



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

A summary of Burma-related issues in the British Parliament

DEC
2014

Answers to Written Parliamentary Questions

Political Prisoners

1 December 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what estimate he has made of the number of political prisoners in Burmese prisons.

Hugo Swire: Estimates of the number of political prisoners in Burma vary. Organisations such as the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPPB) monitor the figures and provide regular status updates. Their latest from October, indicates that there are 75 political prisoners remaining in Burma, down from 2,073 in March 2011. Our Embassy in Rangoon remains in close contact with the AAPPB and other civil society networks to support their work. We continue to press for the unconditional release of all political prisoners in Burma.

Rape & Sexual Violence in conflict

4 December 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their assessment of reports of systematic sexual violence against women in Burma, as documented by the Women's League of Burma in their recent report; and what action they plan to take under their Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative to help prevent further violence and to bring the perpetrators of sexual violence to justice.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We are aware of the reports, not least the most recent one from the Women's League of Burma, alleging sexual violence on Commander during his visit to Burma in January. In October the Minister of State for the Department of International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), took up the issue when he met with Burma's Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. The UK has allocated over £300,000 to projects supporting the prevention of sexual violence in Burma. Prevention of sexual violence in conflict is also a key element of our defence the part of the Burmese army. These are extremely concerning and we continue to press the Burmese military and government to hold perpetrators to account. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), raised this issue directly with the Commander in Chief of the Burmese military and the Northern engagement with Burma and is included, along with the importance of human rights and the rule of law, in any education courses we deliver to the military in Burma.

9 December 2014 Mr Nigel Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the government of Burma on tackling sexual violence in that country.

Mr Hugo Swire: I raised this issue directly with the Commander in Chief of the Burmese military and the Northern Commander during my most recent visit to Burma in January. In October, the Minister of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), also raised the issue with Burma's Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

Burma has endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. This is a positive step. The Burmese authorities now need to demonstrate that they are committed to honouring the commitments contained in the Declaration, including reforming military doctrine and ending the culture of

impunity for acts of conflict-related sexual violence. We will continue to press the Burmese military and government to hold perpetrators to account.

9 December 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what funding her Department has provided to support women's organisations in Burma who document the sexual violence by the Burmese Army and assist survivors.

Mr Desmond Swayne: Tackling violence against women is a high priority for the UK in Burma. In Kachin state, DFID is providing humanitarian assistance for over 40,000 internally displaced people, of whom 21,000 are female. This assistance includes shelter, food and in certain areas specific support for victims of conflict, including for women affected by sexual violence. In the Burmese refugee camps in Thailand we are providing support to victims of gender-based violence including outward referrals to specialist centres.

We have agreed to provide funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for two specialists to further strengthen the response to gender-based violence in the conflict-affected areas of Rakhine and Kachin states. We continue to emphasise to the Burmese Government the need to protect all citizens and respect human rights, particularly for women, and the UK has agreed two new projects to tackle this problem in Burma, under the Foreign Secretary's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative.

In November DFID officials from the DFID Burma office met with the Women's League of Burma (WLB) to discuss the UK's work and listen to concerns raised by the WLB.

Rohingya

4 December 2014 Mr David Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to the Burmese government on the implications for that country's international legal obligations of the internment of Rohingya people who do not meet that country's citizenship criteria.

Mr Hugo Swire: We have raised our concern at the issues surrounding the Rohingya community in all of our recent Ministerial contacts with the Burmese government. Most recently, I discussed this with the Minister for Immigration and the Rakhine Chief Minister during their visit to the UK in October. We have been clear in our communications with the Burmese government that we expect them to adhere to their international human rights obligations regarding the treatment and welfare of those that do not meet the country's citizenship criteria. While we welcome the limited citizenship verification in Taungpaw for internally displaced people that has seen some individuals from the Rohingya community granted citizenship status, we continue to urge the Burmese authorities to follow a transparent, inclusive and consistent process in establishing the status of inhabitants of Rakhine State. We are also clear that, regardless of citizenship status, the human rights of all individuals in Rakhine must be fully respected.

3 December 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Burmese government on allowing humanitarian access to Rohingya Muslims who are displaced in Rakhine state.

Mr Hugo Swire: We have raised our concerns at the situation of the Rohingya community in every one of our recent Ministerial contacts with the Burmese government.

