



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

JAN
2014

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Rohingya

13 January 2014 Mr Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the government of Burma complies with international law and grants citizenship to the Rohingya in that country.

Mr Swire: The situation in Rakhine State and the rights of the Rohingya community were at the heart of discussions between the Prime Minister and President Thein Sein during his visit to the UK in July 2013. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), also pressed for a long term solution on the issue of Rohingya citizenship that is consistent with their human rights and we welcome the Government's stated commitment to initiating such a process. Our ambassador discussed citizenship with the authorities and communities involved during his visit to Rakhine State in December 2013. Together with the UN, EU, US, Australia, France and Japan, British Ministers and officials continue to lobby key Burmese Ministers with responsibility for Rakhine State on the full range of issues, including the need to resolve the citizenship status of the Rohingya community.

13 January 2014 Mr Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking in response to claims that ethnic cleansing is being committed against the Rohingya in Burma.

Mr Swire: The British Government has been among the most vocal members of the international community about the plight of the Rohingya community. We continue to make clear to the Burmese Government that 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 that meets international standards. Further independent investigative work to fully establish the facts would be required for an informed assessment as to whether ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity have been committed.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) staff are currently on the ground in Rakhine State, monitoring the human rights situation. We also continue to lobby the Burmese Government to allow the opening of a country office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, with a strong mandate which allows it to monitor the human rights situation in all parts of the country.

We have raised these concerns repeatedly at the highest levels of the Burmese Government and will continue to do so. Indeed, the situation in Rakhine State and the rights of the Rohingya community were at the heart of discussions with President Thein Sein during his visit to the UK in July 2013. In December 2013, our ambassador discussed human rights issues with the authorities and communities involved during his visit to Rakhine State.

20 January 2014 Baroness Nye: To ask Her Majesty's Government what guarantees have been received from the government of Burma that ethnic Rohingya will be allowed to register as Rohingya in the 2014 census in Burma.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con): British officials hold regular discussions with Burmese officials, members of the Rohingya and other ethnic community leaders about the upcoming census. Our Ambassador most recently raised it with local authorities and communities during his visit to Rakhine State in December 2013.

We understand that the census form will contain a blank space where people can self-identify their ethnicity, such as Rohingya. This is being discussed between the government and members of the Rohingya community.

The British Government is providing significant funding support to the census in 2014 because it will be a vital source of data to inform better government service delivery, help the government manage public finances more transparently, and underpin private investment and job creation. We, with other donors, have been lobbying the Burmese government and the UN to manage the political risks and ethnic tensions that could be associated with the census to ensure as complete and credible a process as possible.

20 January 2014 Baroness Nye: To ask Her Majesty's Government how the government of Burma has responded to requests to change the 1982 citizenship law to allow the Rohingya to have citizenship in Burma.

Baroness Warsi: The Burmese government view is that over 90% of the Rohingya will be eligible for citizenship under the existing 1982 law. We continue to lobby the government on the need to address the lack of citizenship for Rohingya to ensure their fundamental human rights are fully respected in Burma.

The situation in Rakhine State and the rights of the Rohingya community were at the heart of discussions between my Rt Hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Thein Sein during his visit to the UK in July 2013. We note the government's commitment to initiate a process to find a long term solution on the issue.

20 January 2014 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead : To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they are having with the Burmese authorities on the case for regularising the status of the Rohingya people before the planned census in 2014.

Baroness Warsi: British officials hold regular discussions with Burmese officials, members of the Rohingya and other ethnic community leaders about the upcoming census and issues surrounding citizenship. The Ambassador most recently raised both issues with local authorities and communities during his visit to Rakhine State in December 2013. Discussions are also ongoing directly between the government and members of the Rohingya community.

Together with the UN, EU, US, Australia, France and Japan, British Ministers and officials continue to lobby key Burmese Ministers with responsibility for Rakhine State on the full range of our concerns there, including the need to resolve the citizenship status of the Rohingya community.

Political Prisoners

07 January 2014 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his Burmese counterparts to encourage Burma to fulfil its pledge to release all prisoners of conscience by the end of the year.

Mr Swire: Throughout 2013, we closely monitored the implementation of President Thein Sein's pledge to release all political prisoners by the end of the year. We continue to raise the issue of political prisoners, and I did so most recently with the Burmese ambassador, Kyaw Zwar Minn, on 12 December and Minister for the President's Office, Tin Naing Thein, on 22 November. On both occasions I raised our concerns about those prisoners still detained in Burma and made clear that we did not want to see new arrests or political activists re-arrested.

On 30 December, it was announced President Thein Sein had ordered the release of all prisoners and persons facing trial under political sections. I released a press statement on 31 December welcoming this announcement but noting there are individuals still in jail whose status as political prisoners is disputed. I

urged continued dialogue between the government and civil society to review these remaining cases as a matter of urgency.

16 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to obtain the release of La Ring and other political prisoners in Burma.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con): Throughout 2013, we closely monitored the implementation of President Thein Sein's pledge to release all political prisoners by the end of the year. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), frequently raised the issue in meetings with key interlocutors, such as with the Burmese Ambassador on 12 December and the Minister for the President's Office, Tin Naing Thein, on 22 November. On both occasions he raised our concerns about those prisoners still detained in Burma and made clear that we did not want to see new arrests or political activists re-arrested.

On 30 December, it was announced President Thein Sein had ordered the release of all prisoners and persons facing trial for political offences. Mr Swire released a press statement on 31 December welcoming this announcement but noting the individuals still in jail whose status as political prisoners is disputed. He urged continued dialogue between the government and civil society to review these remaining cases as a matter of urgency, and will emphasise this again on his visit to Burma later this month.

21 January 2014 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his Burmese counterpart on the release of political prisoners in that country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Swire: Ministers regularly raise political prisoners with our Burmese counterparts. In November I pressed a senior Minister in the President's Office on Thein Sein's commitment to release all political prisoners by the end of 2013. On 31 December I welcomed further releases but expressed concern over individuals who remain in prison. One political prisoner anywhere in the world is too many.

