



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

JAN
2011

HOUSE OF COMMONS

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Burma: Human Rights

10 January 2011 Margaret Ritchie : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to address the human rights situation in Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The Government remain deeply concerned over Burma's human rights record. We seek to raise the issue at every opportunity directly with the regime, with regional countries of influence and in the UN. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed Burma during his visits to China and India, and we continue to work to build international support for the UN to consider a Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights abuses in Burma. At the UN General Assembly Third Committee, we pressed the regime to improve their human rights record through a toughly worded resolution and the UK will reiterate our concerns during the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of Burma.

Burma: Politics and Government

24 January 2011 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what projects his Department funds to promote (a) democracy and (b) human rights in Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues to prioritise the promotion of democratic values and human rights protection in Burma. We have supported a number of projects, inside the country, in Thailand and in the UK, to work towards this aim. Our embassy in Rangoon currently provides funding for three projects in Burma through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's strategic priority fund on human rights and democracy. The projects help to nurture conditions for democratic transition, through supporting civic empowerment and giving people the skills needed to drive change. We work closely with the British Council and Department for International Development to deliver this work.

24 January 2011 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the compliance of the government of Burma with UN General Assembly Resolutions on Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The latest UN General Assembly resolution on Burma in November 2010 expressed deep concern at the regime's failure to address calls in previous resolutions to improve the human rights situation. It highlighted the regime's continued violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and stressed that without significant progress the situation would continue to deteriorate.

It is this continued failure by the Burmese regime to respond to international concerns that underpins UK support for the UN Special Rapporteur's call for the UN to consider a Commission of Inquiry.

24 January 2011 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the political situation in Burma concerning the Government of Burma and armed groups on ceasefire.

Jeremy Browne : The Government continue to receive regular reports of sporadic fighting along the Thai-Burma border. Regime attempts to force ethnic ceasefire groups to join their national Border Guard Force and restrictive elections have further marginalised key ceasefire groups and escalated tensions

We regularly point out to Burma and its neighbours that there is little prospect of lasting peace and stability until the regime pursues a political settlement that takes account of the legitimate aspirations of Burma's ethnic groups. Our Charge d'Affaires in Bangkok raised the issue of refugees fleeing across the Thai-Burma border as a result of recent fighting with the Thai Foreign Minister on 19 January 2011.

25 January 2011 Malcolm Wicks : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent visits HM Ambassador to Burma has made to (a) Chiang Mai and (b) Mae Sot to meet refugees and exiled political activists from Burma.

Jeremy Browne : Officials at our embassies in Rangoon and Bangkok are in frequent contact with Burmese exile groups and political activists in Thailand, and make regular visits to refugee camps for this purpose.

Our Charge d'Affaires in Bangkok visited Mae Sot on 17 to 18 January 2011 where he met with a wide range of exile and refugee groups and discussed their concerns, including the recent fighting on the Thai-Burma border. On his return to Bangkok on 19 January, he raised a number of these issues with the Thai Foreign Minister.

25 January 2011 Malcolm Wicks : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of efforts made by the UN to secure negotiations between the Government of Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of her party and representatives of ethnic groups in Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The efforts of the UN Secretary General and his Good Offices Mission to facilitate national reconciliation and dialogue in Burma have been consistently hampered by the unwillingness of the Burmese regime to co-operate with him, and engage seriously on issues of international concern. This lack of co-operation has included a reluctance to grant visas for visits by the UN Secretary General's special adviser on Burma, and rigid control of the special adviser's programme, restricting his ability to meet key political actors in Burma, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. We nonetheless applaud and strongly support the leadership shown by the UN Secretary General on this issue, and urge him to continue his efforts despite the difficulties. We also call on the Burmese authorities to work more constructively with the UN in the months ahead.

Export: Burma

27 January 2011 Fiona Bruce : To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the monetary value of exports to Burma was in each of the last three years; and what were the main products so exported.

Mark Prisk : Recorded UK exports of goods to Burma were worth just under £4 million in each of 2007, 2008 and 2009. The main exports were beverages and medicinal products in all three years, and power generating equipment in 2007.

The Office for National Statistics estimated UK exports of services to Burma were worth £4 million in each of 2008 and 2009; consistent estimates for 2007 are not available.

The Government discourage trade and investment with Burma and UK Trade and Investment offers no commercial services to companies wishing to trade or invest there. EU sanctions are in place against Burma.

