



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

AUGUST
2013

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Rohingya

19 August 2013 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have held with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture regarding the treatment of Muslim prisoners in Buttidaung prison in northern Rakhine State, Burma.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi): The Government has not held recent discussions with the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture in relation to Burma. However, we engage regularly with UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana.

During the March 2013 session at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, there was discussion of Mr Quintana's report, which highlighted the practice of torture in places of detention in Burma, and set out allegations that Muslim prisoners in Buthitaung prison in Rakhine State had been tortured and beaten to death. British Embassy officials have made several visits to northern Rakhine State over recent months, and have received similar reports of torture in Buthitaung jail.

The Minister of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr Duncan), visited Burma and Rakhine State in June 2013, and raised our concerns about the treatment of prisoners in Buthitaung jail with the Minister for Border Affairs. Separately, our Ambassador has also discussed the position of Rohingya prisoners in Buthitaung jail with the Burmese Minister for Border Affairs.

During the visit of President Thein Sein to London from 14-16 July, the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), raised a range of human rights and ethnic issues. The Foreign Secretary urged the President to sign the Convention against Torture. The UK has lobbied consistently on this and we will continue to press the Burmese government to sign the Convention and its Optional Protocol.

Kachin

29 August 2013 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assistance and treatment for cervical infections has been provided to ethnic Kachin women in Burma in camps for the internally displaced.

Lord Popat: The UK is one of the biggest bilateral donors in Kachin State. We have just announced new humanitarian funding there of £13.5 million for the next two and a half years. This will include provision of a range of basic health services with a focus on internally displaced people.

For serious diseases and infections our partners provide support to help improve people's access to better healthcare facilities, which may include assistance for treatment of cervical infections.

Humanitarian Aid

29 August 2013 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have discussed with the government of Burma how much money that government has spent on support for (1) internally displaced people in Kachin State, and (2) internally displaced people in Rakhine state.

Lord Popat: The UK is in regular contact with the government of Burma at ministerial level regarding the situation of internally displaced people in Kachin and Rakhine states. Inter-communal violence, and the state of the peace process were discussed by UK Ministers, including the Prime Minister, with Burmese President Thein Sein during his recent visit to London.

The Minister of State for International Development, Rt. Hon. Alan Duncan, visited Rakhine in June 2013 and discussed the need to provide equitable assistance to internally displaced people (IDPs) and improve access to essential services, with his Burmese government counterparts.

It is difficult to provide a precise figure for support from the Government of Burma to IDPs in Rakhine and Kachin as the majority of assistance is in kind, such as shelter, food and health worker visits. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that the Government of Burma has provided 44% of the required shelters for IDPs (June 2013), although the figure may now be higher, as more government-built shelters have been completed in recent weeks.

Rape and Sexual Violence

19 August 2013 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will include Burma in the Foreign Secretary's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative.

Baroness Warsi: The Government regularly lobbies the Burmese Government on the rights of women, particularly on preventing sexual violence against women in conflict areas. During his recent visit to the UK, the Burmese President, Thein Sein, welcomed the Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague)'s initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict.

As part of this initiative, our Embassy in Rangoon is working closely with the UN and other partners to identify options for increasing UK engagement in this area and on integrating protection and prevention against sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict environments into our existing work in Burma.

Through international non-governmental organisations, the UK already gives support to legal assistance centres in Burmese refugee camps in Thailand and to trauma care in camps in Kachin State, both of which deal with rape cases.

19 August 2013 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government how many representations they made in the past year with respect to rape and sexual violence in Burma during United Nations Security Council discussions on resolutions 1325 and 1820.

Baroness Warsi: We regularly raise issues surrounding rape and sexual violence in Burma with international partners in UN Security Council discussions. The most recent discussion on Burma was the UN Security Council 'Friends of Myanmar' meeting on 10 July, which was addressed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and Vijay Nambiar, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Burma.

More broadly, we regularly lobby the Burmese government on the rights of women and children, particularly on preventing sexual violence against women and children in conflict areas. We are working with our partners in the UN Security Council working group on Children and Armed Conflict on a Burma country specific resolution, where we are pushing for language that calls for strong action against the perpetrators of sexual violence against children by the Burmese government.