24 January 2014 Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Kyaw Hla Aung was raised when a Minister in his Department last met the new Burmese Ambassador to the UK: and if he will make a statement.

Mr Swire: I last met the Burmese ambassador to the UK on 20 January 2014. I last raised political prisoners with him, when we met on 12 December, as I did in my meeting with Minister for the President's Office, Tin Naing Thein, on 22 November. In my public statement on 31 December I specifically called for the release of Kyaw Hla Aung, along with Dr Tun Aung and others whose status as a political prisoner is disputed. I intend to raise this issue again during my visit to Burma at the end of this month.

Torture

16 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have held with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture regarding the Kachin prisoners allegedly tortured during interrogation in northern Burma.

Baroness Warsi: We are aware of credible reports of the arbitrary arrest and torture of Kachin men accused of belonging to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), as raised by UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, in his report to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2013. We remain deeply concerned over recent military action and reported wider human rights abuses against civilians in Kachin State.

Though we have not had any recent discussions with the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, officials regularly raise the situation in Kachin State bilaterally with the Burmese government, as well as through the EU and UN. Most recently, our Ambassador discussed human rights with community leaders and the government during his visit to Kachin State in December 2013.

Rape & Sexual Violence

07 January 2014 Baroness Jenkin of Kennington: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Warsi on 19 November (WA 184), which existing projects in Burma will be incorporated into the 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): Our Embassy project work on the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) in Rangoon currently totals over £300,000 for the next 15 months. We are currently supporting 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. In addition, 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. This project will benefit women and girls in Kachin, Kayah, Rakhine, Meiktila, and Pyapon. We are also funding separate work to engage with non-state armed groups in support of our existing work on the wider peace process. We will continue to look for further opportunities to incorporate PSVI in to our work and engage with the Burmese government on this issue.

07 January 2014 Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which women's organisations in Burma that assist victims of sexual violence by the Burmese military receive funding from her Department.

Mr Duncan: 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 recently approved two new projects to tackle this problem in Burma, under the Foreign Secretary's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative.

16 January 2014 Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government has taken to ensure that Burmese army soldiers committing acts of sexual violence in conflict are held accountable for their crimes.

Mr Swire: We regularly lobby the Burmese Government on the rights of women, particularly on preventing sexual violence in conflict areas. We continue to make clear that where serious crimes have been committed, those who have perpetrated them should be held accountable for their actions. During his visit to the UK last year, President Thein Sein welcomed the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict (PSVI). We continue to encourage Burma to join 138 nations and endorse the declaration on PSVI.

More specifically, the focus of our defence engagement in Burma is 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.

16 January 2014 Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many women who have been victims of rapes and sexual violence by Burmese armed forces have received financial assistance from her Department in the last two years.

Mr Duncan: I refer the hon. Member to my previous answer to the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) dated 21 November 2013, Official Report, column 957W.

21 January 2014 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what the outcomes were of their discussions with Aung San Suu Kyi regarding rape and sexual violence by the Burmese army.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con): During Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to the UK in October 2013, the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), discussed our engagement with the Burmese military, the ethnic peace process and ongoing human rights concerns including the use of sexual violence in conflict areas. Aung San Suu Kyi has encouraged our engagement and shares our views on the importance of reforming the military to enable long-term reform in Burma. We are using our defence discussions to encourage the military to step back from politics, tackle issues such as the use of child soldiers, and bring an end to the use of sexual violence in conflict areas. Our Embassy in Rangoon will continue to discuss these issues on a regular basis with Aung San Suu Kyi.

Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative

30 January 2014 Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions the UK, through the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, has had with the Women's League of Burma;

(2) what recent reports he has received of continuing sexual violence by the Burmese Army against women in Burma; and what assessment he has made of the report by the Women's League of Burma contained in *Same Impunity, Same Patterns*, that over 100 women have been raped by the Burmese Army since the election of 2010.

Hugh Robertson: We have received a number of reports containing allegations of the use of sexual violence by the Burmese Army, including the Women's League of Burma's "Same Impunity, Same Patterns" report in January 2014, and other reports from the non-governmental organisation (NGO) community and Burmese ethnic groups.

In January, diplomats based at our Mission to the United Nations (New York) met with representatives of the Women's League of Burma, following the publication of their report. They discussed the range of issues affecting women in Burma, including sexual violence in conflict. Our embassy in Rangoon remains in contact with the Women's League of Burma, along with other NGOs working to address the issue of sexual violence in Burma.

We regularly lobby the Burmese Government on the rights of women, particularly on preventing sexual violence in conflict areas. We continue to make clear that where serious crimes have been committed, those who have perpetrated them should be held accountable for their actions. During his visit to the UK last year, President Thein Sein welcomed the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict (PSVI). We continue to encourage Burma to join 138 nations and endorse the UN Declaration on PSVI.

We are funding work on preventing sexual violence totalling over £300,000 for the next 15 months. We will continue to look for further opportunities to incorporate PSVI in to our work and engage with the Burmese Government on this issue.

27 January 2014 Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether representatives of the Women's League of Burma have been invited to the international summit on sexual violence in conflict being planned by the Government for June 2014; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Swire: The Preventing Sexual Violence summit in June will focus on turning political commitments into practical action and, so as to end the use of rape and sexual violence in conflict. It will be the largest global event ever convened on this issue and will bring together conflict and post conflict affected countries, donors, the UN and other multilateral organisations, NGOs and civil society.

While the list of invitations is yet to be confirmed, we are currently working with our embassies around the world to ensure that there is broad global representation at the summit, including from those organisations working directly on the ground supporting survivors of sexual violence. This work will also consider how best to harness international expertise on this issue in a wider sense, including through related international events.

