



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

DEC
2010

HOUSE OF COMMONS

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

BURMA: THAILAND

03 December 2010 Fiona O'Donnell : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made representations to the Thai government to ensure that repatriations of Burmese citizens are monitored.

Jeremy Browne : Our ambassador to Thailand raised refugee issues with Foreign Minister Kasit on 18 November. Foreign Minister Kasit assured us that the Thai authorities were helping to provide temporary assistance for the recent influx of Burmese refugees and that no forcible repatriations had taken place. Our ambassador also raised the recent influx of refugees with the permanent secretary of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who stated that no forced repatriations would be carried out.

We are in close touch with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and local non-governmental organisations and we are closely monitoring the refugee situation on the Thai-Burma border. We are clear that all refugees should be treated in accordance with international humanitarian law and international refugee principles.

BURMA: POLITICAL PRISONERS

06 December 2010 Gemma Doyle : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the imprisonment of Min Ko Naing in Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience in Burma remains one of the international community's long-standing demands. The UK was instrumental in ensuring that Min Ko Naing and other high profile political prisoners were specifically mentioned in the UN Human Rights Council resolution on Burma in March this year and the UN General Assembly 3rd Committee resolution on the human rights situation in Burma in November.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) discussed the issue of over 2,200 people still imprisoned for their political beliefs in Burma most recently with the Thai Foreign Minister on 29 November. My hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, Mr Lidington also raised our concern with EU Foreign Ministers at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 22 November.

The Government will continue to press for the release of Min Ko Naing and all other prisoners of conscience in Burma.

21 December 2010 William Bain : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Burmese Government on the release of political prisoners in jail or under house arrest in Burma.

Jeremy Browne : We remain deeply concerned about the continued imprisonment of over 2,200 political prisoners in Burma. Their immediate and unconditional release remains one of the international community's long-standing demands. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and I raised the plight of Burmese political prisoners at the October Asia Europe summit at which the Burmese Foreign Minister was present. We also raise the issue directly with the Burmese Government through our ambassador in Rangoon, with regional countries with influence and in the UN's human rights bodies. Most recently we secured a strongly-worded human rights resolution on Burma in the UN General Assembly which demanded the release of all political prisoners. We will continue to maintain international pressure for progress.

BURMA: POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

20 December 2010 Jim Shannon : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to press the Government of Burma to grant political freedoms to Burmese citizens.

Jeremy Browne : The Government remain deeply concerned about the actions of the military regime which continues to deny fundamental freedoms to the people of Burma. The UK played a leading role at the Asia-Europe summit in May, where the EU pressed the Burmese Foreign Minister to respect human rights. These issues have also been raised with Burma's regional neighbours in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visits to India and China and in human rights bodies including most recently the UN General Assembly, where the EU secured a strongly-worded resolution which catalogued the continuing human rights abuses in Burma.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BURMA

06 December 2010 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the report Diagnosis: Critical Health and Human Rights in Eastern Burma, in particular the conclusion that at least 41 per cent of children under five in eastern Burma are acutely malnourished and 60 per cent of deaths of children under five are due to preventable and treatable diseases.

Baroness Verma : The Diagnosis Critical report highlights the serious impact of human rights abuse and the absence of health provision on the well-being of people affected by conflict in eastern Burma, particularly women and children.

The Department for International Development's (DfID's) support for healthcare in eastern Burma has expanded considerably in recent years, including our cross-border aid from organisations based in neighbouring countries. We will consider expanding this part of our programme further in future if it can be shown to deliver effective results.

HOUSE OF LORDS

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

THAILAND

02 December 2010 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the plight of Karen refugees on the Burmese border; and what response they have received to representations made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the Government of Thailand on behalf of the refugees.

Lord Howell of Guildford : We understand that many of the estimated 20,000 refugees who crossed the border into Thailand earlier this month have now returned home. Non-governmental organisations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) responded well to the crisis and although

stretched, we understand that they were able to provide sufficient emergency food, water, shelter and medical assistance.

Our ambassador in Bangkok raised refugee issues with the Thai Government on 18 November 2010. The Thai Government assured us that they were helping to provide temporary assistance and that no forcible repatriations had taken place.

The Thai/Burma border remains unstable with ongoing tensions between the Burmese army and Karen militia in eastern Burma. There have been further reports of refugees fleeing across the border as fighting breaks out, with some returning home as fighting subsides. The situation remains in flux. We are in close touch with UNHCR and are monitoring developments closely.

BURMA

14 December 2010 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Howell of Guildford on 2 December (WA 487), what role the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees played in assisting Burmese refugees escaping across the Thai border; and whether they will detail (a) the number of personnel they deployed, and (b) the material support they gave.

Lord Howell of Guildford : The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is leading the international community's work to ensure that refugees who crossed the Thai-Burma border last month are offered appropriate protection and assistance. UNHCR is liaising with the Thai authorities and working closely with non-governmental organisations and other donors. UNHCR deployed personnel from UNHCR field offices in Kanchanaburi and Mae Sot to the border, where they provided material for temporary shelter and co-ordinated the provision of food, water and medical assistance by non-governmental organisations.

ANSWERS TO ORAL PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

HOUSE OF LORDS

BURMA — QUESTION

15 December 2010 Lord Elton : To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the role of China in the development of the infrastructure and economy of Burma and of its implications for that country and the region.

