



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

FEB
2014

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Rohingya

06 February 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have received any additional information concerning the statement from the United Nations that it has "credible information" about the killing of Rohingya Muslims in Du Chee Yar Tan village in Burma; and what is their assessment of current levels of violence in Arakan State.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con): We have received reports from a range of sources, including UN agencies, non-governmental organisations, community groups and international partners concerning the killing of Rohingya Muslims in Northern Rakhine State in mid January.

On 23 January, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), issued a statement calling on the Burmese government to launch an immediate and transparent investigation into the violence – a message he delivered directly to the Burmese government during his visit to Burma from 28-30 January. The Burmese government must continue to provide security for all communities in Rakhine State and enable the free distribution of international assistance.

British Embassy officials visited Rakhine State from 29 January to 1 February as part of an EU diplomatic mission. Whilst there were no signs of further violence at that time, the situation remains tense and there have been reports that a number of houses were set on fire in Du Chee Yar Tan village on the night of 28 January.

24 February 2014 Yasmin Qureshi: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the number of people killed in the Du Chee Yar Tan massacre in Burma.

Mr Swire: We have received reports from a range of sources, including UN agencies, non-governmental organisations, community groups and international partners concerning the killing of Rohingya Muslims in Northern Rakhine State in mid January. While the number of deaths reported varies, the majority of sources agree that at least 40 people, mainly Rohingya women and children, were killed.

On 23 January, I called on the Burmese Government to launch an immediate and transparent investigation into the violence—a message I delivered directly to the Burmese Government during my most recent visit to Burma from 28-30 January. The Burmese Government must continue to provide security for all communities in Rakhine State and enable the free distribution of international assistance.

24 February 2014 Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government supports the establishment of an international investigation into human rights abuses against the Rohingya in Burma.

Mr Swire: We believe that a credible and transparent national process is the most effective way of furthering accountability. We are extremely concerned about the situation and, in particular, the recent violence in Rakhine State. I made our concern clear during my most recent visit to Burma, 28-30 January.

Where serious crimes have been committed, those who have perpetrated them must be held accountable for their actions. This should be done through a clear and transparent investigative and prosecutorial process. We welcome sentences passed on those guilty of the violence in June 2012. However, we continue to call for all those accused of having instigated, incited, or carried out violence in Rakhine State to be held to account.

Political Prisoners

Naw Ohn Hla

24 February 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 22 October 2013, Official Report, column 151W, on Burma, whether he has raised the case of Naw Ohn Hla with his Burmese counterpart following her re-arrest in December 2013.

Mr Swire: I raised the issue of political prisoners with U Soe Thane, Minister of the President's Office during my visit to Burma at the end of January. While I did not raise the individual case of Naw Ohn Hla, our embassy in Rangoon remains in close contact with the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) in support of their work to identify those that have been unjustly convicted and ensure they are freed. We continue to make clear to senior members of the Burmese Government that even one political prisoner is one too many.

Daw Bauk Ja

24 February 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 10 October 2013, Official Report, column 352W, on Burma, whether he has raised the case of Daw Bauk Ja with his Burmese counterpart; and what reports he has received on whether she has been released.

Mr Swire: I raised the issue of political prisoners with U Soe Thane, Minister of the President's Office, during my visit to Burma at the end of January. I did not raise the individual case of Daw Bauk Ja as she was released from detention earlier in the month.

Rape & Sexual Violence

12 February 2014 Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of rape, sexual violence and murder of rape victims by members of the military in Burma; and what assessment he has made of whether such crimes amount to a crime against humanity.

Mr Swire: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received a number of reports containing allegations of rape, sexual violence and murder of rape victims by the Burmese Army, including from the non-governmental organisation (NGO) community and Burmese ethnic groups.

I recently raised the issue of sexual violence with senior Ministers, the Commander in Chief and the Northern Commander during my visit to Burma in January. We continue to make clear that where serious crimes have been committed those who have perpetrated them should be held accountable for their actions.

A full independent investigation would be required to make an assessment as to whether crimes against humanity have been committed.

24 February 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid her Department provided in (a) 2011, (b) 2012 and (c) 2013 to support victims of rape and sexual violence by Burmese armed forces.

Mr Duncan: It is not possible to provide a breakdown of DFID funding to support victims of rape and sexual violence by year. DFID provides support for women affected by sexual violence and rape, including referrals to specialist centres, but it is part of a wider package of assistance which is not broken down by these categories.

Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative

03 February 2014 Baroness Jenkin of Kennington : To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Baroness Warsi on 19 November 2013 (WA 184) and 7 January (WA 246–7), what are the details of each existing project in Burma which will be incorporated into Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI); which new PSVI projects will be undertaken in Burma; and how much funding is being allocated to each of those projects.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con): In my previous answer to my noble Friend, I mentioned three projects.

The first of these is a project to train 60 women in Burma in basic legal skills so that they can provide advice to victims of sexual violence on how to access legal and other support services.