Shan State

27 January 2014 Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will assess the Shan Human Rights Foundation's reports that villagers in Mung Paeng township in Burma are being used as forced labour by Burmese Government troops giving security to military-linked logging operations above the planned Ta Sang Dam; whether any UK companies are involved in planning or construction of the Ta Sang Dam in Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Swire: We are aware of the reports from the Shan Human Rights Foundation. We are also aware of reports that a British company is involved in the dam project. We make clear to every British company operating in Burma that their investment should be made responsibly and in line with international standards.

The 2013 UNGA resolution on the human rights situation in Burma, co-sponsored by the EU and agreed by consensus, welcomed steps taken by the Burmese Government to improve engagement and co-operation with the UN and the International Labour Organisation and welcomed progress made towards the elimination of forced labour.

We continue to raise our concerns about incidents of forced labour and urge the Burmese Government to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which includes articles that prohibit the use of forced labour. I am due to raise this issue during my forthcoming visit to Burma. The British ambassador frequently raises the wide range of human rights issues, including that of forced labour, with senior members of the Burmese Government.

Kachin State

07 January 2014 Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the use of international law to challenge restrictions on the delivery of aid to internally displaced ethnic Kachin people.

Mr Duncan: The UK and others in the international community regularly press the Burmese Government to ensure that aid can reach those displaced by conflict in Kachin state, and we welcome and acknowledge some positive moves by the Government to allow some UN convoys to reach areas under Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) control. We continue to call on the government to allow unhindered access for humanitarian aid, in line with international humanitarian law, and to implement the agreement signed with the KIO in May 2013 to ensure humanitarian access to all conflict affected areas.

16 January 2014 Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the firing on civilians by the Burmese army at Nam Lin Pa internally displaced person camp in Kachin state when they attacked it in November 2013.

Mr Swire: We were deeply concerned by the fighting in the vicinity of Nam Lin Pa during November 2013 which led to the displacement of many people. In November, while welcoming the UN resolution on human rights in Burma, I expressed concern at the situation in Kachin state.

My statement is available online at:

www.gov.uk/government/news/fco-minister-welcomes-un-resolution-on-human-rights-in-burma

Our ambassador raised specific concerns about Nam Lin Pa during his meeting with the Burmese army's northern commander in December, and urged restraint and an end to the violence. He also specifically called for immediate and unrestricted humanitarian access to those affected in the area, including those displaced from Nam Lin Pa.

22 January 2014 Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether any (a) rice and (b) other humanitarian aid stolen by Burmese Army soldiers in the Nam Lin Pa Internally Displaced Person camp in Kachin State, Burma, in November 2013 was supplied by any agency or organisation funded by her Department.

Mr Duncan: DFID-funded rice was in the process of being delivered to the Nam Lim Pa Internally Displaced Person camp when armed conflict broke out there. Since the violence, our partner NGO has not had access to the camp. They have retrieved over half of the rice from nearby areas.

Human Rights

07 January 2014 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Burma.

Mr Swire: Burma is currently identified as a Country of Concern in our Annual Human Rights Report. We provide quarterly reporting on the human rights situation in Burma on our website: <http://www.hrdreport.fco.gov.uk/human-rights-in-countries-of-concern/burma/>

We welcome the UN General Assembly 3rd Committee Country Resolution on Burma that was adopted by consensus on 20 November 2013. While recognising areas where the Burmese Government has made genuine progress, the resolution, agreed to by all member states including Burma, also emphasises our continued human rights concerns. In particular, we remain extremely concerned by allegations of human rights violations in Rakhine State and the rights of the Rohingya community. These issues were at the heart of discussions with President Thein Sein during his visit to the UK in July.

We welcome the continued peace talks between the Burmese Government and ethnic armed groups, and the agreement made after the latest round of talks in November to work towards a nationwide ceasefire and political dialogue. However, we are concerned by continued fighting in Kachin State, and reports of human rights violations including sexual violence. As the largest bilateral humanitarian donor to Kachin State, we continue to call on the government to allow unhindered access for humanitarian aid in line with international humanitarian law.

We welcome President Thein Sein's order to release all prisoners and persons facing trial under political sections on 30 December, but note there are individuals in jail whose status as political prisoners is disputed. We urge further dialogue between the government and civil society to resolve the continued detention of individuals whose status as political prisoners is disputed. We also remain concerned by the continued arrests, detentions and sentencing of political activists in Burma. We continue to raise these issues regularly with the Government of Burma and call upon them to take decisive action to tackle human rights abuses.

The 2015 elections will be a crucial milestone, and reform of the 2008 constitution will be necessary for continued progress. The constitution needs to enshrine equal rights for ethnic groups and reflect issues around federalism that will arise from the peace process. This will be crucial for sustainable stability.

Interfaith Dialogue

07 January 2014 Baroness Goudie : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether Her Majesty's Ambassador to Burma has hosted any meetings or conferences of different religious and ethnic groups in order to promote tolerance and understanding.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Con): Our Ambassador to Burma has frequently hosted meetings bringing together leaders of different faiths, including during the visit of the Speaker of the House of Commons in July 2013, when representatives from the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist and Muslim faiths discussed how to promote tolerance and understanding in the country. Our Ambassador and Embassy officials meet regularly with representatives of all faith communities, both in Rangoon and in the wider country. Our Embassy in Burma also frequently hosts meetings with leaders of Burma's ethnic minority groups, including during the visit of the International Development Committee in November 2013, and on regular visits to ethnic minority states throughout 2013. The UK is also supporting interfaith dialogue to help build trust between

communities – for example a project promoting peace building among interfaith youths to encourage reconciliation between communities.

International Law

23 January 2014 Yasmin Qureshi: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports the Government has received of violations of international law taking place in Burma.

Mr Swire: The Government receives a wide range of reports concerning the situation in Burma, some of which contain allegations of violations of international norms. For example, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, regularly highlights in his reports to the UN General Assembly areas where international human rights standards have been contravened.

