registered our concerns with the Burmese Government that same evening. Since then we have been liaising very closely with MSF tailoring our lobbying to their support, as they negotiate with the Burmese authorities. The British ambassador visited the MSF clinic in Sittwe during his visit to Rakhine State from 19-20 March to hear first hand the impact this decision has had on the local community.

I summoned the Burmese ambassador to London on 7 April to make clear our grave concerns about the situation in Rakhine State, including the expulsion of Médicins San Frontières. I called on the Burmese Government to urgently restore humanitarian access to all communities in need and to ensure the security of humanitarian aid workers and all communities in Rakhine State so that they can operate free of constraint and intimidation. We continue to make clear to the Burmese authorities that there must be no deterioration in the provision of health services in Rakhine State, which is already on the brink of crisis. Burmese soldiers

28 April 2014 Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Burma on protecting Burmese soldiers who refuse orders which could result in human rights abuses.

Mr Swire: During my second visit to Burma in January, I personally pressed the Burmese Government and members of the Burmese military, including the Burmese Commander in Chief, to address our human rights concerns. I was also fortunate to visit Kachin State in January—the first British Minister to do so since Burma gained independence. I made clear to the Government and the military that conflict should end and that there should be unhindered humanitarian access to the areas affected. I also raised our concerns about very serious allegations of sexual violence in conflict and the forced conscription of child soldiers.

While I did not discuss the issue of soldiers refusing orders which could result in human rights abuses, a discussion of the nature of illegal orders featured during the Managing Defence in a Wider Security Context course, delivered by the UK Defence Academy in Burma in January. The 30 course participants were a mix of mid-ranking military officers, members of the police and officials from Burma's foreign ministry.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Office

30 April 2014 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on whether the government of Burma plans to open a country office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in that country.

Mr Swire: It has been over 18 months since President Thein Sein committed to opening an in-country Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights. This would allow for more constructive relations between the international community and the Government on human rights. Most recently, the British ambassador raised the issue with the Burmese Foreign Minister on 31 March. We continue to call on the Government to publish a timeline for the opening of the Office, with a mandate that includes monitoring and technical assistance.

Sexual violence in conflict

30 April 2014 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of steps taken by the Burmese Government to (a) prevent sexual violence and (b) end impunity for sexual offences allegedly committed by the Burmese military.

Mr Swire: During his visit to the UK last year, President Thein Sein welcomed the initiative of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), on preventing sexual violence in conflict (PSVI). We continue to encourage Burma to join 146 nations and endorse the declaration on PSVI. The launch in October 2013 of the Burmese Government's National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) committed Burma "to develop and strengthen laws, systems, structures and practices to eliminate all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls and to respond to the needs of women and girls affected by violence".

We are clear, however, that all of these steps need to be accompanied by actions leading to real progress in Burma. We remain concerned by continued reports of sexual violence against women, including reports of crimes committed by members of the Burmese military. We regularly lobby the Burmese Government on the rights of women, particularly on preventing sexual violence in conflict areas. We continue to make clear that where serious crimes have been committed, those who have perpetrated them should be held accountable for their actions. I raised the issue of sexual violence directly with senior Ministers, the commander in chief and the northern commander during my visit to Burma in January. More recently, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised the issue in a call with the Burmese Foreign Minister on 28 April.

Joint statement by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire) 8 April 2014: I am making a joint statement with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for International Development. Together we wish to inform the House that the Government are today publishing a summary of the UK's activities in Burma.

The last three years in Burma have seen remarkable change. Burma is undertaking a complex transition: from an authoritarian military regime to democratic Government; from a centrally directed to a market oriented economy; and from decades of conflict to peace in the border areas.

British engagement has grown rapidly since Burma embarked on its path of reform. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development (DFID), UK Trade and Investment (UKTI), the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the British Council are all now established and active in Rangoon. We work closely with the Burmese authorities, Aung San Suu Kyi and the opposition, civil society, businesses and communities to encourage a stable, democratic and prosperous Burma and to urge Burma to play a constructive role in the international community.