The former Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), raised the situation in Rakhine State in a call with his Burmese counterpart, U Wunna Maung Lwin, in April. He called for the Burmese government to facilitate humanitarian assistance to all communities in the State.

I also raised this issue with Khin Maung Soe, Burmese Minister for Electric Power in July, as well as with the Burmese Ambassador, whom I summoned in April to register my concerns.

My hon. Friend the member for New Forest West and Minister of State for International Development (Mr Swayne), discussed Rakhine with Minister for the President's Office, U Soe Thein in August. In October the Minister of State for International Development specifically raised the difficulty of delivering humanitarian assistance to displaced people in Rakhine with the Minister for Immigration and the Rakhine Chief Minister.

In Rangoon our Ambassador and Embassy officials consistently discuss these concerns with representatives of the Burmese government.

3 December 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Burmese government on granting citizenship to the Rohingya.

Mr Hugo Swire: This is an issue that we regularly to raise with the Burmese government and which I discussed with the Minister for Immigration and the Rakhine Chief Minister during their visit to the UK in October. While we welcome the limited citizenship verification in Taungpaw for internally displaced people that has seen some individuals from the Rohingya community granted citizenship status, we continue to urge the Burmese authorities to follow a transparent, inclusive and consistent process in establishing the status of all inhabitants of Rakhine State. We are also clear that, regardless of citizenship status, the human rights of all individuals in Rakhine must be fully respected.

3 December 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assistance his Department is providing to the internally displaced Rohingya.

Mr Hugo Swire: UK support to internally displaced persons of Rakhine State, including the Rohingya community, is provided by the Department for International Development (DFID). In April, DFID announced an additional £5.8m humanitarian funding for Rakhine State – bringing our total allocation for humanitarian work there to £12m since 2012 and making us one of the largest bilateral donors. Our aid supports shelter, water sanitation and hygiene programmes, nutrition and protection activities, as well as non-food items for over 114,000 people. We also provide support to the United Nation’s coordination of the international humanitarian response.

The humanitarian situation in Rakhine State remains of concern. We continue to urge the Burmese government to work toward a long-term solution to bring peace and reconciliation.

1 December 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Burmese government about its Rakhine State Action Plan.

Hugo Swire: We welcome the Burmese Government’s efforts to develop a comprehensive plan that seeks to address the complex and interrelated challenges in Rakhine. There are, however, some aspects of the Rakhine Action Plan which would, if implemented, undermine the prospects for peaceful co-existence and stability across the State. We have made our concerns on this clear to the Burmese government, most recently when I met with the Minister for Immigration and the Rakhine Chief Minister on 7 October.

The Constitution

1 December 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Burmese government on its decision not to change the constitution of that country until after the general election in 2015.

Hugo Swire: Changing Burma’s 2008 constitution to enshrine equal rights for all will be crucial for Burma’s future stability. The UK is one of the leading international proponents of such change. Changes to many parts of the constitution are ultimately a matter for the people of Burma to decide directly by referendum.

Ministers regularly raise the issue of constitutional change with their Burmese counterparts. The Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) discussed Burma’s constitution with President Thein Sein when they met at the G20 Summit in Brisbane.

Conflict in Ethnic Areas

3 December 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent reports he has received of fighting in Kachin State and northern Shan State in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: The recent fighting in Kachin and Shan States, and the shelling of a training camp in Kachin which killed 23 people on 19 November, has been widely reported. We have concerns about

the impact it will have on the peace process in Burma. We call for an end to the violence to allow for the resumption of meaningful negotiations towards a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

15 December 2014 Mr David Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the humanitarian implications of the recent armed conflict in the Kachin State of Burma.

Mr Desmond Swayne: Some 100,000 people have been living in camps for displaced people for over three years since the fighting restarted between the Kachin Independence Army and Government forces. Clashes and shelling in Kachin and Northern Shan have stepped up since early November. We are monitoring the situation carefully and have been in frequent contact with the UN and local organisations about the humanitarian implications of recent fighting. While there has been no significant new displacement or humanitarian needs in the last few months we will continue to monitor these issues closely. Between 2012 and 2015 DFID has allocated over £17 million for humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons (IDP) in Kachin and Northern Shan States in Burma affected by the violence. This aid is providing food security, sanitation and health in line with accepted humanitarian standards as well as to strengthening IDP communities' capacity to manage health hazards and risks.