We continue to urge the Burmese Government to adhere to international standards across the full range of issues, from human rights to non-proliferation. We are specially pressing for the opening of an Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the ratification of key conventions and protocols, such as the international convention on civil and political rights and the chemical weapons convention. I will be repeating these calls in person to members of the Burmese Government during my visit to Burma later this month.

Child Soldiers

07 January 2014 Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether she has made an assessment of the needs of demobilised child soldiers from the Burmese Army.

Mr Duncan: The Government of Burma signed an Action Plan with UNICEF in 2012 to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by the Burmese military. In June 2013 the Government released a further 42 children from service in the armed forces. The UK provides central core funding to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) globally, which helps assess the needs of demobilised child soldiers. UNICEF provides rehabilitation, reintegration, family-tracing and other forms of support to former child soldiers in Burma. UNICEF also provides assistance to help the military protect, respect and promote the rights of children.

20 January 2014 Baroness Nye: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they consider that Burma is complying with its agreement with the United Nations to stop recruiting child soldiers.

Baroness Warsi: We welcome the Burmese government's commitment to end the recruitment of child soldiers since signing an Action Plan with the UN in 2012. This agreement is a critical instrument to prevent and end recruitment and use of children in the Burmese Army. We welcome the progress that has been made, which has seen the release of over 600 child soldiers and a nationwide public awareness campaign. But we are clear that more needs to be done. Access to military units and non-state armed groups continues to be restricted, release of child soldiers has been limited, and while recruitment of children has slowed, it has not ceased entirely. We call on the Burmese government to address these issues, and to agree to an extension of the Action Plan to ensure this practice is eradicated. We will continue to raise this issue with the Burmese government at every appropriate opportunity.

Aid

23 January 2014 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to her Burmese counterpart on minimising threats to humanitarian staff and aid operations in Rakhine state.

Mr Duncan: I raised the issue of safe humanitarian access in Rakhine state during my visit in June 2013. In December 2013, a delegation including DFID staff and led by the UK ambassador, raised concerns over threats to humanitarian staff with the Rakhine state Chief Minister directly, and with the township administrator in Myebon—which has been the scene of tensions between local communities and an international non-governmental organisation.

DFID funds the secondment of an expert into the UN's Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Rakhine state who focuses on building relations between local communities and international organisations in order to facilitate safe access for humanitarian agencies. UK officials regularly raise the issue of access in Rakhine state with Government officials and UN partners.

23 January 2014 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to his counterpart in Thailand to encourage that country to provide safe shelter to Rohingya children and their families who arrive there by boat.

Mr Swire: UK Ministers and senior officials regularly raise concerns about the treatment of the Rohingya in Thailand. I raised the issue with Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jullapong Nonsrichai at the inaugural UK-Thailand Strategic Dialogue I co-chaired in Bangkok in May 2013.

Through our embassy in Bangkok, the UK continues to press Thailand to ensure that international protocols governing the treatment of refugees are strictly adhered to by offering protection and assistance to those who land on her shores, by moving those Rohingya detained in immigration detention centres to more appropriate facilities, and offering family reunification of split families.

07 January 2014 Baroness Nye: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the remarks by Baroness Northover on 12 December (HL Deb, col 970), how much they spent on direct bilateral aid for tuberculosis in each country, in the financial year 2012–13.

Baroness Northover (LD): In 2012/13 we estimate that £13.7 million was spent bilaterally through UNITAID, the Stop TB Partnership, research, country programmes and civil society organisations. Of this, £1.2 million was provided in direct bilateral aid for tuberculosis to Burma. In addition DFID's spend on strengthening health systems in partner countries, helps support and deliver TB programmes.

Further details of UK aid expenditure can be found at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development/about/statistics

Military Training

07 January 2014 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what are the anticipated outcomes of providing training for the Burmese army.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Haver) (Con): The UK Defence Academy and Cranfield University will deliver a Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context course in Burma in January 2014. Over a 14 year period, this course has been delivered to representatives from 101 different nationalities and it is exported annually to 12 prioritised nations or regions across the world.

The programme has been designed around a theme that will examine the legal framework by which defence and security operations are legitimised and controlled, and it will draw attention to human rights and international humanitarian law.

The objectives for each participant are that they will have had an education in:

The structures and processes through which security can be legitimately governed and managed;
Professionalism within the defence and security sectors as it pertains to civilian and security personnel;
The significance of leadership, governance and management in the attainment of higher professional standards;
The implications and benefits of enhanced professionalism for the civil-military relationship;
And the wider consequences of enhanced professionalism for international security.

The course is being delivered as part of Her Majesty's Government wider strategy to support democratic reform in Burma and through engagement with the Tatmadaw, we hope to impart the values and ethos of a professional military that operates within a democratic society.

07 January 2014 Baroness Goudie : To ask Her Majesty's Government what will be the cost of their commitment to train 30 Burmese army officers; and from which department's budget those costs will be met.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Haver) (Con): £87,850 is currently allocated for the Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context course which will take place in January 2014. It is funded from the Conflict Pool.

07 January 2014 Baroness Goudie : To ask Her Majesty's Government why the training they are providing for the Burmese army is not being provided in the United Kingdom.

Lord Astor of Haver: The Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context course will be delivered in Burma in January 2014 by the UK Defence Academy and Cranfield University. The course, tailored for Burma, will teach how defence works within a democratic framework. Five personnel will travel and be accommodated in Burma rather than 30 personnel who would need to travel if the course was in the UK. For the numbers attending this course it is more cost effective to send a team to country.

13 January 2014 Mr Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the risk of Burmese army soldiers who receive training from the UK using the skills and experience gained to undermine the human rights of civilians in Burma.

Mr Francois: Courses that we might currently offer to the Burmese military will address the core principles of democratic accountability. Such courses include an examination of the legal frameworks by which defence and security operations are legitimised and controlled in line with international human rights and humanitarian law.

