



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

DEC
2011

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Rohingya

12 Dec 2011 Mr Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the treatment of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh; and if he will make a statement.

Alistair Burt: The UK has raised concerns on this matter with the Government of Bangladesh bilaterally and with EU partners. The Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), raised concerns about the treatment of ethnic minorities with the President of Burma and senior officials during his visit to the country on 15-17 November. Officials from, our high commission in Dhaka have visited the camps for displaced Rohingyas. The Department for International Development provides core contributions to the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department and UN agencies that directly support the Rohingya community.

HOUSE OF LORDS

Political Prisoners

5 Dec 2011 Lord Avebury: To ask Her Majesty's Government what response the Secretary of State for International Development received to his request during his visit to Burma that the Government should release political prisoners; and whether he was given any news of the monks who were detained following the demonstrations of September 2007.

Baroness Northover: During his visit to Burma from 15-17 November, the Secretary of State for International Development pressed President Thein Sein, the Vice President, the Speaker of the Lower House and several Ministers for the unconditional release of all political prisoners, including the monks detained in 2007. He made clear that releasing political prisoners would be a critical indicator of the Burmese Government's intentions. He received assurances that releases were under consideration, but no detail was given on timing. The Vice President indicated that prisoners may be moved nearer to their families, which has now taken place in some cases, including that of the leader of the All-Burma Monks Alliance, U Gambira, who has been moved to a prison in Rangoon.

ANSWERS TO SPOKEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Political Prisoners

1 Dec 2011 Mark Pritchard: May we have an urgent debate on Burma? I am sure that we all welcome the recent release of political prisoners, but there are still more than 1,000 being held without charge or trial. If the Burmese regime is serious about being taken into the international family and community, it needs to let those people go.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that, like him, I welcome the signs of relaxation of some of the extreme measures undertaken by that regime. I cannot promise a debate, but I understand that the Backbench Business Committee has indicated that, on the last day before the Christmas recess, we will have a series of Adjournment debates. He might like to apply for one of those.

International Development topical questions

7 Dec 2011 Tom Greatrex: If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I attended last week's high level forum on aid effectiveness in Busan. The United Kingdom was instrumental in securing an international agreement that, for the first time, includes new providers of development co-operation such as China and Brazil. I have also recently visited Burma for talks with the Government and with Aung San Suu Kyi. It appears that the political tectonic plates in Burma are shifting.

Political Reform

7 Dec 2011 Tony Baldry: My right hon. Friend is the first UK Minister to have visited Burma for a very long time. Will he please take this opportunity to update the House on the outcome of that visit, particularly on his discussions with Aung San Suu Kyi?

Mr Andrew Mitchell: It does appear that the political tectonic plates are moving in Burma. The Government of Burma have made it clear that they are committed to releasing the political prisoners—in particular, Min Ko Naing, one of the leaders of the students of 1988—and also committed to the 48 by-elections proceeding. Aung San Suu Kyi and her party have said that they will stand in those elections. We await credible elections with fair and open results.

DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Burma

23 Nov 2011

Statement by the Secretary of State for International Development, Mr. Andrew Mitchell:

I visited Burma for three days from 15 to 17 November, the first visit by a senior Minister from the European Union since a ban on high-level engagement was suspended in April 2011. In the capital, Naypyidaw, I met President Thein Sein, Vice-President Tin Aung Myint Oo, the Speaker of the Lower House Shwe Mann, and the Ministers of Industry, Railways, Border Affairs and Health. In Mandalay I visited development projects funded by Britain. In Rangoon I spent most of a day with Aung San Suu Kyi including visiting a school run by her party, the National League for Democracy, and I met representatives of ethnic groups, other political parties, activists, civil society groups, and the recently freed political prisoner Zarganar. I was accompanied throughout by British journalists.

Speaking to members of the Burmese Government, I both welcomed the progress that the government has recently made towards political reform and strongly urged that the momentum of reform be maintained. In particular I pressed for:

- a full release of political prisoners, including 1988 Generation leader Min Ko Naing;
- continued progress in the dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi ;
- free and fair by-elections, due to be held in the next two months;
- urgent moves towards a resolution to the ethnic conflicts; and
- improved humanitarian access in border areas.

I made clear that Britain would support a very significant positive international response if the reform process continued. The President and his Ministers assured me that the reforms would continue, but gave no clear timeframe and argued that considerations about stability were stalling the release of more political prisoners. The President however emphasised the importance of the dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi , and expressed his hope that she and the National League for Democracy would run in the by-elections –

they have since confirmed that they will. Burmese Ministers confirmed that they had opened channels of communication with armed ethnic groups. I noted that the international community was watching closely for successful outcomes on these issues.

Aung San Suu Kyi expressed her gratitude for Britain's unwavering support for democracy, development and human rights in Burma. She stressed the need to maintain pressure for the full release of political prisoners, strengthened rule of law in Burma including the independence of the judiciary, and progress on negotiations with the ethnic groups. Aung San Suu Kyi set out her priorities for development and poverty reduction in Burma, focussing on education, health, widening the availability of small-scale finance to poor families, and improving child nutrition. She underlined the importance of improving living conditions equally across Burma, including in ethnic areas.

During the visit I set out the results that British Aid would deliver for the Burmese people over the next four years:

- ensuring that more than 127,000 mothers give birth more safely;
- preventing more than 150,000 unintended pregnancies;
- helping more than 1.8 million people with bed nets to help avoid malaria;
- diagnosis and treatment to reduce drug-resistant malaria;
- supporting 277,000 children through primary school;
- providing 110,000 women with access to affordable credit;
- helping 92,000 women and men produce more food.

I also highlighted the prospect of further British help in the future if the reform process is maintained, for example to encourage wealth creation and to help to improve government accountability, service delivery and the rule of law.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

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: 146

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 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: 47

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

**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**