



# LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

A summary of Burma-related issues  
in the British Parliament

JAN  
2015

## Answers to Written Parliamentary Questions

### *Rohingya*

**5 January 2015 Rushanara Ali:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what guidance her Department issues to staff on terminology to be used when referring to ethnic groups in meetings with the Burmese government.

**Mr Desmond Swayne:** The Department for International Development has not issued guidance to staff on terminology to be used when referring to ethnic groups in meetings with the Burmese government.

**5 Jan 2015 Rushanara Ali:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether officials of her Department have been instructed not to use the word Rohingya when discussing the Rohingya people in meetings with the Burmese government.

**Mr Desmond Swayne:** No. DFID officials have not been instructed to not use the word Rohingya when discussing the Rohingya people in meetings with the Burmese government.

**5 January 2015 Rushanara Ali:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether officials in his Department have been instructed not to use the word Rohingya when discussing the Rohingya people in meetings with the Burmese government.

**Mr Hugo Swire:** I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 November 2014 (PQ 214863).

Which was:

**25 Nov 2014 Dr Matthew Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what guidance his Department has issued on the use of the word Rohingya in communications with the government of Burma.

**Mr Hugo Swire:** No guidance has been issued and it is a word that we continue to use in communications with the government of Burma. The history of the word Rohingya is contested in Burma, but whatever the history we believe in the right of minorities to choose the name by which they are identified. I and other British Ministers are on record using the word Rohingya.

**22 January 2015 Tim Farron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to the Burmese government on the persecution of the Rohingya people in that country.

**Mr Hugo Swire:** I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 4 December 2014 (PQ 216502). I also discussed the situation of the Rohingya at length in a Westminster Hall debate on 14 January .

PQ referred to:

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

**Mr Hugo Swire:** We have raised our concern at the issues surrounding the Rohingya community in all of our recent Ministerial contacts with the Burmese government. Most recently, I discussed this with the Minister for Immigration and the Rakhine Chief Minister during their visit to the UK in October. We have been clear in our communications with the Burmese government that we expect them to adhere to their international human rights obligations regarding the treatment and welfare of those that do not meet the country's citizenship criteria.

While we welcome the limited citizenship verification in Taungpaw for internally displaced people that has seen some individuals from the Rohingya community granted citizenship status, we continue to urge the Burmese authorities to follow a transparent, inclusive and consistent process in establishing the status of inhabitants of Rakhine State. We are also clear that, regardless of citizenship status, the human rights of all individuals in Rakhine must be fully respected.

**27 January 2015 Valerie Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make it his policy to support the establishment of an independent, international inquiry to investigate allegations of crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide in Rakhine State, Burma.

**Mr Hugo Swire:** We remain deeply concerned by intercommunal violence in Burma, particularly in Rakhine State. While levels of violence have not been repeated on the same scale as in 2012, the situation remains fragile and sensitive. Our approach is to seek an end to all violations by encouraging a resolution of the underlying problems and de-escalating tensions. We have made clear to the government of Burma that allegations of human rights abuses must be dealt with through a clear, independent and transparent investigative and prosecutorial process that meets international standards. We have also put on record our view that an independent investigation, supported by appropriate technical assistance, would make a significant contribution to accountability and reconciliation.

### ***Rape & Sexual Violence***

**5 Jan 2015 Mr David Burrowes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the Government is taking through the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative to help to prevent further sexual violence in Burma and to bring the perpetrators of sexual violence to justice.

**Mr Hugo Swire:** In June, after considerable lobbying from the UK, Burma endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. The authorities now need to demonstrate that they will honour these commitments. We continue to make clear to the Burmese government that all allegations of human rights abuses must be dealt with through clear, independent and transparent investigative and prosecutorial processes which meet international standards.

I raised this issue with Deputy Foreign Minister U Thant Kyaw on 13 June 2014 during the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. More recently, in October the Minister of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), discussed the issue when he met Burma's Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

The UK is providing over £300,000 towards projects training women in basic legal skills, helping leaders prevent sexual violence in their own communities and working with non-state armed groups to promote adherence to international standards in respect of sexual violence and gender discrimination. Additionally, in conflict areas in Burma, the Department for International Development (DFID) provides over £500,000 in humanitarian funding directly supporting the prevention of sexual violence and assistance to survivors.

### ***Political Prisoners***

**27 January 2015 Naomi Long:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department has taken in response to the increase in the number of political prisoners in Burma in the last year.

**Mr Hugo Swire:** The UK actively pushes for the release of all political prisoners in Burma. The most recent official figures from the government of Burma suggest that 27 political prisoners remain in prison, having dropped from over 2,000 in 2011. However these figures are contested, and a leading local non-

government organisation – the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) – suggest that as of January there are 160 political prisoners with another 203 facing trial.