16 January 2014 Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what outcomes are expected from training provided to the Burmese Army.

Mr Francois: Providing defence education to overseas armed forces personnel to the same high standards used by UK armed forces helps improve standards, accountability and among other things, raises awareness of the importance of human rights. It also helps build stability overseas as part of the Government's wider foreign policy goals.

Each participant of the Managing Defence in a Wider Security Context course that recently took place in Burma received education in the following objectives:
the structures and processes through which security can be legitimately governed and managed;
professionalism within the defence and security sectors as it pertains to civilian and security personnel;
the significance of leadership, governance and management in the attainment of higher professional standards;
the implications and benefits of enhanced professionalism for the civil-military relationship; and
the wider consequences of enhanced professionalism for international security.

16 January 2014 Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that Burmese Army soldiers receiving training by UK armed forces have not been involved in human rights abuses in the past.

Mr Francois: The course that we are currently providing was specifically tailored for Burmese officers at the rank of Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel and seeks to address the key issues of accountability, governance and respect for human rights. We have no information to suggest that course participants have been involved in human rights abuses.

We have a long tradition of providing defence education to overseas armed forces personnel and we do so in Burma in support of wider foreign policy objectives.

16 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what training is planned for the Burmese army, with United Kingdom involvement, in 2014 and 2015.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Hever) (Con): The Managing Defence in a Wider Security Context course that is currently being delivered in Burma examines the legal framework within which defence and security operations may legitimately be conducted in accordance with human rights norms and international humanitarian law. The course is for 30 members and includes 23 members of the Burmese military.

In addition to this course that is being delivered in country, an invitation has been offered to a member of the Burmese military to attend a similar course for a mixed international audience, later this year, at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. To support this course, two Burmese students have been funded to take English language exams so that one may be selected to attend in the course.

It is an aspiration to repeat these two courses, one in Burma and one in the UK, in 2015.

16 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government why training of the Burmese army is not taking place in the United Kingdom.

Lord Astor of Hever: I refer the noble Lord to the answer I gave on 7 January 2014 (Official Report, column WA 238) to the noble Baroness, Lady, Goudie. Academics from the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom and Cranfield University are in Burma this month delivering a course called Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context. This course has been tailored for Burma and it will teach course members how defence works within a democratic framework.

Conducting the course in Burma is the most cost effective way of delivering it because only five personnel needed to travel from the UK to Burma, rather than the 30 Burmese personnel who would have needed to travel if the course was held in the UK.

An invitation has been offered however, for a member of the Burmese military to attend a second Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context course which will be held later this year at the Defence Academy. In this instance, participation in the course will be by students from multiple countries and therefore it will be the most cost effective way to provide this education.

16 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether training provided to the Burmese army will recommend that Burmese soldiers refuse orders which involve actions that would constitute human rights abuses.

Lord Astor of Hever: This issue will be raised in a panel discussion of the Managing defence in the Wider Security Context course that is currently taking place in Burma. The discussion will sit within a lecture on Rules of Engagement. The legal position with regards to obeying illegal orders will be articulated and the consequences explained by an international law academic from Cranfield University who specialises in the law of armed conflict.

So far the legal aspects of the course have covered an understanding of how Armed Forces are regulated and controlled within a constitutional framework; the substance and structure of Human Rights and their relevance to military and security forces; and a wide ranging review of the principles and rules of International Humanitarian Law applicable in armed conflict, including rules on the protection of victims, the position of child soldiers under International Humanitarian Law and the conduct of hostilities.

22 January 2014 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government which departmental budget is paying for the training of the Burmese army; and what is the total cost to the British taxpayer of that training.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Hever) (Con): The UK has spent around £90,000 on training for the Burmese military. This training was focused on encouraging respect for the rule of law and human rights and appropriate civil control of the military. It was funded from the cross-departmental Conflict Pool.

22 January 2014 Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether an offer has been made to the Burmese Army of training in establishing mechanisms to investigate and prosecute cases where Burmese Army soldiers are alleged to have committed human rights abuses.

Mr Francois: No.

23 January 2014 Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the UK training of military police in Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Swire: We believe that engagement with both the Burmese military and with the Burmese police is the best way to encourage their participation in the country's democratic regions, and to encourage their own transition into institutions fit for a democratic era.

From 6 to 17 January 2014, the UK Defence Academy successfully delivered an educational course to 30 students drawn from government and the Burmese military with academic partners from Cranfield University. The course did not build any military capacity or capability. Aung San Suu Kyi supported its delivery and attended the closing ceremony.

In 2013, the EU launched a €10 million project to take place over 18 months to provide Burmese police officers with training in community policing and public order best practice. The UK is contributing directly to this project, and four serving British police officers have so far been involved. Former Northern Irish Police officers will lead on a community policing element.

23 January 2014 Yasmin Qureshi: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the training of the Burmese army provided by his Department was (a) requested by the government of Burma or (b) initiated by the UK Government.

Dr Murrison: Military Engagement with the Burmese armed forces (the Tatmadaw) is an important part of HMG's wider policy on supporting democratic change in Burma. The educational course that was recently delivered in Burma was recommended by HMG after a consultative process. We held regular discussions about military engagement from mid-2012 onwards with members of Government, Parliament, ethnic leaders from political parties and armed groups, and religious and civil society organisations, both inside Burma and in Thailand. The discussions during 2013 made specific mention of this course.

The course has been delivered around the world over a 14-year period to 101 nationalities. It is exported annually to 12 prioritised nations or regions across the world from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and to South America. The delivery of this course in Burma has been broadly welcomed by groups on all sides.

23 January 2014 Yasmin Qureshi: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what monitoring his Department plans to undertake to ensure that Burmese army soldiers trained by the UK are not subsequently involved in human rights abuses.

Dr Murrison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 26 November 2013, Official Report, column 210W, by the Minister for the Armed Forces, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois).

