



# LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

FEB  
2010

## ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

### FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

#### Arms Trade

**10 Feb 2010 Dr. John Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has had discussions with the government of (a) Canada, (b) New Zealand and (c) Brazil on an arms embargo against Burma.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The Government maintains a dialogue with a wide range of international partners on Burma, including the governments of Canada and New Zealand. In recent weeks we have also shared details of our position on Burma with Brazil, which became a non-permanent member of the Security Council in January. In August 2009, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and his fellow UN Security Council members underlining that no one should be selling arms to a military regime with an appalling human rights record. A global arms embargo remains a priority for this Government, and we will continue to press for progress in our bilateral contacts and in relevant multi-lateral fora.

**10 Feb 2010 Mr. Stephen Crabb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of arms trading with Burma, with particular reference to arms from (a) India, (b) Russia and (c) China; and what assessment he has made of the effects of such trade on the situation in Burma.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The Government believe that no one should be selling arms to the Burmese regime in view of their appalling human rights record and the high likelihood arms supplied will be used for internal repression. An EU arms embargo has been in place since 1996, and we are working to build support for a global arms embargo. To this end, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote to the UN Secretary General and all members of the Security Council in August 2009.

Reports suggest that India, China and Russia have all supplied arms to Burma. China is believed to be the leading arms supplier and in early January 2010, media reports suggested Russia had agreed to supply \$600 million of combat aircraft and arms to the Burma regime. In response to these reports, our embassy in Moscow raised our concerns with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The ability of Burma to continue to purchase arms from a wide range of suppliers has helped to reduce their defence and security costs and modernise an army responsible for widespread and systematic human rights abuses.

#### Human Rights and Crimes Against Humanity

**10 Feb 2010 Dr. John Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had in the United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly on reports of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The Government remain deeply concerned at the human rights situation in Burma and we regularly raise the issue with EU and other international partners, and in the UN's human rights bodies.

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At the last session of the Human Rights Council in September 2009, and at the UN General Assembly in November 2009, we helped to secure strong resolutions condemning the Burmese regime for ongoing and systematic human rights abuses. We will be looking to raise the issue again, and secure a further resolution, at the next session of the Human Rights Council in March 2010. In addition, we continue to give our full support to the efforts of the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma-Thomas Ojea Quintana, who is due to visit the country soon.

**10 Feb 2010 Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had discussions with (a) his EU counterparts, (b) the United Nations Human Rights Council and (c) the United Nations General Assembly on reports of crimes against humanity in Burma.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The Government remain deeply concerned at the human rights situation in Burma and we regularly raise the issue with EU and other international partners, and in the UN's human rights bodies. At the last session of the Human Rights Council in September 2009, and at the UN General Assembly in November 2009, we helped to secure strong resolutions condemning the Burmese regime for ongoing and systematic human rights abuses. We will be looking to raise the issue again, and secure a further resolution, at the next session of the Human Rights Council in March 2010. In addition, we continue to give our full support to the efforts of the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Thomas Ojea Quintana, who is due to visit the country soon.

**10 Feb 2010 Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aims and objectives he has set for the outcome of the United Nations Human Rights Council meeting on Burma.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** At the 13th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2010 we will work to secure a further, strong resolution condemning the continuing human right abuses in Burma. In our national intervention, and in the resolution text, we will seek to emphasise that the dire human rights situation, including the continued detention of 2100 political prisoners, child labour and the treatment of displaced people remain cause of significant concern. Burma's treatment of political leaders and suppression of freedom of expression undermine the credibility of elections planned for later this year.

**22 Feb 2010 Mr. Stephen Crabb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received requesting him to propose to the United Nations Security Council the establishment of a commission of inquiry into allegations of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the Burmese regime; and what steps he has taken in consequence. [317000]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** Since early December 2009, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received more than 70 letters from MPs and members of the public calling for the UK to support a UN Commission of Inquiry into crimes against humanity in Burma. We have also taken note of the Early Day Motion on this issue, and I have met campaign groups, NGOs and representatives of ethnic groups based on the Thai/Burma border, to hear their views.