Aid

15 December 2014 Mr David Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what funding her Department is providing for internally displaced persons in Kachin State.

Mr Desmond Swayne: Some 100,000 people have been living in camps for displaced people for over three years since the fighting restarted between the Kachin Independence Army and Government forces. Clashes and shelling in Kachin and Northern Shan have stepped up since early November. We are monitoring the situation carefully and have been in frequent contact with the UN and local organisations about the humanitarian implications of recent fighting. While there has been no significant new displacement or humanitarian needs in the last few months we will continue to monitor these issues closely. Between 2012 and 2015 DFID has allocated over £17 million for humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons (IDP) in Kachin and Northern Shan States in Burma affected by the violence. This aid is providing food security, sanitation and health in line with accepted humanitarian standards as well as to strengthening IDP communities' capacity to manage health hazards and risks.

10 December 2014 Gavin Shaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how her Department ensures that monasteries in Burma which receive funds from her Department promote religious and social cohesion; and if she will make a statement.

Mr Desmond Swayne: DFID supports the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) which has the key objective of increasing the number and proportion of children who complete a quality basic education, including within monastic schools. The Burnet Institute is one of the MEC's founding partners and channels MEC funding to the Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG), which is the national level coordinating and decision-making body for the monastic education sector. It is a condition of Monastic Education Development Group support that schools not take part in any activity that risks religious and social cohesion. Any school that is found in breach of this requirement will have all funding and support withdrawn immediately. The Burnet Institute works with the management team of the MEDG to integrate peace and conflict resolution into the teacher training program.

Violation of International Law

3 December 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the Legal Memorandum: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity in Eastern Myanmar published by the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School in November 2014.

Mr Hugo Swire: The findings of the Harvard Law School report are of serious concern. A judgement on whether war crimes or crimes against humanity have been committed is a matter for the courts, but we remain committed to the principle of accountability for all crimes through an independent and transparent judicial process.

Our wider priority is for a permanent solution to the conflicts in Burma. We are encouraging this by funding experts with experience of the peace process in Northern Ireland to support the peacemaking dialogue in Burma.

Andy Hall

16 December 2014 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether British Embassy officials are attending the trials in Thailand of British citizen Andy Hall.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Officials from our Embassy in Bangkok attended three days of Mr Hall's recent criminal defamation trial, including the opening and closing day, in order to observe proceedings. We also encouraged officials from other EU Member States to attend. We are pleased to note that one case of criminal defamation against Mr Hall has been dismissed.

Officials, both in Bangkok and London, are in regular contact with Mr Hall, and will continue to monitor Mr Hall's case closely, ensuring that his case is raised with the Thai authorities where appropriate and reminding the authorities of their obligations to ensure international human rights standards are upheld. Illicit Drugs and Jade Trade

31 December 2014 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of illicit jade and drug trading in Burma and the actions of the government of that country in respect of tackling the trade of such goods into China.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Burma remains the main source of drugs in the region and is the world's second largest producer of opium poppy, which along with illicit trade of jade, provides significant sources of income that have helped fuel Burma's internal conflicts. The production of methamphetamine is also a growing concern, with the majority of the production in Burma exported to neighbouring countries.

We are aware of plans for improved cooperation between the nations of the Mekong region, including Burma, to tackle the illicit drugs trade. This includes the recent establishment of a regional centre in Chiang Mai, Thailand, staffed by drugs enforcement officers from Burma, Thailand, China and Laos. The UK welcomes these efforts and encourages coordination with the UN Office of Drugs and Crime.

BBC Media Action

15 December 2014 Lord Laird: To ask Her Majesty's Government what was the result of the latest annual review into the grant of £90 million by the Department for International Development to BBC Media Action; whether any evaluation report has suggested that the project's impact and outcomes are unlikely to be achieved; how much of the grant has been spent and where; and what are the BBC's current priorities in relation to the project.

Baroness Northover: The latest annual review for DFID's grant to BBC Media Action, completed in November 2014, found the project results to have exceeded its plan.

From November 2011 to November 2014 the project has spent £53.3 million in the following countries; Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Burma, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia. Additional activities took place through an Asia regional programme. BBC Media Action's priority for the global grant continues to be supporting media outputs that contribute to better governance, healthier populations and an increased ability to cope with crises.