29 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of a letter sent by ethnic civil society organisations to the Prime Minister in October 2013 concerning the United Kingdom's military engagement and training with the Burmese army.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Astor of Haver) (Con): We are aware of the letter, of 17 October 2013, from 133 civil society organisations addressed to the Prime Minister, President Obama of the United States and Prime Minister Abbott of Australia expressing a number of concerns and reservations about engagement with the Burmese military.

Whilst noting the points contained within this letter, the British Government has not replied directly. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Foreign Office (Hugo Swire) set out the justification for Britain's engagement with the Burmese military in an article published in the Huffington Post on 12 January 2014, entitled 'Military Reform is Crucial for Lasting Change.' He made clear that we needed to be proactive in encouraging the Burmese military to play its part in the democratic transition: to step back from politics, to accept proper civilian control, and to uphold international human rights and humanitarian law.

In line with our policy of engagement, the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom delivered an educational course in Burma from 6-17 January 2013 to a mix of 30 civilian and military participants which aimed to develop the professionalism of the Burmese Armed Forces within a democratic framework by raising awareness of effective governance and management structures in order to support the policies of a civilian government. The programme also included an examination of the legal frameworks governing international human rights and humanitarian law. It did not develop any combat capacity or capability.

29 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what consultations were held with Burmese ethnic nationalities and ethnic civil society organisations prior to the current provision of training for the Burmese army; and what conditions were attached to that training.

Lord Astor of Hever: Diplomats consulted widely within Burma and with ethnic groups based on the Thai border prior to the beginning of our military engagement. We held regular discussions from mid-2012 onwards with ethnic leaders from the political parties, armed groups, civil society organisations and religious organisations. During 2013, this included specific discussions on the Managing Defence in a Wider Security Context course.

The majority of ethnic minority contacts, including the leadership of ethnic armed groups, have expressed their support for our engagement policy with the Burmese military. We will monitor progress and review our engagement policy accordingly.

29 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what is meant in the prospectus for the Ministry of Defence's Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context course by "the art and science of war"; why human rights are not referred to in that prospectus; whether the course currently being provided to the Burmese army by the United Kingdom is designed for "developed and transitional democracies"; and, if so, whether they consider Burma to fit that category and why.

Lord Astor of Hever: The phrase appears on a webpage of the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom and is derived from the works of military theorists such as Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. The website is in the process of being updated.

The Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context course teaches course members how defence works within a democratic framework. The course that was delivered in Burma from 6-17 January 2013 was specifically tailored for that country and addressed issues of human rights and international humanitarian law. A summary of the syllabus has been released.

Indeed, by providing this course, we have unlocked the door for officials to engage directly with senior members of the Burmese military, a number of whom have asked for our help, to assist them in becoming a more professional and de-politicised organisation. The Managing Defence in the Wider Security Context course is considered to be an appropriate course to aid them in their transition.

29 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what they mean by "professionalisation" as one of the stated objectives for the training currently being provided to the Burmese army; what plans are in place to monitor the impact of the training currently being provided to the Burmese army after it has concluded; and on what basis they consider that the training provided to the Burmese army will lead to any improvement in governance and human rights in Burma.

Lord Astor of Hever: During her speech at Sandhurst in October 2013, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi requested help to aid the Burmese army in becoming as professional and effective as possible and also help in how to depoliticise it. Daw Suu also commented on the admiration that British people have for their Armed Forces. Values, standards and codes of conduct, as well as reputation and ethos are fundamental aspects of a professional Armed Force. Providing defence education to overseas Armed Forces personnel to the same high standards used by UK Armed Forces helps improve standards, accountability and among other things, raises awareness of the importance of human rights

In line with our policy of engagement, the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom delivered an educational course in Burma from 6-17 January 2013 to a mix of 30 civilian and military participants which aimed to develop the professionalism of the Burmese Armed Forces within a democratic framework by

raising awareness of effective governance and management structures in order to support the policies of a civilian government. Over a 14 year period, this course has been delivered to representatives from 101 different nationalities.

Insofar as it is possible, we will attempt to monitor the impact of this engagement in the same fashion that we seek to track the impact of all our Defence Engagement activity. However, active post-course monitoring of participants is not practicable although through long-term dialogue, we will enquire about their progress.
Police Training

08 January 2014 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what involvement, if any, the United Kingdom has in training police and security forces in Burma.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Taylor of Holbeach) (Con): As part of an 18-month European Union funded police training mission four officers from England and Wales police forces have provided expertise on public order training to the Burmese police force. Former police officers with experience of policing in Northern Ireland are also contributing to the community policing component of the EU police mission.

Speaker Shwe Mann

21 January 2014 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what information they have received on Parliamentary Speaker Shwe Mann's alleged involvement in human rights abuses in Burma.

Baroness Warsi: We have not directly received information regarding human rights abuses that involve Parliamentary Speaker Shwe Mann. However, we are aware of open source reporting that points to allegations of human rights abuses during his military career.

Government Expenditure

07 January 2014 Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she had with the Government of Burma about their expenditure on (a) health, (b) education and (c) defence.

Mr Duncan: DFID is providing support to Burma's peace process which includes initial work advising the Government on how to manage reforms in the security sector. DFID is also working with the World Bank on a public expenditure review which has a particular focus on assessing expenditure in the health and education sectors, and which will form the basis for discussions with government.

Arms Embargo

23 January 2014 Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conditions the UK is seeking before the arms embargo on Burma is lifted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Swire: The EU arms embargo and restrictions on the supply of equipment which could be used for internal repression will be reviewed in April. The Burmese military must demonstrate their genuine commitment to reform before any change is considered.

We will continue to use our discussions with the Burmese military to tackle human rights issues such as the use of child soldiers, and to bring an end to sexual violence in conflict areas.