19 August 2013 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Burma regarding the reform of rape laws in Burma.

Baroness Warsi: While no specific representations have been made to the Burmese government on the

reform of rape laws in Burma, the British Government regularly lobbies the Burmese government on the rights of women, particularly on preventing sexual violence against women in conflict areas.

Our Embassy in Rangoon funds local non-governmental partners which provide technical support to the Burmese Ministry of Social Welfare to help the Burmese government fulfil its obligations under the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, to which Burma is a signatory.

Child Soldiers

12 August 2013 Baroness Goudie : To ask Her Majesty's Government what projects they have funded in the past year to end child soldier recruitment in Burma.

Lord Popat: The UK provides central core funding to the United Nations Children's Fund globally. UNICEF provides rehabilitation, reintegration, family-tracing and other forms of support to former child soldiers in Burma. UNICEF also provides assistance to help the military protect, respect and promote the rights of children. The Government of Burma signed an action plan with UNICEF in 2012 to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by the Burmese military. In June 2013, the Government released a further 42 children from service in the armed forces.

19 August 2013 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have held discussions with any other government regarding a review as to whether Burma is upholding its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Baroness Warsi: While the British Government has not held discussions with other Governments regarding a review as to whether Burma is upholding its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we do hold regular discussions in the UN and EU on Burma's human rights record.

During President Theirs Sein recent visit to London on 14-16 July, the President met with the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), who underlined the importance of international initiatives on human rights and Burma's participation in relevant UN treaties was discussed.

Debt

19 August 2013 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what guarantees they have received that funding for repayment of debts by the Government of Burma and written off by Her Majesty's Government will not be redeployed for investment in the Burmese armed forces.

The Commercial Secretary to the Treasury (Lord Deighton): The Paris Club reached an international agreement to clear Burma's arrears to Paris Club creditors, including the UK, on 25 January. As part of this agreement, cancellation of arrears due to the UK is subject to Burma's satisfactory performance under an IMF Staff Monitored Program. No additional funds have been created which could be diverted towards military spending.

Trade and Investment

05 August 2013 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what export control licences have been granted for goods to Burma in the last five years.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Viscount Younger of Leckie): Information on arms exports is published in the Annual and Quarterly Reports on Strategic Export Controls. These reports contain detailed information on export licences issued, refused or revoked, by destination, including the overall value, type (eg Military, Other) and a summary of the items covered by the licences.

They are available to view on the Strategic Export Controls Reports and Statistics Website at: <https://www.exportcontrol.dbis.gov.uk/eng/fox>.

By registering on the website it is possible to create your own bespoke reports by country.

The reports currently available provide information up to 31 March 2013. Information covering the next quarterly period to be published, 1 April 2013 to 30 June 2013, is due to be published in the first week of October.

MR SPEAKER'S SPEECH AT RANGOON UNIVERSITY, BURMA

1 August 2013

It is an enormous privilege and honour, and a personal joy, for me to be with you here today. I come not only as Speaker of the House of Commons in the British Parliament, but perhaps more significantly as a friend of the people of this country, to salute those who have struggled for so long at great cost for the cause of freedom, democracy, human rights and peace; to encourage those who are working for change; and to offer whatever practical assistance we can to all those who wish to build a better future for this beautiful country.

In the past two years, President Thein Sein and his Government have introduced measures which have changed the atmosphere significantly, and opened the way for a transition to democracy and freedom after decades of brutal military rule. It is absolutely right that the international community should recognise the changes that have been implemented, applaud the reforms, welcome the positive steps and encourage all parties engaged in the reform process to continue further along this path. When dictators unclench their fists, they should be met with outstretched hands.