Written Statements

Women, Peace and Security Implementation Plan

11 December 2014 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge): I wish to inform the House that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, together with the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence, are today

publishing an implementation plan for the “UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for 2014-17”, which was published on 12 June 2014 (HC Deb, column 72-4WS, 16 June 2014).

The national action plan sets out our priorities on women, peace and security for the next three years. It is the guiding national policy document that provides the direction and vision to the Government and their partners as we work to ensure that women and girls are at the centre of our efforts to prevent, respond to, and resolve conflict.

The implementation plan published today establishes baseline data and target indicators for the national action plan. These will help us measure progress against outcomes at country level in the six focus countries set out in the national action plan: Afghanistan, Burma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Somalia and Syria. This is the first time that the UK has published a detailed implementation plan for our work on women, peace and security. The implementation plan helps capture the diverse set of initiatives to promote the protection and full participation of women that are taking place within the UK Government across our development, defence and diplomacy work. It is complemented by work undertaken through the preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative and DFID’s strategic vision for women and girls. The implementation plan also helps set the global standard by demonstrating the UK’s determination to monitor our progress in delivering on our commitments.

We will report to Parliament annually on progress on all aspects of the national action plan, including in the six focus countries, beginning in autumn 2015.

I have deposited a copy of the implementation plan in the Libraries of both Houses.

Attachments can be viewed online at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>

Burma mentioned in Foreign Affairs Committee (Hong Kong visit) debate

2 December 2014 Andrew Rosindell: (...) They are servicemen from the Hong Kong Military Service Corps and the Hong Kong Royal Naval Service who did not receive a UK passport following the handover of Hong Kong to China. Those men and their ancestors served British commitments in south-east Asia greatly. They stood shoulder to shoulder with Britain through two world wars, and in France, Burma, Korea, Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong and China, and they served the United Kingdom—King, Queen, empire, Commonwealth and country—for all those years. The British Government must surely now recognise that the decision not to give all those servicemen a right to British nationality was unjust and an error of judgment that should be rectified. (...)

For full debate, see:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm141202/debtext/141202-0002.htm>

Burma mentioned in Westminster Hall debate on Disability and Development

11 December 2014 The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne): (...) We are prioritising national data systems. We have just managed to get the Washington Group questions on disability incorporated into our programmes in Burma and Yemen. We are developing new guidance on disaggregating data at programme level, and we have an important new commitment to disaggregating data on humanitarian support and disability. It is true that if disabled people cannot be counted, the temptation is to think that they do not count. We have to be able to count them and disaggregate. (...)

For full debate, see:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm141211/halltext/141211h0001.htm#14121137000002>

Burma mentioned in House of Lords Question for short debate: Procedures and practices

4 December 2014 Baroness Deech: (...) My second point relates to the comprehensiveness and evenness of our discussions about foreign affairs. Because it is fairly rare for a debate to be arranged by the Government on an aspect of foreign affairs, our discussions are dominated by the Questions tabled by individual noble Lords with their individual interests. I looked at the Oral Questions tabled for the last two weeks before Christmas as an example. There are Questions about Afghanistan, Kuwait, Iran, Ireland and Sudan. Questions for Short Debate may never find time to be debated at all, but currently refer to Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Israel, the Philippines, Russia and North Korea. On the day I checked, Questions for Written Answer, which are guaranteed an Answer, included references to Palestine, Ukraine, Iraq, the Caribbean, Burma, Guinea Bissau, Colombia, the UAE, the Congo, Zimbabwe and Sudan. There are some very significant omissions and no particular programming according to topicality or importance, or failure to address for a number of years. There was nothing about China; nothing about Europe, the Far East or Australasia; and nothing about the United Nations or the USA. Can it be right that in one calendar year there were 308 Questions and debates about Israel/Palestine but 27 about Russia and 24 about China? I suggest that an overwhelming number about one country alone does not suggest expertise but obsession.

It is a situation that does not improve the standing of this House and its involvement with foreign affairs in the eyes of observers. Should it not be for consideration that there should be a survey of the areas of the world that need periodic attention in this House, and that either the Government should ensure that there is time to debate them or that noble Lords be invited to table Questions on areas in an even way, without concentration on one at the expense of others? (...)