30 January 2014 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions, if any, have taken place within the Government and between the United Kingdom and Burma about the possibility of future arms sales if the European Union arms embargo in respect of Burma is lifted.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con): No discussions have taken place within the British Government or between the British Government and the Government of Burma about the possibility of

future arms sales if the EU arms embargo against Burma is lifted. Any decision on the continuation of the arms embargo, and on restrictions on the supply of equipment which could be used for internal repression, beyond 30 April 2014 is contingent on unanimity amongst all 28 EU Member States. Our view is that the time is not right for these restrictions to be lifted. The Burmese military must demonstrate their genuine commitment to reform before this is considered.

Even in the event that the arms embargo and related restrictions lapse, such exports to Burma would still be subject to the 'Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria'. Under Criterion Two, we would not issue a licence if there was a clear risk that such equipment might be used for internal repression.

UN Special Rapporteur on Burma

24 January 2014 Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that the UK take steps to ensure the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Swire: The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma will next be considered in March at the UN Human Rights Council. The Special Rapporteur plays a valuable role providing independent reporting on the human rights situation in Burma. As the current Special Rapporteur Tomas Ojeo Quintana reported to the UN in October, progress has been made in a number of areas but there are still some very serious human rights concerns. Independent reporting on the human rights situation in Burma remains very important as the country continues with its reform process.

UN General Assembly

16 January 2014 Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made any commitments not to support a UN General Assembly resolution on human rights in Burma in 2014.

Mr Swire: We welcomed the UN General Assembly 3rd Committee Country Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma, which was sponsored by the EU and adopted by consensus on 20 November 2013. While recognising areas where the Burmese Government has made genuine progress, the resolution, agreed by all member states including Burma, further emphasised our ongoing human rights concerns. The EU will decide later in the year whether to sponsor a country resolution at the UN General Assembly. This will depend on the situation and the views of member states at the time.

Andy Hall

20 January 2014 Paul Blomfield: Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal assistance his Department is providing to Andy Hall who has been accused of criminal defamation in Thailand.

Mr Swire: We are aware of Mr Hall's case and are in regular touch with him. As set out in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) Consular guidance, we provide general information about local police and legal procedures, but we cannot provide legal assistance or advice to British nationals. Officials at the British embassy in Bangkok have met with Mr Hall to listen to his concerns and advise him of the consular assistance we can offer.

Information about the consular services the FCO provides can be found at the following link:
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/35519/support-for-british-nationals-abroad.pdf

20 January 2014 Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what EU mechanisms for supporting human rights defenders are being applied in the case of Andy Hall.

Mr Swire: Officials at the British embassy in Bangkok and in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London are aware of Mr Hall's case and have been in regular touch with him since March 2013.

During my visit to Thailand in May 2013, I raised Mr Hall's case with Thailand's Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jullapong Nonsrichai. British embassy staff have also raised the importance of Mr Hall receiving an independent trial with officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

27 January 2014 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations have been made to the government of Thailand regarding reports of a recent attempt by Thai police to persuade British citizen Andy Hall to sign a false confession.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con): Officials at our Embassy in Bangkok, and in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London, are fully aware of Mr Hall's case and have been in regular contact with him since March 2013.

During his visit to Thailand in May 2013, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my Right Hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), raised the case against Mr Hall with Thailand's Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Jullapong Nonsrichai. Embassy staff have also raised the importance of Mr Hall receiving an independent trial with officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Following reports from Mr. Hall of the Thai police attempting to coerce him into the signing of a document of confession, our Ambassador to Thailand wrote to the Thai Ministry for Foreign Affairs expressing an interest in the case and raising concerns around the application of due process.

Burmese Civil Society

07 January 2014 Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which civil society organisations in Burma that (a) overtly and publicly promote human rights and democracy and (b) document human rights abuses receive funding from her Department.

Mr Duncan: The DFID Burma bilateral programme is providing a total of just over £22 million directly to 21 civil society organisations in Burma in 2013-14, some of which are involved in promoting democracy and human rights. Civil society organisations in Burma also receive DFID funding through central and regional funding streams, some of which are involved in promoting democracy and human rights.

Women

20 January 2014 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they are supporting the We Women Foundation in Burma.

Baroness Warsi: We do not provide support to the We Women Foundation in Burma. However, we are currently funding a women's empowerment project through the British Council and Action Aid to boost the representation of women in public life in Burma. We have also funded technical support over the last two years to the Ministry of Social Welfare to fulfil the Burmese government's obligations under the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, to which Burma is a signatory.

Wildlife

07 January 2014 Lord Jones of Cheltenham: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had since May 2010 with the government of Burma regarding the conservation of wildlife and eradication of the illegal trade in wildlife.

Lord De Mauley: Defra officials have engaged with the Government of Burma at various international wildlife conservation meetings, for example, the Global Tiger Initiative's Second Asian Ministerial Conference on Tiger Conservation held in Bhutan in October 2012, and the 16th Conference of Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in March 2013.

Burma's Foreign Minister has been invited to attend the London Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade on 13 February 2014. Burmese Government officials are also invited to the Senior Officials Group that brings together representatives of all the invited Governments and intergovernmental organisations discussing the structure and objectives of the London Conference.

In Burma, in 2010 and 2011 the British Embassy in Rangoon supported conservation work in wildlife sanctuaries in the Mandalay Region and Southern Rakhine State respectively. Embassy officials met the Minister of Environmental Conservation and Forestry in Naypyitaw in April 2013 and raised concerns over the conservation of rare animal species in Hkakabo Razi in Northern Kachin State. Embassy officials also met the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry in Naypyitaw on three occasions earlier this year to discuss wildlife conservation and protection, and urge Burma to attend the London Conference in February 2014. In addition, the Embassy made requests to the Burmese Government to permit the BBC to film in Burma for the 'Wild Burma: Nature's Lost Kingdom' programme.

Trade & Investment

20 January 2014 Baroness Nye: To ask Her Majesty's Government which United Kingdom companies have received advice and support from the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business.