And so today, both on behalf of the British Parliament and as a long-time friend of this country personally, I join others in welcoming the changes that have been introduced: the release of most political prisoners, greater freedom of expression for the media, increased space for civil society, greater participation in the political process by opposition parties, and the establishment of preliminary ceasefires with most of the ethnic nationalities.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is a heroine for humanity and, alongside Nelson Mandela, the greatest freedom fighter in the world today. The fact that Daw Suu, for so many years the international symbol of your struggle, now sits in Parliament rather than under house arrest, symbolises the fact that your country is changing. The fact that alongside her in Parliament are 42 of her colleagues from the National League for Democracy, many of whom spent years in prison, is remarkable. The fact that the leaders of the 88 Generation, whom I had the privilege of meeting in London last month, are not only released from decades-long jail terms but are engaging so openly, actively and admirably in the political and civil life of this country once again is another important sign that the political atmosphere of the country has changed in an extraordinary way. And the fact that I am able to be here today speaking in these terms is yet more evidence of the first steps towards the development of a freer and more open society.

But I am under no illusions whatsoever about the challenges ahead. These changes, these signs of openness, these glimmers of hope, represent a welcome change of atmosphere, but they need to go much further and deeper if there is to be a fundamental change of system. There is, as you will know far better than me, a very very long way still to go. You are just at the very beginning of the path towards democracy and peace – and the international community must remember that. We must welcome positive steps when they occur; we must encourage deeper reform; but we must be vigilant in guarding against premature euphoria which is as misplaced as it is desperately dangerous.

I know that there are still political prisoners in jail today. If democracy is to be truly established, and secured, there must be no political prisoners at all. As Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has said, one political prisoner is one too many. There can be no place in an open and democratic society for arbitrary arrests, repressive laws that attempt to curtail or silence dissent, or the imprisonment of people simply for daring to criticise the Government or express an alternative opinion.

Freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom belief and freedom of expression, including the freedom to protest, are the bedrock of a democratic and open society. So I hope that the

President and the Government will release, and release unconditionally, all remaining political prisoners as a matter of urgency, and in so doing, signal their seriousness about real, lasting, irreversible reform.

In addition to releasing unconditionally remaining political prisoners, there is a need for a thorough review of legislation, and the repeal of all repressive laws. I hope the Government, and the Parliament, will work with the international community to ensure that legislation is in accordance with international human rights standards, and if Britain and our Parliament can offer any assistance to help your Parliament develop skills and capacity needed for drafting laws and other aspects of law-making, we would be delighted to do so.

However, even if political prisoners are freed and repressive legislation repealed, if the Constitution itself hinders democracy, a meaningful transition will be hindered. So there is an urgent need for amendments to the Constitution, including the clauses relating to the eligibility of candidates for the presidency, and the system of governance for the ethnic states, if the reform process is to be genuinely inclusive and legitimate.

None of these steps, however, will deliver true freedom and democracy if there is not a genuine peace in the country, and it is here that I wish to speak most frankly and personally.

Just over nine years ago, I travelled to Burma for the first time. The differences between that visit and this one are stark. On that occasion, I did not enter the country on a visa, or visit the cities. I did not meet with Government officials. Instead, I visited internally displaced Karen peoples in the jungles across the border from Thailand, and Karen and Karenni refugees on the Thai side of the border. I met people who had fled attacks by the Tatmadaw, sometimes multiple times – people whose homes had been burned down, crops destroyed, loved ones killed. I met children who had seen their parents shot dead in front of them; and parents who had seen their children killed in front of them. I met women who had been raped, and men who had been taken for forced labour. I heard appalling stories of excruciating torture. Indeed the testimonies I heard were to some of the most egregious abuses of human rights that can have been practised anywhere by anyone at any time.

That visit was the beginning of my own personal commitment to your country. I returned to the Thai border with colleagues from the House of Commons three years later in May 2007. In September 2007 I travelled to the India border, to visit the Chin people, where I heard further stories of forced labour, rape, torture and religious persecution. I did what I could, as a Member of Parliament before I was elected Speaker, to raise the plight of the ethnic nationalities, as well as the wider struggle for freedom and democracy, regularly in Parliament, because such barbaric and gross violations of human rights cannot and must not be tolerated.

Between November 2003 and June 2009, I tabled 343 written questions about Burma and mentioned your country in no fewer than 46 question times and debates in parliament. I did so for the good reason that the subject of the fight for democracy in Burma needed to be raised again and again and again. For as Martin Luther King once said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”.