Burma: Foreign Investment

31 January 2011 Valerie Vaz : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the inward investment in Burma made via British Overseas Territories in each of

the last three years.

Jeremy Browne : The UK Government does not hold information on the amount or destination of outward foreign direct investment via the British Overseas Territories.

Ensuring that the Overseas Territories comply with relevant UK international obligations is a priority for the Government. This includes giving effect to international sanctions, including the EU's targeted restrictive measures against the Burmese regime. We have seen no evidence to date to suggest that there is direct investment in Burma via the Overseas Territories that is contrary to existing sanctions.

Burma: EU Action

31 January 2011 Valerie Vaz : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had at EU level on the future of targeted EU sanctions on Burma.

Jeremy Browne : EU Foreign Ministers last discussed Burma at the November 2010 Foreign Affairs Council, attended by the Minister for Europe, my right hon. Friend Mr Lidington. There was agreement on the need for caution in response to recent events, including flawed elections and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Longstanding EU policy is that sanctions will only be eased in response to progress on the ground. Official level discussions on the annual renewal of the EU Council Decision on Burma have since begun in Brussels.

Burma: Ethnic Groups

31 January 2011 Jo Swinson : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on attacks against the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army in Myawaddy, Karen state, Burma.

Jeremy Browne : Fighting between troops and ethnic Karen rebels close to the Thai-Burma border has continued since November 2010 and resulted in thousands of Burmese refugees fleeing into Thailand. Regime attempts to force ethnic ceasefire groups to join a national Border Guard Force in addition to restrictive and deeply flawed elections in November, have further heightened tensions.

Our chargé d'affaires in Bangkok raised this issue with the Thai Foreign Minister on 19 January 2011 and with the Army commander and governor of the affected area of Thailand during a visit to Mae La refugee camp, in Mae Sot, on 17 January.

31 January 2011 Jo Swinson : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representation he has received on the compatibility with the Rome Statute on forced population transfer of the proposed relocation of ethnic Kachin people in advance of the construction of the Myitsone dam, Kachin state, Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The Government have not received any such representations. However, we remain deeply concerned about the human rights and environmental impact of the construction of the Myitsone dam. We understand that construction of the dam will forcibly displace around 15,000 people. In addition, reports suggest the construction of the dam is causing flooding and water shortages, threatening the livelihoods of thousands of people. Our embassy in Rangoon is working with local groups to raise awareness of the situation and staff are scheduled to travel to the affected area shortly.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BURMA: ASYLUM

20 January 2011 Fiona O'Donnell : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions he has had with non-governmental organisations working on the Thai-Burmese border on (a) numbers and (b) treatment of Burmese refugees; and if he will make a statement.

Alan Duncan : UK Government officials in Bangkok are in close contact with the Thailand Burma Border Consortium and other NGOs working on the Thai-Burma border. We are concerned by reports that thousands of new refugees have crossed the Thai-Burma border since November to escape the fighting in east Burma, and reports that some of these have been encouraged to return to Burma by the Thai authorities. The British ambassador to Thailand and Department for International Development (DFID) officials visited the Thai side of the border on 17 January 2011. They raised these concerns with the local military and civilian authorities, and pressed them to treat all those who have crossed into Thailand seeking refuge in accordance with international law and international standards.

DFID is providing about £1.6 million this financial year for food, housing, other supplies and improved access to legal assistance for the 146,000 Burmese refugees living in camps in Thailand.

Burma: Malaria

24 January 2011 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information his Department holds on the areas of Burma which have the highest rates of malaria.

Alan Duncan : According to the World Health Organisation, malaria is endemic in 284 of the 325 townships in Burma. An estimated 68% of Burma's population is at a risk of contracting the disease, the most vulnerable being those who work in logging, plantation agriculture and the construction of roads and dams. The areas with the highest rates of transmission of malaria are in hilly and forested border areas.

Burma: Overseas Aid

26 January 2011 Malcolm Wicks : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether his Department has allocated aid to ethnic Karen refugees in response to the current political situation in Karen State, Burma.

Alan Duncan : The Department for International Development (DFID) is providing approximately £1.6 million this financial year for food, housing, other supplies and improved access to legal assistance for the 146,000 Burmese refugees living in camps in Thailand. We have not provided additional funding in response to the recent upsurge in fighting in Karen state.