Baroness Warsi: The British Government is supporting the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business in line with our wider policy of championing responsible business practices in Burma.

We actively encourage all British companies visiting Burma to engage with the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business. We can confirm that British companies in the oil and gas, garments, food and consumer goods, financial services and professional services sectors have done so to date.

ANSWERS TO ORAL PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Political Prisoners

21 January 2014 Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): May I ask the Minister on his next visit to Burma to raise the letter that Mr Speaker has written to Minister Soe Thein with a list of political prisoners and to ask for their unconditional release?

Mr Swire: I am travelling to Burma very shortly. I raised some individual cases with some success when I was last there, last year. I should be delighted to take the list to which the hon. Lady refers and raise it with the authorities when I meet them in the coming days.

Rohingya

22 January 2014 Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Several people have been killed and hundreds of civilians displaced in Burma recently in Rakhine state. What representation has the Secretary of State made about greater humanitarian access to internally displaced persons, especially the Rohingya persecuted minority?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise this incredibly important question, which we pursue through our Foreign Office with the Burmese regime. She will be aware that we have put in significant humanitarian support, particularly focused on internally displaced people in the region. Burma mentioned in Human Rights Debate in the Westminster Hall

[Relevant documents: Fourth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, The FCO's Human Rights Work in 2012, HC 267, and the Government Response, Cm 8762.]

23 January 2014 Rory Stewart (Penrith and The Border) (Con): Having spoken about Sri Lanka, will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to reflect a little on the situation in Burma?

Sir Richard Ottaway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I will come to Burma shortly.

More disappointing was the Government's answer to the question whether they still hold the view that there is no substantiated evidence of Sri Lankans returned home from the UK being tortured or maltreated. Simply stating that the Foreign Office is not aware of any new evidence since the original answer was submitted ducks the issue. Will the Minister clarify what is meant by "the original answer"? Can he give us an assurance about cases that occurred before that time?

I turn to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart). Burma, like Sri Lanka, attracted widespread media coverage following the historic visit of Aung San Suu Kyi in summer 2012. We believe that the EU's decision to lift economic sanctions the following year was the right one, given the remarkable progress made in that country. However, that comes with a caveat.

The UK should not hesitate to advocate the reimposition of sanctions if undertakings on human rights are not followed through. Serious reservations remain about the continued incarceration of political prisoners and the failure to bring those responsible for intercommunal violence to justice. Will the Minister update us on the release of political prisoners and accountability for the shocking crimes in Rakhine state?

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): On Burma, I support the comments of the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Sir Richard Ottaway), the Committee Chair. Although we were all delighted at the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and with her visit to Parliament, that is certainly not the whole story. Renewed efforts are needed to tackle the Government in Burma on the continued repression, recent arrests of political activists, and issues relating to Rakhine state.

On sexual violence, I concur with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Sandra Osborne). I support the UK's initiatives in challenging the use of sexual violence in conflict and in the difficult task of trying to change attitudes, to try to stop the collusion in and cover-up of such crimes and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The Government response makes exhortations about approaching other countries to provide expert teams for the painstaking and challenging work involved in tackling the use of sexual violence in conflict, and it mentions the statement made by the Foreign Secretary on 28 November, saying likewise. What progress is being made on involving other countries and providing teams for this work? Although the initiative has been taken, in some ways, by this country, the area is so huge that we need as much help as we can possibly get.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I welcome the Committee's reminder that, although Burma has come a long way, there is still a long way to go. It is important that the lifting of EU sanctions should be used as leverage to press for more concerted action on human rights. The opportunity that provides for economic development and greater inward investment in Burma could in turn promote further democratic reforms. We welcome the EU's continued involvement and the confirmation of an EU-Burma human rights dialogue.

We also welcome the decision of the President of Burma to release political prisoners but, as the Committee's report highlights, there are worrying restrictions on the definition of "political prisoner" and troubling conditions were imposed on the release of prisoners in the past. We urge the Government to renew their efforts to secure the unconditional release of all those unjustly detained and to press for the necessary legal and judicial reforms to end arbitrary or politically motivated detention.

The ongoing tensions in Rakhine state, the discrimination suffered by the Rohingya and the conflict in Kachin state must remain on the international agenda, as is recognised in the latest country of concern update. The Rakhine investigation commission was not sufficient, the irregularities in the Burma's 1982 citizenship law are unresolved and the prejudice against the Rohingya community remains.

Finally, it is important that the UK should continue to press Burma on the role and powers of the military, particularly in light of the British Army's involvement with the Burmese army. Constitutional reforms are also paramount to removing the obstacles to free, fair and inclusive elections next year, including the barrier to Aung San Suu Kyi's standing for President.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mark Simmonds): My right hon. Friend and others were right to mention Burma and the plight of the Rohingya. The Government are highly vocal in expressing concern about that plight. When President Thein Sein visited the United Kingdom in July last year, the situation in Rakhine state was at the heart of discussions between him and the Government. In December 2013, our ambassador in Burma visited Rakhine state and discussed human rights with authorities. We have been clear with the Burmese Government that people must be held accountable when serious crimes have been committed. We continue to lobby the Burmese

Government that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights be allowed to open an office in the country. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), who is the Minister of State at the FCO with responsibility for Burma, is engaged with human rights issues in that country.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140123/halltext/140123h0001.htm#14012366000001>

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Democracy and Development in Burma, HC 821-iii

Thursday 23 January 2014

It is available in the link below:

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/WrittenEvidence.svc/EvidenceHtml/5563>

Oral evidence: Democracy and Development in Burma, HC 821-ii

Tuesday 17 December 2013

It is available in the link below:

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/WrittenEvidence.svc/EvidenceHtml/5322>

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR DEMOCRACY IN BURMA

On 21st January 2014, APPG Burma hold a meeting with Gavin McGillivray, Head of DFID Burma. At the meeting, he discussed DFID's activities, plans and DFID's role in Burma.

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Thank you.

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