Clearly, the UK is very concerned by the increase in political prisoners witnessed over the last year. Officials from our Embassy in Rangoon meet regularly with members of civil society on this issue, and we continue to raise our concerns with the government of Burma at Ministerial level. I raised our concerns over political prisoners with Deputy Foreign Minister Thant Kyaw in June 2014. Most recently, the Minister of State at the Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Ms Featherstone), raised this issue directly with the Minister for the President's Office, U Soe Thein, during her visit to Burma this month.

We continue to lobby on individual cases. We also raise our concerns publicly in our Annual Report on Human Rights and in multilateral fora such as the UN General Assembly, where the UK co-sponsored a Resolution last year that called for the unconditional release of all political prisoners.

### ***Diplomatic relations***

**15 January 2015 Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to improve UK-Burmese diplomatic relations; and if he will make a statement.

**Mr Hugo Swire:** The UK's relations with Burma have improved since 2011 when President Thein Sein embarked on a programme of reform. Since then we have been a critical friend, using our bilateral relationship to encourage reforms and speaking out where Burma has fallen short of accepted international standards of democracy and human rights. As a result of our engagement, the UK has been able to increase our access and influence with the government of Burma.

Since the reform process began, the government of Burma has made progress in a number of areas, not least by releasing hundreds of political prisoners and child soldiers, and opening up space for the media and civil society to operate. The UK's support has included a package of development assistance, worth £82 million in financial year 2015-16. We will continue to use our diplomatic relations to encourage reform in 2015, when elections due to be held towards the end of the year will be a critically important milestone in Burma's transition to a more open and democratic society. At the same time, we recognise there is still a lot further to go, including on human rights, and we will continue to make our concerns known to the government of Burma, both publicly and privately.

### ***Democratic reform***

**15 January 2015 Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of progress by Burma towards establishing democracy; and if he will make a statement.

**Mr Hugo Swire:** We recognise the significant steps towards democratic reform that the government of Burma has taken over the past two years. This includes releasing hundreds of political prisoners and discharging hundreds of child soldiers. It has also included lifting of restrictions on the media, which has opened the space for the growth of a vibrant civil society.

At the same time, we recognise much more needs to be done, and that in some areas progress has declined. We remain deeply concerned about the recent intimidation, detention and sentencing of reporters and political activists, the appalling situation of Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, and about ongoing conflict in ethnic areas and associated human rights abuses, including sexual violence. All of our concerns are thoroughly documented in our Annual Report on Human Rights, and the quarterly updates to them. I personally raise our concerns regularly with the government of Burma.

Burma's elections, scheduled for October or November this year, will be a critically important test of the government's commitment to see the reforms through to their conclusion. It is vital for Burma's future development that these are inclusive and credible. The Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) made this point to President Thein Sein at the Group of Twenty (G20) summit in Brisbane in November.

## Healthcare

**23 January 2015 Jeremy Lefroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps the Government is taking to combat the spread of drug-resistant malaria.

**Mr Desmond Swayne:** DFID has a portfolio of investment and action across all five pillars of the World Health Organisation's Global Plan for Artemisinin Resistance Containment, through our bilateral, multilateral and research support in Africa and Asia. This includes support to programmes that aim to replace artemisinin monotherapy with artemisinin combination therapy in the private sector in Burma; the Tracking Resistance to Artemisinin Collaboration (TRAC) research programme; financial support to an Asian Development Bank programme in South-East Asia, which aims to strengthen regional political leadership and ownership of the issue; and to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria's regional Artemisinin Resistance Initiative.

DFID is also working with the World Health Organisation and other donors to develop strategies to investigate the most effective ways to identify resistance and contain the spread.

## Westminster hall debate on Rohingya Community (Burma)

**14 January 2015 Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Main, not least because I know that you take a particular interest in matters affecting the part of the world on which I am about to speak through your work with the all-party parliamentary group on Bangladesh. I am grateful for the opportunity to put some issues on the record. In September 2012, I introduced a very good debate in this Chamber, to which the Minister responded. I wanted this opportunity to invite the Minister to update the House on the progress made by the Foreign Office, and to reiterate some of the points I made previously and make some new ones.

Back in September 2012, I said:

"This is an issue of human rights, justice and desperate humanitarian need, to which we must respond."—  
[Official Report, 11 September 2012; Vol. 550, c. 1WH.]

In the two and a half years since that debate, I would have hoped to have seen significant progress. Sadly, I do not believe that we have seen such progress. As I am sure the Minister will recall, the debate in 2012 came on the back of deeply ugly sectarian violence that had broken out between the Buddhist Rakhine community—

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** The hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) is in his position and the Minister has also returned from the Division, so we will go ahead with the debate, which will now finish at five minutes past 10—10 minutes past 5. Oh dear, it has been a long day.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** As I was saying, when I last secured a debate on this subject in Westminster Hall in September 2012, it was on the back of ugly sectarian violence in Rakhine between the Buddhist community and the Muslim Rohingya people. At that time, tens of thousands of the Rohingya community were being displaced. In Sittwe, for example, the Rohingya people were driven out of their homes, and there were reports at the time of mobs burning down houses. Indeed, various non-governmental organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, reported that the police and other paramilitary forces had opened fire with live ammunition on members of the Rohingya community.