I welcome the Government’s efforts to engage in talks with the ethnic armed groups, and I welcome the establishment of ceasefires with many of the armed groups. But just as the political changes I have witnessed and described mark merely the very beginning of the process of democratisation, so too the fragile preliminary ceasefires must lead to something more substantial if they are to result in a genuine peace. As one Karen activist told me, “ceasefires are about just pressing the pause button – we need to press the stop button” to end more than 65 years of civil war. So I wish to encourage the Government to go further and engage in a genuine nationwide peace process, involving a political dialogue with the ethnic nationalities.

Without a political solution, the root causes of conflict will not be addressed and peace will not be achieved. The desire of the ethnic nationalities, as is well known, is for a federal system, in which they are granted some autonomy, and in which equal rights are respected for all. The cultures and languages of the different ethnic nationalities must be protected and respected. This is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation, and that diversity is what makes it so rich and beautiful. Diversity should be celebrated. Only with a true application of the principle ‘unity in diversity’ can peace be achieved.

I welcome the remarks by several very senior leaders in Government and Parliament, displaying an openness to consider the idea of federalism. I hope that such openness will translate into a real dialogue

process. I know in the past that 'federalism' has been a word viewed with alarm by some in this country, but it would appear it has been misunderstood. I hope policy-makers will now have the opportunity to study different models of federalism from different parts of the world, and see that, far from leading to the fragmentation of a country, federalism can provide a way of strengthening and uniting the country. Some of the world's most successful economies and democracies are federal systems – the United States, Germany, Switzerland, India and Australia, to name just five.

A free, peaceful and democratic future for your country can be built on these foundations – the release of political prisoners, legislative and constitutional reform, a nationwide peace process involving a political dialogue leading to a federal system in which equal rights are protected and diversity is celebrated. There is, however, one further element without which peace and democracy cannot be achieved: respect for human rights, including religious freedom, justice and the rule of law.

The stories I have heard from the conflict in Kachin State over the past two years are deeply disturbing. They are very similar to the testimonies I heard myself from the Karen, Karenni, Shan and Chin people in the past. In the past two years, it is reported that at least 100,000 Kachin civilians have been displaced; more than 200 villages destroyed, including at least 66 churches; rape, forced labour, torture and killing of civilians are all still happening.

These acts of violence, these abuses which could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, must stop. The culture of impunity must end. If the President's reforms are to be believed, there must be a concerted, unremitting and transparent effort to change the behaviour of the Tatmadaw, to end these widespread and systematic abuses which result in so much injustice and loss of life.

Today, I say clearly and unambiguously to the President, the Government and the military, as a friend of this country and its people: stop the war; stop the killings; stop the torture; stop the rapes; stop forced labour. Only then can the people of this beautiful but benighted country – whether in Kachin State or in other parts of the country – begin to rebuild their lives, not only physically but spiritually as well, to reconcile, and to build a better future for all.

In this multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation – home to Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Animists – respect for religious diversity and freedom is essential. I understand that in Buddhism you have two principles, 'Metta' (loving kindness) and 'Karuna' (compassion). I hope that the appalling violence we have seen over the past year – in Rakhine State, and in Meikhtila, Oakkan, Lashio and other towns and cities – will cease, and that the country and all its people, of whatever religion, will be filled with a new spirit of Metta and Karuna. For the spirit of Metta and Karuna is not limited to Buddhism. All the great religions have similar teachings to these. These are the teachings that unite us, people of different races and religions, for they are the teachings of humanity – and they are fundamental to democracy.

If such violence and hatred continue, they threaten to undermine all that has been achieved in the past two years, and to snatch from you the freedom and democracy for which you have struggled so long just when they appear at last to be in sight.

A country in which one particular religious or racial minority is made to feel they do not belong; a country in which a particular religious or racial minority is subjected to campaigns of hatred and violence; a country in which, despite being born in the country, people from one particular racial group are denied citizenship and rendered stateless – can never be a country free and at peace. So it is vital that everyone who desires true freedom, democracy and peace for this country should unite to oppose intolerance and hatred. Voices of peace and justice from all religious and political groups must work together to oppose the intolerant minority. I urge the Government to ensure that the police and security forces act swiftly and effectively to prevent further violence, protect vulnerable communities and bring the perpetrators of such hatred and violence to justice.