For the second project, community leaders and local government staff in 40 target villages will participate in workshops and receive psychosocial training to gain a better understanding of their potential role in preventing sexual violence in their own community. These projects, implemented by Action Aid, aim to address some of the challenges obstructing the right of women to live free from violence in several conflict-affected areas: Kachin state; Kayah state; Rakhine state, Meiktila; and Pyapon. To these, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is providing funding of £221,000 across this financial year (2013/14) and the next (2014/15), with the UN Trust Fund To End Violence Against Women providing the rest of the projects' funding.

To the third project, work with non-state armed groups relating to the wider peace process, the FCO is providing just over £97,000 across the same two financial years. In this case, the implementer has requested that we do not release further information, due to the sensitive nature of their work.

Regarding new project work on the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, the bidding round for projects for the next financial year is not yet underway.

24 February 2014 Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent progress has been made on the Government's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative in Burma.

Mr Swire: We regularly lobby the Burmese Government on preventing sexual violence against women in conflict areas. I recently raised the issue of sexual violence with senior ministers, the Commander in Chief and the Northern Ireland commander during my visit to Burma in January. We continue to invite all countries, including Burma, to join 140 nations and endorse the UN Political Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We are providing more than £300,000 funding, over the next 14 months, to three projects supporting the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) in Burma.

The first will train 60 women in Burma in basic legal skills so that they can provide advice to victims of sexual violence on how to access legal and other support services.

In the second project, community leaders and local government staff in 40 target villages will participate in workshops and receive psychosocial training to gain a better understanding of their role in preventing sexual violence in their communities. These projects will be implemented by Action Aid in several conflict-affected areas: Kachin state, Kayah state, Rakhine state, Meiktila and Pyapon. To these, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is providing funding of £221,000 across this financial year (2013-14) and the next (2014-15), with the UN Trust Fund To End Violence Against Women providing the rest of the projects' funding.

The third project supports work with non-state armed groups relating to the wider peace process, and the FCO is providing just over £97,000 across the same two financial years. In this case, the implementer has requested that we do not release further information, due to the sensitive nature of their work.

Anti-Muslim Violence

05 February 2014 Mr Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 16 December 2013, Official Report, column 417W, on Burma, when representatives of his Department had discussions with Aung San Suu Kyi on visiting places in Burma where anti-Muslim violence has taken place; and who took part in those meetings.

Mr Swire: The British embassy in Rangoon has had a number of discussions with Aung San Suu Kyi about visits to places where anti-Muslim violence has taken place—for example following the British ambassador’s visit to Meiktila in March 2013 and following embassy visits to Rakhine over the course of 2012-13.

We have discussed the wider issue of anti-Muslim violence with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on numerous occasions over the past year, both at ministerial and official levels. Most recently, I discussed the situation in Rakhine with her on 28 January and staff from the British embassy in Rangoon discussed the situation in Rakhine with her on 23 January.

We have not had recent discussions with Aung San Suu Kyi regarding her own visits to places where anti-Muslim violence has taken place.

Humanitarian Aid

24 February 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what humanitarian aid contribution her Department has made to Burmese refugees living in camps on the Thailand-Burma border in (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012, (d) 2013 and (e) 2014 to date.

Mr Duncan: DFID has made the following aid contributions to Burmese refugees living in camps on the Thailand-Burma border since 2010:

	£ million
2010	2
2011	1.7
2012	2
2013	2.5

Money has yet to be distributed for 2014.

Military Training

05 February 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty’s Government what conditions are attached to the current provision of training for the Burmese army in regard to (1) the use of child soldiers, (2) sexual violence by the Burmese army, and (3) commitments by the Burmese army that it will lead to a transition to democratic, civilian oversight of the military in Burma.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Hever) (Con): The Government pursues a policy of addressing the issues of child soldiers, sexual violence by the Burmese Army and the civilian control of the military with the Burmese Government at every appropriate opportunity.

We continue to make it known that where serious crimes have been committed; those who have perpetrated them should be held accountable for their actions.

Our defence engagement in Burma is focussed on promoting adherence to the core principles of democratic accountability, international law and human rights. We have used initial discussions to encourage the Burmese military to step back from politics, address issues such as the use of child soldiers, and take firm and decisive action to tackle sexual violence in conflict areas.

We have communicated to the Burmese military that our engagement with them is subject to continuous review and satisfaction on the part of Her Majesty’s Government of their continued willingness to reform.

24 February 2014 Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to ascertain whether any Burmese Army soldiers who are currently receiving training from the British Army previously committed war crimes, or crimes against humanity.

Mr Swire: There are currently no Burmese Army soldiers receiving training from the British Army. From 6 to 17 January 2014, the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom in collaboration with its academic partner, Cranfield University, delivered the Managing Defence in a Wider Security Context educational course in Burma to 30 Burmese participants, a mix of military officers and civilians. We are not aware of any involvement in human rights abuses by course participants.

Burmese Army

27 February 2014 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 3 February 2014, Official Report, column 6, what recent discussions he has had with the Burmese army on that body's role in the Burmese Parliament.