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/141204-0003.htm>

Burma mentioned in House of Lords debate on Soft Power and Conflict Prevention

5 December 2014 The Archbishop of Canterbury: (...) Since the report was published, there has been added to the mix the recognition of international and often religion-linked terrorism and the growth of ISIS, Boko Haram, al-Shabaab and numerous others. There is a continuity between the Select Committee report and the needs of a world in which international terror and localised conflict seem ever more dangerous. The clear conclusion of the past few months of reflection on the advent of ICIS and of our renewed involvement in the use of armed force in Iraq has been that this is principally an ideological and even theological struggle that cannot be won by violence. It has to be won by the development of a fresh narrative which provides a peaceful, humane, viable, motivating and effective alternative to the terrible visions of ISIS and Boko Haram, to violence in India, Myanmar and many other areas of the world. Such a narrative will only be developed with soft power in collaboration with allies and partners around the world. It is the only way of avoiding the alternative: a long descent into the dark and fear filled ways of anarchic, networked conflicts—perhaps never critical but always a frightening and deeply draining demand. (...)

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): (...) More than 80 years after its establishment by Lord Reith, today the BBC World Service has a global audience of 265 million people, as the noble Lord, Lord MacLennan, reminded us. It transmits in English and 27 other languages. Often it is the only lifeline to honest reporting of news and current affairs. That was certainly true for the millions living behind the iron curtain in eastern Europe during the Cold War. It was true in Burma, throughout decades of brutal military dictatorship. When I visited Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in March last year, she told me of the vital role that the World Service played, not only as a source of information and hope for her during her long, lonely years under house arrest, but as a source of ideas for the people of Burma. During my visit I gave a lecture at the British Council library in Rangoon, which throughout the worst of those years was always a place of hope for the people of Burma. I know that last month the Member of Parliament for Enfield Southgate, David Burrowes, delivered another lecture there on parliamentary democracy, human rights and civil society.

In building Burma's democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi particularly points to the role that the World Service has played in disseminating information, broadcasting truthful news bulletins and programmes that could

be relied upon, and sustaining morale in the darkest of times. Yet, as we have heard, funding and the mandate of both the World Service and the British Council risk their effectiveness. In 2010-11 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office grant for the British Council was 27% of its income. In 2013-14 that grant is forecast to be less than 20% of total income. The proportion is projected to decrease further, reaching 16% of total income by 2015-16. Meanwhile, of course, the World Service has seen its mandate changed and its capacity reduced.

I will give your Lordships one example of the effect of depleted resources. I want to talk about the use of soft power in North Korea. I remind the House of my non-pecuniary interest as co-chairman of the All-Party Group on North Korea. Although I readily concede that there are significant differences between Burma and North Korea, there are also legitimate comparisons, and I regret that our now more resource-driven approach has led to very different outcomes. (...)

At a recent meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea, it was suggested that we need off-the-tracks lines of engagement. Breaking the information blockade should be one of those objectives, which is why I deplore the decision of the BBC World Service thus far not to broadcast to the Korean peninsula, unlike what happened in Burma. (...)

Lord Williams of Baglan: (...) In that spirit, the BBC has also set up a College of Journalism focusing on three key aspects: skills, language and values—and I emphasise values. In addition to English and French, the college now has websites in Arabic, Burmese, Chinese, Hausa, Urdu and Turkish. Even in these straitened times, we still have the capacity to respond quickly to emerging situations. On 22 May this year, the Thai army carried out a coup d'état, closing down the free press in that country. Within little more than a month, with the approval of the Foreign Secretary, we had reopened a Thai language service that had been closed 10 years earlier, operating online and through social media, returning impartial and accurate news to that country.

Another country I want to mention, which has already come up in the debate, is Burma, or Myanmar, as it is now called, where I recently chaired a conference on transition and reform for Chatham House. The BBC has broadcast in Burmese for 75 years—through the period of colonial rule, Japanese occupation, military dictatorship and now, I hope, a transition to representative government. Two years ago, censorship of newspapers was still in place and the BBC could not operate officially. Things have changed at such a pace that a few weeks ago the BBC's Burmese Service launched its own-language version of a "Question Time"-style format. The BBC now has a permanent presence in Rangoon. In the rapidly changing media market of the country, its weekly audience stands at 6.8 million. The Burmese Service operates not just on short wave radio but also through FM rebroadcasts, social media and mobile telephones. In April this year, it launched a limited television bulletin which is broadcast via partner channel, Myanmar National Television. (...)