I call upon the Government, and Parliament, urgently to review and revise the 1982 Citizenship Law, to bring it in line with international human rights norms. I call for a genuinely independent analysis of the Rohingya people's history in Burma, so that misunderstandings can be corrected, misinformation countered and prejudices addressed. I call on the Government and civil society to invest in initiatives for inter-religious and inter-racial dialogue and reconciliation. And I applaud religious, political and civil society leaders who are already beginning this vital work.

But I am not here just to tell the Government what we expect of them. I am also here, along with my colleagues, to offer our assistance. Just over a year ago, I had the privilege – one of the greatest privileges of my professional life --of introducing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as she addressed our Parliament in Westminster Hall. During her address she specifically requested support from us to help strengthen your own Parliament. She asked Britain as “one of the oldest parliamentary democracies” in the world “to consider what it can do to help build the sound institutions needed to support a nascent parliamentary democracy”. Since then, in addition to groups of UK MPs visiting Burma, I have been pleased to welcome two delegations of Burmese parliamentarians in December 2012 and April 2013. The Bills committee and the Public Accounts Committee came to engage with us on the issues of law-making and legislative scrutiny.

As this country develops the institutions of democracy, strengthening the role of Parliament is vital. Parliament exists in a democratic society to represent the people, to scrutinise the executive, to ensure not only the rule of law but good law, and to hold those who govern to account.

In our Parliament in Britain – known as the ‘Mother of Parliaments’ – we do not claim to get it all right. On the contrary, we make plenty of mistakes. But we have the advantage of experience and history, of lessons learned from our mistakes. We would never presume to suggest that our system is the only model for parliamentary democracy, nor the best, nor the model that you should emulate. But if there is knowledge, experience, expertise and ideas that we may be able to share, that – adapted to your own context, culture and customs – could help Parliamentarians in Naypyidaw strengthen their role, and ensure greater scrutiny, better laws, more transparency and accountability, and better government of, by and for the people, if there is a contribution we can make, then as friends of this country and its people, we would be delighted to be of service.

There is an Asian saying to the effect that a journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step. You have embarked on a new path in your journey towards freedom, democracy, justice and peace. It is a journey that you have been pursuing for decades, with a struggle for independence from colonial rule, a struggle against Japanese occupation, a struggle for ethnic rights, a struggle for democracy. Many of your people have engaged in that struggle with heroism and courage, and sacrifice, which deserve our deep respect. Some of us in Britain have tried, in our own small ways, to walk with you for at least some of that journey. And today I want to assure you that we will continue to do so. To do so until you reach the destination to which you have been journeying for so long. To do so until you achieve the freedom, democracy, justice, respect for human rights and peace which we in Britain have so long enjoyed and which you have too long been denied.

Thank you.

End.

<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/speaker/Mr-Speaker-Speech-Rangoon-University-Burma.pdf>

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

ANTI-MUSLIM VIOLENCE IN BURMA 11.07.2013

That this House expresses deep concern at the growing anti-Muslim violence in Burma; is concerned that the government of Burma has still not taken action against those inciting and organising violence; is further concerned by growing Buddhist nationalism in the country and that other religious minorities could also be targeted; is further concerned that, despite Muslims being the majority of the victims of violence, they also make up the vast majority of those being charged with violent offences; calls on the Government to significantly increase support for programmes promoting religious tolerance in Burma; and further calls on the Government to mobilise and co-ordinate an international task force to help address religious violence in Burma.

Total Signature: 30

ROHINGYA MUSLIM PERSECUTION IN MYANMAR

Date tabled: 20.05.2013

That this House notes that the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar is not only continuing but sectarian violence is getting worse; further notes that a boat carrying well over 100 Rohingya Muslims fleeing a cyclone capsized on 14 May with many drowned; further notes that the Myanmar President Thein Sein has been invited to Washington to meet President Obama as part of the normalisation of relations with western countries; deplores the continued persecution of the Rohingya Muslims; and calls on the Government to take all necessary measures to get the Myanmar government to act to protect the Rohingya Muslims from sectarian persecution and violence.

Total Signatures: 14

Note: House of Lords written parliamentary questions were answered during summer recess.

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