I am sure that Members will recall that the tensions at that time were exacerbated by the suggestion by the Burmese President at the height of the crisis about handing over the Rohingya community to the UN high commissioner for refugees until they could be resettled in some third country.

As I remember, in that earlier debate all Members who contributed spoke out against the Burmese regime and we all would have hoped for some progress. However, today in Rakhine there are still 140,000



Rohingya living in squalid temporary camps, which are routinely described by agencies as being among the worst refugee camps in the world. Basic necessities such as food, clean water and health care are scarce; job opportunities for the Rohingya are virtually non-existent; and often the Rohingya are banned from leaving the camps by security services. Those Rohingya who leave those camps illegally often travel to Thailand and Malaysia, but they often end up as the victims of human traffickers. The Arakan Project found that in November alone, nearly 12,000 Rohingyas fled Rakhine state. Since 2012, a total of around 80,000 Rohingyas have fled Burma by boat.

The picture remains depressing for that part of the world. I will cite a few more statistics that I came across while doing my research for this debate. Today, 70% of the Rohingya still have no access to safe water or sanitation services; in some Rohingya districts, there is just one doctor per 160,000 people; only 2% of Rohingya women give birth in a hospital; and 44% of the population of Rakhine state live below the poverty line, which is almost 20% higher than the average figure in most parts of Burma.

**Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab):** Does my hon. Friend agree that what he is saying tallies with what Tomás Ojea Quintana of the UN said in April last year? He said that “the deprivation of health care is deliberately targeting the Rohingya population, and...the increasingly permanent segregation of that population is taking place”, and that “human rights violations are connected to discriminatory and persecutory policies against the Rohingya Muslim population” by the Burmese Government.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** My hon. Friend puts it well. I know that she has spoken out on these issues in the past and I am pleased that she has had the chance to put her views on the record again.

I have spoken to aid agencies that work in this part of the world. Very few of them want to be named for fear of what that would mean for the work they do, but they conclude that there is a systematic approach to oppressing the Rohingya people. International organisations are forced to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Burmese Government, which is more restrictive in that part of the world than in many other parts. The Burmese Government often use “security concerns” to block humanitarian access to certain places. Foreign staff working for aid agencies need special visas to enter Burma and only a limited number of visas are given. Indeed, aid workers are often denied visas. Travel authorisations are needed for Burmese humanitarian staff to go to remote areas.

In addition, staff working for international organisations, particularly Rohingya staff, face additional travel restrictions, which have become much stricter since 2012. Rohingya humanitarian aid workers working for organisations, including the UN, have been subject to arbitrary arrest and detention.

Overall, obtaining access for humanitarian purposes has become more difficult, and more restrictions have been put in place since 2012. Aid organisations, including Médecins Sans Frontières, have faced threats of expulsion or have effectively been expelled permanently from Rakhine state.

**Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab):** As one who campaigned for a long time when the Burmese elected politicians were in jail, does my hon. Friend agree with Aung San Suu Kyi when she suggests that the reforms in Burma have stalled during the last two years? It is extremely bad that the Rohingya in particular seem to be targeted. Life is being made as awful as possible for them, with 100,000 of them having gone, including 10,000 in the last two weeks. What is going on?

**Jonathan Ashworth:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention; she is absolutely right, as is Aung San Suu Kyi. As an aside, I say to my right hon. Friend that I am delighted that she is standing again at the next election, because she is an eloquent and persuasive voice on matters of international human rights.

The Burmese Government will often deny responsibility and claim that much of the anti-Rohingya sentiment exists at a local level. But of course we all know, as has been discussed in great detail in previous debates, that the flames of anti-Rohingya sentiment are very much fanned by the denial of Burmese citizenship to them. A nasty, bigoted piece of legislation—the 1982 citizenship law—stripped Rohingya Muslims of their legitimacy in the country and officially declared them foreigners. In effect, they ceased to exist legally and were denied any form of citizenship.

I have been very much influenced on this issue by Benedict Rogers of the Christian Solidarity Worldwide network. He writes persuasively and passionately about these matters. I know that in his spare time he is a Conservative activist, so the Conservatives would do well to encourage him to join us all in this place; I hope I have not ruined his chances by saying that. He writes that “the Rohingyas face restriction in almost every sphere of life. To travel from one village to another, they are required to obtain permission from at least three local authorities...such permission can be difficult to obtain and often takes up to five days.” He goes on to say that the Rohingya even need “permission to marry, and approval can take several years”.