In consequence of these representations and discussions, the Government have given further careful thought to the question of a UN Commission of Inquiry. We regularly test the level of consensus for action on Burma at the UN through our efforts to secure Security Council discussion. We secured tough resolutions in the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council and will continue to raise abuse of human rights in the year ahead. Our assessment remains that an attempt to establish a Commission of Inquiry would not receive the requisite support from a significant number of countries and in particular veto holding members of the Security Council. We are concerned that if we tried and failed to secure agreement this would be interpreted by the Burmese regime as a diplomatic victory and approval of its conduct. The Government will nonetheless continue to do all they can to highlight the appalling and systematic abuse of human rights in Burma, and work to secure as robust an international response as possible.

## **EU Sanctions**

**10 Feb 2010 Mr. Crabb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to secure EU targeted sanctions against the government of Burma until the human rights situation in Burma improves.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The Government continue to believe that targeted EU sanctions against the military regime in Burma are an important means of maintaining pressure for political reform and respect for human rights. Sanctions introduced in 1996 have been strengthened over time, notably after the Saffron Revolution in 2007, and in August 2009 in response to the guilty verdict in Aung San Suu Kyi's trial. They are now among the EU's toughest autonomous measures against any country. The UK will not support any easing of sanctions in the absence of tangible progress on the ground.

## Political Prisoners

**10 Feb 2010 Dr. John Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had discussions in the United Nations Human Rights Council on the arrest of pro-democracy activist Nyi Nyi Aung in Burma in September 2009.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** We are deeply concerned at the arrest and imprisonment of Nyi Nyi Aung and are monitoring his case closely. We continue to take every opportunity to raise the detention of Burma's 2100 political prisoners in the UN's Human Rights bodies. At the last session of the Human Rights Council in September 2009, and at the UN General Assembly in November 2009, we helped to secure strong resolutions calling for the release of all of political prisoners. We will be looking to raise the issue again, and secure a further resolution, at the next session of the Human Rights Council in March 2010.

**10 Feb 2010 Dr. John Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made representations to the Burmese authorities on permitting the International Committee of the Red Cross to resume its inspection of prisons in Burma.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The refusal of the Burmese authorities to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) independent and unsupervised access to political prisoners remains a grave concern, particularly as the number of prisoners of conscience has doubled to over 2100 since the 'Saffron revolution' in autumn 2007. We continue to urge the military government to co-operate fully with the ICRC and allow an immediate resumption of prison visits.

The UN General Assembly highlighted their concern at the condition of prisons and urged the regime to comply with human rights law in a resolution passed in November 2009. Our Ambassador in Rangoon last raised the issue of independent prison access for the ICRC to the Burmese government in August 2009 during the last visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma. Our Ambassador regularly raises the plight of political prisoners with Burmese ministers, and we remain in close contact with the ICRC on this issue.

**10 Feb 2010 Dr. John Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received reports on the recent sentencing and imprisonment of a journalist who worked with the Democratic Voice of Burma.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** We are aware that Democratic Voice of Burma journalist Ngwe Soe Lin was sentenced to 13 years in prison on 27 January 2010 by a Burmese military court for offences under the Electronic and Immigration Emergency Provisions Acts. This case follows the recent sentencing of two other journalists from the Democratic Voice of Burma to 20 and 26 years imprisonment respectively. At least 13 journalists and bloggers are currently detained in Burma, as the Burmese authorities seek to prevent the free flow of information in advance of elections planned for later this year.

The Government have consistently called on the military authorities to release all of Burma's over 2100 prisoners of conscience. Without their release, elections planned for later this year can have no international credibility.

## Politics and Government

**10 Feb 2010 Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will request the United Nations Security Council to undertake a review of the 2008 Burmese constitution together with representatives of (a) pro-democracy, (b) ethnic and (c) other groups in Burma.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** In November 2009 the UK helped to secure a UN General Assembly Resolution on the human rights situation in Burma, which called on the Burmese authorities to undertake a transparent, inclusive and comprehensive review of the Constitution while fully engaging with the democratic opposition and ethnic groups. We believe that a process of dialogue involving all actors in Burma will ensure a sustainable transition to democracy. This view is shared by other members of the EU and the United States of America. In the UN Security Council, we regularly test the level of consensus for action on Burma, and have succeeded in securing discussion and a number of important Presidential Statements since autumn 2007. We do not judge, however, that an attempt to secure a Security Council review on the 2008 Constitution now would be successful. A resolution on Burma tabled in January 2007 was vetoed by two Permanent Members of the Council and any attempt to invalidate the Constitution will suffer the same fate.