26 January 2011 Malcolm Wicks : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding was allocated by his Department to (a) the Mao Tao Clinic and (b) Backpack Health Worker teams operating in Burma in the last year for which figures are available.

Alan Duncan : The Department for International Development (DFID) provided £119,999 in 2009-10 to the Mao Tao Clinic. We are considering a proposal for additional health aid for displaced people in conflict-affected parts of eastern Burma.

31 January 2011 Valerie Vaz : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects and organisations in Burma his Department funded in the latest period for which figures are available.

Alan Duncan : In 2010 the main projects funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) in Burma were: the Three Diseases Fund to tackle HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria; the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund; UNICEF's multi-donor Education Fund; Save the Children's pre-school education programme; and a project working with civil society organisations to help Burmese people to have a better say in local decisions which affect their lives. DFID also provided funding for Burmese refugees in Thailand and people displaced by conflict inside Burma through the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, the International Rescue Committee and other non-governmental organisations.

Further details, including financial allocations, can be found on DFID's project database at www.dfid.gov.uk
Thailand: Education

31 January 2011 Fiona Bruce : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether his Department funds educational projects in Thailand which target migrant children from Burma.

Alan Duncan : The Department for International Development's (DFID's) funding in Thailand focuses primarily on providing food, shelter, other materials and improved access to legal assistance for Burmese people living in refugee camps, and humanitarian assistance for people displaced by conflict inside Burma. Burmese migrant children in Thailand have, however, benefited from one project which included support of £17,680 in 2009-10 for primary education.

Burma: Politics and Government

31 January 2011 Fiona Bruce : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment his Department has made of the needs arising from the humanitarian situation in Burma.

Alan Duncan : A comprehensive assessment is not available. It is estimated that more than one third of all households have insufficient money to meet their basic needs, and 10% of the population do not have enough to eat. One in five children die before they reach the age of five, and one in three is malnourished. 380 of every 100,000 women die unnecessarily in pregnancy or childbirth. 70% of people are at risk from malaria, with 4 million cases and 9,000 deaths each year. Over 95% of health costs are met by people themselves, with government expenditure and international assistance for health care amounting to less than US \$1 per person per year. Education is also severely underfunded. It is likely that poverty is particularly severe in areas of eastern Burma affected by armed conflict, in Chin and Rakhine States, and in parts of the central dry zone. Around 500,000 people have been displaced by conflict in eastern Burma, of which about 100,000 are living in areas of continuing fighting. Around 150,000 Burmese people live as refugees in camps in Thailand.

The Department for International Development (DFID) is helping to address these needs through an aid programme focused on improving health care, basic education and income-earning opportunities for rural people; and providing assistance for people displaced by conflict, including Burmese refugees in Thailand. DFID's allocation for Burma for 2010-11 is £28 million, to which a further £3 million is being added in order to contribute to the relief and recovery effort following Cyclone Giri which hit Burma in October 2010.

HOUSE OF LORDS

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Burma

26 January 2011 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what funding they provide for cross-border aid into Burma.

Baroness Verma : In 2010 the Department for International Development provided £1,057,000 for cross-border humanitarian assistance to Burma from Thailand and China.

26 January 2011 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what the aid budget for Burma will be for (a) 2011-12, (b) 2012-13, and (c) 2013-14.

Baroness Verma : The future aid budget for Burma is being considered as part of the wider review of the Department for International Development's (DfID's) bilateral programme. The shape of DfID's programme and spending over the next four years will be made known after this review.

31 January 2011 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the new MDG3 Fund will accept applications which involve aid being delivered by cross-border mechanisms to ethnic groups inside Burma.

Baroness Verma : The detailed design of the new Three Millennium Development Goal (3MDG) Fund in Burma is still under consideration. It is expected that the fund will focus on aid delivered inside Burma. However, a number of alternative means are available for delivering aid to Burma cross-border from neighbouring countries. In 2010, the Department for International Development (DfID) provided £825,000 in cross-border health sector aid to ethnic minority groups inside Burma.

31 January 2011 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether preparations have been made for the potential humanitarian consequences of the Burmese army breaking ceasefires with armed ethnic groups in Burma.