Lord Howell of Guildford : My Lords, Chinese investment in Burma is significant and growing. Major projects are under way in the oil, gas and mining sectors. We are concerned that such investment will not benefit the people of Burma due to the regime's economic mismanagement and the prevalence of corruption and human rights abuses, including forced labour. Increased competition in the region for influence and economic opportunities in Burma has reduced pressure for genuine political reform.

15 December 2010 Baroness Cox : My Lords, is the Minister aware that the Shan Women's Action Network has recently launched the report High and Dry documenting very serious problems affecting people in the Shan state of northern Burma arising from a dam being built on the Longjiang River in China's Yunnan Province? It highlights the need for an assessment of the impact of trans-boundary dams and shared water resource management. Could Her Majesty's Government encourage the Chinese Government to address these matters urgently because they are seriously affecting the lives and livelihoods of people inside Burma?

Lord Howell of Guildford : Yes, we are aware of the Shan Women's Action Network report which has just been published and the very worrying situation it outlines where the potential stoppage of water further up the river by Chinese activity would cause grave harm. We regularly discuss environmental concerns at official level with the Chinese Government; we are particularly focused on this matter and will certainly raise it further with them.

15 December 2010 Lord Hylton: Can the Minister confirm that China has been buying up large quantities

of the best tropical hardwoods from Burma only to convert them into low-grade plywood? Is that not a bad bargain for both countries?

Lord Howell of Guildford : I cannot confirm the detail but that kind of practice is clearly highly undesirable. In our constant dialogue with the Chinese on the need for environmental responsibility, that is a matter that we will certainly raise if we are not doing so already.

15 December 2010 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead : My Lords, of course we all agree with the concerns which the noble Lord has expressed about the way that China behaves in Burma as well as in other parts of the world. However, as far as that region is concerned, is not the most important thing to ensure that China uses the influence that it has regionally on the Burmese regime?

Lord Howell of Guildford: I think I understood the noble Baroness. Clearly, we have to seek responsible dialogue with the Chinese to ensure that they do not undermine the effect of the sanctions that we are keeping in place and which are having some effect because the generals are complaining bitterly that the sanctions put in place by the US, Australia and the EU are damaging their lifestyle and plans. So we will continue with these sanctions but we must have better co-operation from China and other countries in this matter. If that is what the noble Baroness was arguing for, I am right with her.

15 December 2010 Baroness Falkner of Margravine : My Lords, does my noble friend agree that the slight shift in the US position, whereby it wishes to have direct negotiations with Burma to build a better relationship in the longer term, will help shift the regional balance of power by making China less capable of making Burma a client state, particularly in terms of ports in the Indian Ocean and strategic shipping?

Lord Howell of Guildford : We are constantly looking at ways of bringing more effective global pressure to bear on this unpleasant regime and its practices. Any developments of this kind need to be measured and calibrated very carefully, but it is the direction in which we should go.

15 December 2010 Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean : My Lords, do the Government believe that there is any truth in the suggestion that the Chinese are helping the authorities in Burma to develop a nuclear capability?

Lord Howell of Guildford : I have no evidence or proof of that, beyond media suggestions. There is no established evidence or clarity on that matter which I can share with the House today.

15 December 2010 Lord Dubs : My Lords, does the Minister agree that there is a little difficulty with the sanctions regime against Burma, which instinctively we would all be inclined to support? If the sanctions are working, they will leave a gap for the Chinese; yet if western companies go into Burma, they are accused of conniving with the regime. There seems to be no answer to that.

Lord Howell of Guildford : The noble Lord puts his finger on an obvious dilemma. The answer to it is responsible action by the Chinese. If China's activity effectively undermines the impact of sanctions, then the noble Lord is absolutely right in his analysis. However, it does not seem to be working that way. The sanctions appear to be causing considerable difficulties, reflected in the continual, bitter complaints made by the generals and the authorities about them. They feel that they are both hostile and damaging to their nation and target those who are richer and more comfortably ensconced rather than the ordinary people of Burma.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

Early Day Motion 112: Human Rights in Burma

John Pugh

30.05.2010

Signed by 149 MPs

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.

Early Day Motion 787: Aung San Suu Kyi and Elections in Burma

Valerie Vaz

11.10.2010

Signed by 42 MPs

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 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.

Early Day Motion 788: BBC World Service and Human Rights

11.10.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 54 MPs

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.

Early Day Motion 989: Elections in Burma and Advance Voting

11.11.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 27 MPs

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.

Early Day Motion 1014: Release of Aung San Suu Kyi

16.11.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 47 MPs

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.

Early Day Motion 1034 : Imprisonment of Zarganar by Burmese Authorities

17.11.2010

Tom Harris

Signed by 59 MPs

That this House condemns the treatment by the Burmese regime of the actor, director and comedian, Zarganar, who in 2006 was banned from any public performance and who in 2008, after speaking out on behalf of millions of Burmese citizens left homeless by a cyclone, was convicted of public order offences and sentenced to 59 years imprisonment, this sentence being reduced on appeal to 35 years; believes that Zarganar has suffered a grievous miscarriage of justice; and calls on the Burmese government to release him at the earliest possible opportunity.

Early Day Motion 1125 : RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI (No. 2)

02.12.2010

Ritchie, Margaret

Signed by 24 MPs

That this House welcomes the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and calls for the release of her fellow pro-democracy campaigners Htay Kywe, Mie Mie and Zaw Htet Ko Ko, who have all been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment away from their families; and urges the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to keep their plight to the fore of any discussions he has with the Burmese Ambassador and Burmese government officials.

**Published by Burma Campaign UK, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT
www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



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