**22 Feb 2010 Mr. Stephen Crabb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment his Department has made of the political situation in Burma. [316579]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The Government remain deeply concerned about the lack of progress towards democracy and respect for human rights in Burma. Planned elections will have no international legitimacy while over 2,100 political prisoners remain in detention. Aung San Suu Kyi's appeal has reached its final stage. We call on the military government to release her, along with all other political prisoners, and begin a dialogue with the opposition and ethnic groups that would lay the foundations for a genuine and inclusive transition to democracy.

As elections approach, the democratic opposition and Burma's ethnic groups face a difficult dilemma. If they participate in the elections they risk legitimising a process they know to be flawed. Boycott the elections and they risk further marginalisation and exclusion from the political process. This is not a decision we can or should presume to make for them.

## 2010 Election

**22 Feb 2010 Mr. Stephen Crabb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take in response to Burma's announcement that plans are underway to hold elections in a systematic way in 2010; and if he will make a statement. [316584]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** The UK position on planned elections in Burma is well known. Unless Aung San Suu Kyi, and all other political prisoners are released, and the regime initiates an inclusive dialogue with the democratic opposition and ethnic groups, the elections will have no credibility or international legitimacy. As the elections approach, the UK will work to maintain tough EU sanctions targeted at the regime's economic interests, and press Burma's neighbours, including China, India and ASEAN countries to use their influence to secure real progress. We will also work in the UN's human rights bodies to highlight the ongoing and systematic human rights abuses in the country.

The planned elections should be an historic opportunity to reverse Burma's steady decline into poverty, stagnation and international isolation. It is difficult to be optimistic that the military regime will seize this opportunity, but the UK will continue to use all diplomatic channels to press them to do so.

## Karen Refugees

**25 Feb 2010 Mr. Stephen Crabb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the government of Thailand on its proposals to deport Karen refugees back to Burma. [317192]

**Chris Bryant:** The Government are closely monitoring reports about the possible forced return of Karen refugees to Burma. Our ambassador to Thailand has raised our concerns with the Thai Foreign Minister and with the Secretary-General of the National Security Council stressing the importance of adherence to international standards and to Thailand's international obligations. We understand that the Royal Thai Government decided not to deport the 30 families it had originally identified for removal. We will continue to co-ordinate closely with UN High Commissioner for Refugees, US and EU partners and will continue to raise any concerns with Thai authorities.

## EARLY DAY MOTIONS

### **EDM 238      REPORTS OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY IN BURMA**

**25.11.2009**

Carmichael, Alistair  
Signed by 163 MPs

That this House expresses severe concern at the escalating systematic human rights abuses being perpetrated against the people of Burma by the Junta military dictatorship; notes that there is well documented evidence over many years of widespread torture, forced displacement, sexual violence, extra-judicial killings and forced labour with civilians being deliberately targeted; further notes that these actions constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes; and calls on the Government to urge the United Nations to establish a Commission of Inquiry into these crimes in addition to supporting the International Labour Organisation's calls to refer the use of forced labour to the International Court of Justice.

### **EDM 391      INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY**

**08.12.2009**

Evans, Nigel  
Signed by 91 MPs

That this House welcomes International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2009; condemns those countries where human rights abuses occur on a daily and systematic basis; notes that on Monday Iranian authorities ordered foreign news outlets not to cover the protests that came on National Student Day, which were reportedly dispersed with the use of tear gas and militia brutality; further notes that in Burma, the case of Aung San Suu Kyi highlights the cruel suppression of democracy and perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the military junta; and calls on international agencies, including the UN and EU, and each sovereign state, to refocus their attention on human rights violations wherever they occur throughout the world.

### **EDM 955 THAILAND AND THE RETURN OF ETHNIC KAREN REFUGEES TO BURMA**

**26.02.2010**

Opik, Lembit  
Signed by 21 MPs

That this House condemns the actions of the government of Thailand, which is threatening to deport 3,000 ethnic Karen refugees back to Burma; is appalled that on 5 February 2010 thirteen refugees were forced to return against their will to an area which is infested with landmines, and occupied by a military force, allied to the dictatorship in Burma, which is likely to use the villagers as slave labour and children as child soldiers; expresses deep concern that the government of Thailand has made false claims to the international community that the refugees want to return; calls on the government of Thailand to turn its temporary halt of the deportations into a permanent one, and to end the harassment and intimidation of the refugees; and calls on the British Government to make the strongest possible representations to Thailand on this matter, and to examine whether the actions of the government of Thailand in forcing refugees to return could break international humanitarian and human rights law.

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