Baroness Verma : A number of possible humanitarian consequences might arise from an increase in conflict between the Burmese army and armed ethnic groups in Burma. The Governments of countries neighbouring Burma are aware of the potential for increased flows of refugees following any upsurge in fighting, as are the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which provide assistance to Burmese refugees in Thailand. Members of the NGO Committee for the Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT) have undertaken contingency planning for possible increased humanitarian needs on the Thailand-Burma border. The Department for International Development (DfID) is providing about £1.6 million this financial year to two CCSDPT member organisations for food, housing, other supplies and improved access to legal assistance for Burmese refugees in Thailand.

HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATES

ANSWERS TO ORAL QUESTIONS

BBC World Service

26 January 2011 Meg Munn : The BBC World Service provides a vital link to the outside world for oppressed countries and isolated countries such as Burma. The Foreign Secretary will remember the important role that the Burmese service played during the demonstrations back in 2007. Will he assure the House that those considerations will be taken into account in the future, to ensure that we do not pull such important services away from those countries?

William Hague : Yes, the hon. Lady is absolutely right, and I certainly would not agree to the closure of services for Burma, even if it were proposed. The considerations that she underlines, such as the help that the World Service provides to people in oppressed countries, must always be important in the decisions that we make about its services.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

Early Day Motion 112: Human Rights in Burma

John Pugh

30.05.2010

Signed by 148 MPs

That this House sends its best wishes to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who will spend her 65th birthday in detention on 19 June 2010; calls for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in Burma; rejects the elections planned by Burma's generals later this year which, due to election laws and ongoing repression in Burma, cannot be free and fair; condemns Burma's new constitution which is designed to maintain dictatorship in civilian guise and does not grant rights or protection to Burma's ethnic minorities; notes that all diplomatic efforts to reform the dictatorship's sham roadmap to democracy have failed; recalls that the United Nations Security Council, General Assembly, Secretary General and Human Rights Council have all stated that the solution to the problems in Burma lies in dialogue between the dictatorship, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, and ethnic representatives; and calls on the Government to support a United Nations-led effort to pressure the dictatorship to enter into such dialogue.

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

Valerie Vaz

11.10.2010

Signed by 42 MPs

That this House acknowledges reports that Burmese political prisoner Aung San Suu Kyi may be released on the completion of her current term of arrest on 13 November 2010; is concerned that, as this date falls six days after scheduled elections in Burma on 7 November, Ms Suu Kyi may not be permitted to utilise her vote; is further concerned that her National League for Democracy party will play no part in the election, having boycotted it on the grounds of Ms Suu Kyi's and others' continued political imprisonment, her exclusion from political office and party membership and the Burmese junta's new election laws, which ban groups including civil servants and Buddhist monks from joining a political party; firmly believes that Aung San Suu Kyi should be released unconditionally as a matter of urgency; and calls on the Government to condemn strongly the Burmese junta's recent election laws as obstacles to the free and fair conduct on democracy.

Early Day Motion 788: BBC World Service and Human Rights

11.10.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 55 MPs

That this House considers the BBC World Service to be not only a world-class broadcasting network, but also a lifeline for political prisoners and other suppressed persons; strongly believes that any move to cut this service, for example in Burma, will remove vital access to current and impartial information from those such as Aung San Suu Kyi who have no alternative source of unbiased news; further believes that such cancellation would constitute a failure of the Government to promote or support human rights on the international stage; and urges the Government to strongly oppose any reduction in this important service.

Early Day Motion 989: Elections in Burma and Advance Voting

11.11.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 27 MPs

That this House notes with concern reports of widespread manipulation of advance votes during the recent Burmese elections, boycotted by the National League for Democracy; believes that this is yet another blow to the prospects for democracy in Burma; dismisses this election as no more than a sham to reinforce the ruling regime's power; and urges the Government to make further representations for the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2,200 other prisoners of conscience currently detained in Burma.

Early Day Motion 1014: Release of Aung San Suu Kyi

16.11.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 47 MPs

That this House welcomes the unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from her house arrest in Rangoon on 13 November 2010; supports her calls for a peaceful revolution and for dialogue with the ruling regime in order to work towards change in Burma; urges continued international attention to the political system in Burma; and further supports Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's belief that nothing can be achieved without the participation of the people.

Early Day Motion 1034 : Imprisonment of Zarganar by Burmese Authorities

17.11.2010

Tom Harris

Signed by 59 MPs

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

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

02.12.2010

Ritchie, Margaret

Signed by 24 MPs

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

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**for Human Rights, Democracy
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