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/141205-0001.htm#14120531000468>

Burma mentioned in House of Lords debate on Modern Slavery Bill

8 December 2014 Baroness Cox: (...) In my humanitarian work with victims of oppression I have personally met many hundreds of victims of modern slavery and heard first-hand the heart-wrenching stories of the anguish of physical torture, humiliation and hopelessness, often lasting for many years. For some, their loved family members are still missing and enslaved. I have met and talked to many hundreds of former slaves from South Sudan and the Nuba mountains abducted into slavery by the Government of Sudan, using slavery as a weapon of ideological warfare. I have heard first-hand the heartbreaking stories of many victims of forced labour and sexual slavery in Burma; children abducted and forced to become child soldiers by the infamous Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda; and victims of bonded labour and enforced so-called temple prostitution in India. In this context, I would like to record my deep appreciation of organisations such as the Dalit Freedom Network UK and Anti-Slavery International for their immensely important work, reflected in their comprehensive briefings. (...)

For full debate, see: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/141208-0001.htm#1412087000316>

Early Day Motions

BURMA (Early Day Motion 182)

Date tabled: 25.06.2014

That this House supports the call for action for peace in Kachin State signed by 55 organisations worldwide; further supports calls from 80 organisations for Burma to scrap proposed legislation that would unlawfully restrict the right to freely choose a religion; notes that it has been over three years since the Burma Army broke a 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army; calls on the government of Burma to cease its attacks in Kachin State; further notes since June 2011 over 120,000 Kachin people have been displaced and over 200 villages have been destroyed; condemns the human rights abuses and breaches of the Geneva Conventions in Kachin State, especially the use of sexual violence; acknowledges the need for further peace talks between the Burmese government, the Burma Army, Kachin Independence Organisation and the Kachin Independence Army; welcomes Charles Bo, the Archbishop of Yangon's call for the rights of all ethnicities and religious faiths to be protected and his message of peace; call on the Government to provide humanitarian assistance to the internally displaced people in Kachin and Northern Shan States; and further calls on the Government to establish an independent investigation into the use of rape and sexual violence.

Signatures: 21

70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BURMA CAMPAIGN (Early Day Motion 285)

Date tabled: 22.07.2014

That this House recognises with respect and gratitude all who fought in the war in Burma 70 years ago; notes that this was the longest land campaign of the Second World War; salutes the memory of nearly 40,000 British and Commonwealth Service personnel who died in the fighting, as well as the thousands more killed in captivity; and commends the work of The Not Forgotten Association, a tri-service charity for the wounded in keeping alive the memory of such sacrifices.

Signatures: 64

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT IN BURMA (Early Day Motion 587)

Date tabled: 02.12.2014

That this House condemns the continuing use of rape as a weapon of war and the recent escalation in military attacks in Kachin, Northern Shan and Karen States; notes the recent report by the Women's League for Burma detailing evidence of the continuing use of rape and sexual violence; calls for a nationwide ceasefire and an end to the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war by the Burmese army; further calls on the Government to urge the government of Burma to engage in genuine political dialogue with ethnic nationalities without preconditions; further calls on the Government to urge the government of Burma to uphold its obligations under international law to end impunity and ensure accountability; further calls on the Government to urge the government of Burma to amend the constitution of that country to remove the current disqualification of Burmese citizens with foreign children becoming President; further calls on the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict to address the issues in Burma highlighted by the Women's League for Burma's Report; and further calls on the Government to support an independent international investigation into rape and sexual violence in Burma and to provide funding to women's organisations from Burma which document sexual violence by the Burmese army and assist survivors.

Signatures: 34

<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2014-15/587>

All Party Parliamentary Group for Democracy in Burma

On the 16th of December Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK and Chris Lewa, founder and director of the Arakan Project addressed the All Party Parliamentary Group For Democracy in Burma. Tun Khin spoke about recent developments in Arakan State and the ongoing persecution of Rohingya as well as the acute humanitarian situation in the camps which still have very limited access to humanitarian aid. Chris Lewa highlighted the many problems with the drafted Rakhine Action Plan, the numerous obstacles for the Rohingya to participate in the Burmese elections in November 2015 and the increase of Rohingya fleeing Arakan State by boat, as a consequence of increased harassment by state authorities, including arbitrary arrests.

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