Mr Francois: The Secretary of State for Defence met President Thein Sein on his visit to the UK in July 2013 and discussed a range of issues. Our Chief of Defence Staff also met the Commander in Chief of the Burmese Army during his visit to Burma last year. In addition, since the start of 2014, both the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire) and Her Majesty's Ambassador to Burma, accompanied by the Defence Attaché, have raised this subject during meetings with the Commander in Chief.

Burma's Census

27 February 2014 Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department is having with the Government of Burma to reduce the risk of the census in March 2014 triggering communal violence and increasing ethnic tensions.

Mr Duncan: DFID officials have regular discussions with the Government of Burma. DFID officials sit on the National Advisory Committee, chaired by Government and that includes representatives from across Government Departments, and have successfully pushed for broader representation of ethnic groups on this national oversight body. During his visit in January the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire) raised the census with the Government of Burma and other interested parties.

ANSWERS TO ORAL PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Military Training

03 February 2014 Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): What support his Department has offered to the Burmese army; and what his Department's objectives are for such work.

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr Mark Francois): Our support to the Burmese military is limited to providing courses that address subjects such as accountability, the rule of law and respect for human rights. We have neither provided any training that would enhance combat capability, nor do we plan to do so. The Burmese military are a central political actor in Burma and are key to the process of political reform. It will only be through engagement with all actors, including the military, that we will see greater democracy in Burma, something I am sure the whole House would welcome.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank the Minister for that clarification and for the tone of his response, but civil society organisations in Burma have expressed concern that, given the human rights situation there, our involvement could be rather premature. What conditions were imposed on the Burmese army in return for UK assistance, and how will the Ministry of Defence monitor the Burmese army's compliance with international law in future, particularly on the use of child soldiers and impunity for human rights abuses?

Mr Francois: There are two points to make. First, the trainees who undertook the course were selected

by the Burmese army. We are not aware of any involvement in human rights abuses by any of those course participants. Secondly, the House should be aware that in a speech at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst last October, which was broadcast on Burmese television and covered by the international media, Aung San Suu Kyi encouraged the UK to engage with the Burmese military and appealed directly to the Burmese army, saying that she wanted it to be a professional military of the highest standard and noting that the most respected armies in the world were apolitical.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is only by engaging with the Burmese army that we can have any hope of positively influencing human rights issues and democratic accountability and that, on balance—it is a balance—that outweighs the risk of coming into contact with individuals who might have been involved in abuses in the past?

Mr Francois: I understand my hon. Friend's question, and I am mindful of his previous military service. The whole House will understand that Burma has a complicated history and that this is a difficult situation, but given that, and given the fact that the Burmese military have an important role in the Burmese political system, if we are to encourage reform, which we would all like to see, it is right that we engage with the military, although we maintain a strong commitment to human rights in everything we do in that context.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): I visited Burma last year as a member of the International Development Committee, and some of us met General Aung Min, who is leading the peace process. I believe it is extremely important that our military develop relationships with their military and pass on some of the lessons we learnt from the Northern Ireland peace process. I strongly encourage the Government to ensure that that happens.

Mr Francois: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and I am mindful that he represents a constituency with a significant military component. The previous Chief of the Defence Staff has visited Burma and engaged with the Burmese military at senior level, and as I said, we are undertaking our course of action partly on the advice of Aung San Suu Kyi herself.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140203/debtext/140203-0001.htm#1402035000012>

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

MYANMAR AND THE PERSECUTION OF THE ROHINGYA COMMUNITY

Date tabled: 25.02.2014

That this House notes that a recent report by the human rights organisation Fortify Rights concluded that the government of Myanmar systematically discriminated against the minority Rohingya Muslim community restricting their family size and mobility; further notes that the United Nations concluded that the Rohingya community is one of the most persecuted in the world; further notes that many members of the Rohingya community have fled to neighbouring countries where they are now living in very precarious circumstances; deplores the persecution of the Rohingya community; and calls on the UK Government to make urgent representations to the Myanmar government to change policy towards the Rohingya community and accept them as full citizens of Myanmar with equal rights.

Total signatures: 8

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE ROHINGYA

Date tabled: 24.02.2014

That this House is deeply concerned by the statement of the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma that the government of Burma is failing to satisfactorily investigate allegations of the mass murder of ethnic Rohingya men, women and children at Du Chee Yar Tan village in January 2014; notes that the government of Burma has failed to respond to every single request by the United Nations to carry out impartial and independent investigations into human rights abuses in Burma; further notes that the government of Burma has rejected and failed to investigate evidence compiled by Human Rights Watch of ethnic cleansing and

crimes against humanity against the Rohingya; condemns the rejection by the Burmese government of the UN General Assembly Resolution call to reform the discriminatory 1982 Citizenship Law; believes that it is now abundantly clear that the government of Burma is not willing to take sufficient action to either investigate or end violence and discrimination against the Rohingya; and therefore calls on the Government to work to establish an independent international investigation into violations of international law against the Rohingya people in Burma.

Total signatures: 20

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Thank you.

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