My visit to Burma from 28 to 30 January 2014 was an opportunity to see the positive developments since my first trip in 2012, and to urge progress on the many challenges which remain. In meetings with Government Ministers, the military, Aung San Suu Kyi, ethnic and community leaders, I underlined the UK's commitment to supporting further reform, not least to address the many outstanding human rights concerns. As I made it clear in a speech at the British Council in Rangoon, 2014 will be a critical year for Burma—particularly for the prospects of constitutional reform and the peace process, both of which will be vital to Burma's future. I also emphasised that Burma must take concerted action to tackle the humanitarian situation and the continuing inter-communal tensions, including those affecting the Rohingya community in Rakhine state in particular.

DFID has recently allocated an additional £5.8 million of humanitarian funding to help meet the emergency needs of both communities in Rakhine state, bringing the UK's total allocation for emergency humanitarian work there to £12 million since 2012. In 2014, DFID has also allocated a further £8 million of assistance to Burma's peace process.

We know there is considerable parliamentary interest and expertise in Burma, given the deep and historic links between our two countries. Today, therefore, the Government publish a summary of the UK's activities in Burma, to set out as clearly as possible our main activities there. I will place a copy of this document in the Library of the House. It is also available on the gov.uk website.

Our main activities in Burma focus on democracy and human rights, tackling inter-communal tensions,

peace-building, development, trade and investment, and wider international co-operation. They are carefully calibrated to ensure transparency, value for money and a balanced approach: our aim is to support reformers in Burma, while pressing for further progress on issues of continuing concern. The summary makes clear the strength and breadth of our commitment to this. The UK remains determined to play its part in Burma's transition, to the benefit of all Burma's people, its neighbours, and the wider international community.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140408/wmstext/140408m0001.htm#14040848000004>

Answers to Oral Parliamentary Questions

Rohingya & the Census

8 April 2014 Rushanara Ali: Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state face discrimination and a protracted humanitarian crisis, compounded by the failure of the Burmese Government to recognise their right to citizenship. What action is the Minister taking to prevent the Burmese Government from using their census, which receives some £10 million of UK assistance, to discriminate against Rohingya Muslims by refusing to recognise their religious and ethnic identity?

Hugh Robertson: The hon. Lady's point is well made. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), expressed our strong concerns about conditions there during his visit to Burma in January. He called the Minister, Khin Yi, on 26 March, and summoned the Burmese ambassador only yesterday to make these representations.

Burma mentioned in House of Lords' debate on Immigration Bill

7 April 2014 Baroness Berridge: First, much mention has been made of the potential to undermine the position of the United Kingdom in relation to human rights laws on the international stage. It is important to give two current examples. In November 2012, 31 Bahraini citizens were deprived of their citizenship for "undermining state security". When given the opportunity to sit in front of some Bahraini politicians, I outlined the position in relation to those cases, which arose in the context of civil protest. I was met with the retort, "Well, you do this too". "Yes", I said, "but we don't do it to leave someone stateless". The second example would be that there has been much mention in your Lordships' House of the plight of the Rohingya Muslims in Burma, who do not enjoy citizenship. I therefore struggle to see how representations could be so forcefully made about them being entitled to citizenship if the Burmese Government are able to use similar language to that being outlined in the legislation.

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/140407-0002.htm#14040742000649>

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

MYANMAR AND THE PERSECUTION OF THE ROHINGYA COMMUNITY

Date tabled: 25.02.2014

Total signatures: 13

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/1115>

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE ROHINGYA

Date tabled: 24.02.2014

Total signatures: 48

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/1102>

SPEAKER'S DELEGATION TO BURMA

Date tabled: 08.10.2013

Total signatures: 24

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/524>

SPEAKER'S DELEGATION TO BURMA (No. 2)

Date tabled: 08.10.2013

Total signatures: 24

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/525>

DAW BAWK JA AND THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN MYANMAR (BURMA)

Date tabled: 05.09.2013

Total Signature: 7

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/485>

ANTI-MUSLIM VIOLENCE IN BURMA

Date tabled: 11.07.2013

Total Signature: 33

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/403>

ROHINGYA MUSLIM PERSECUTION IN MYANMAR

Date tabled: 20.05.2013

Total Signatures: 16

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/131>

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR DEMOCRACY IN BURMA

On April the 1st, APPG Burma held a meeting with Pippa Curwen, Burma Relief Centre (BRC), Jessica Nkhum, Kachin Women's Association (Thailand) (KWAT) and Rosalinn Zahau, Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO).

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