He also says that “Rohingya are not permitted to be employed as government servants, either as teachers, nurses or in other public services”.

In addition, those Rohingya who succeed in education are often refused entry to higher education. Of course, it is the citizenship law that is fuelling much of this anti-Rohingya sentiment in Burma. I accept that there is great debate about how long the Rohingya have been in this part of the world, but I think all of us can agree that they have been there for generations.

**Yasmin Qureshi:** On the question of citizenship, does my hon. Friend agree that the new rules are harsher than in 2010? Rohingya people were able to cast their vote at the last election, but they cannot do so now because of the new rules.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention and she is absolutely right. If she will bear with me, I will touch on that issue when I refer to the Rakhine state action plan.

I just wanted to put on the record that even though there is debate about how long the Rohingya people have been part of Burma, everyone can accept that they have been there for some generations; they have certainly been there since Burma gained independence. Indeed, it was the first President of Burma who said that “Muslims of Arakan certainly belong to the indigenous races of Burma. If they do not belong to the indigenous races, we also cannot be taken as an indigenous race”.

**Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD):** Is this situation not compounded and made far worse by the fact that the Rohingya are regarded as stateless not only within Myanmar-Burma, but within Bangladesh? There is nowhere for these people to go.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point; I know that he has spoken out many times on this issue. The focus of this debate is indeed on Burma-Myanmar, but there are questions for the Bangladeshi regime as well; perhaps the Minister could touch on Bangladesh when he responds.

I am sure that many hon. Members welcomed the United Nations General Assembly’s adoption of a non-binding resolution in December, which urged the Burmese Government to grant Rohingyas full citizenship and equal access to services. The UN also called for an office of the UN United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to be opened in Burma without delay.

Although I especially welcome that move by the UN, I am deeply disappointed that the Burmese Government still refuse, despite that UN resolution, even to acknowledge the Rohingya as an ethnic group and criticise the UN for using the term “Rohingya”. They have suggested that reports of Muslim persecution are a “fabrication”.

I am sure that, because of international pressures, the Burmese Government have tried to make progress in Rakhine state, but I do not accept that it is progress. The Rakhine state action plan was introduced last September, to much fanfare in that part of the world. However, looking into it, we see that it means that the Rohingya can secure citizenship only if they register themselves as Bengali, therefore implying they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

As the hon. Member for Bradford East (Mr Ward) intimated, Bangladesh has not exactly been helpful in this situation. Even if the Rohingya conform to that Rakhine state action plan, in reality they are only receiving partial citizenship rights. It is unacceptable that Burma should not give the Rohingya full citizenship, as the UN has called for.

The Minister said in the debate in September 2012—I know that he is committed to this cause: “the UK has been and will continue to be one of the most active, vocal members of the international community in raising concerns about the plight of the Rohingya community.”—[Official Report, 11 September 2012; Vol. 550, c. 20WH.]

We were reassured by those words. In this debate, I want to give the Minister the opportunity to update us on the work that he has done, and the work of the Foreign Office, in the last few years. However, I want to put some concerns on the record. The Minister will be familiar with the concerns about citizenship and sectarian violence, but I hope that he will respond to other issues as well.

Campaign groups, for example, have told me that there is a sense that British diplomats have begun to avoid using the term “Rohingya” in meetings with the Burmese Government. They feel that the Burmese Government are putting pressure on diplomats to stop using that word. I would be grateful if the Minister commented on that. I did a quick trawl of Hansard; I may be wrong—I do not want to speak out of turn—but I cannot find, for example, the new Foreign Secretary using the word. The previous Foreign Secretary was very committed to the plight of the Rohingya. As I say, I might have just missed it, but I would be grateful if the Minister commented about whether we are getting pressure from the Burmese Government to avoid using that word.

Humanitarian access has been denied, or the regime has made it more difficult, deliberately, to get humanitarian aid and relief into that part of the world. I would be grateful if the Minister commented on that. Does he agree that perhaps it is time for a UN-level initiative to help us get the humanitarian aid and relief that is so desperately needed into that part of the world?

Human rights abuses remain. I would be interested to hear the Minister update us on his view, or the Foreign Office’s view, on human rights abuses in Burma.

I understand why we want to increase trade with Burma; I am a great believer in increasing international trade. Leicester, the city I represent, trades with all parts of the world. However, many people are deeply concerned that we are trying to increase trade with Burma, for understandable economic reasons, yet we still seem to turn a blind eye to some of the human rights abuses. I would be grateful for the Minister’s comment on that.

I end with a piece of good news. Earlier this month, the Pope appointed the first Cardinal in Burma, Cardinal-elect Bo. We were hoping that he would visit Westminster in the next few weeks, but I think he has had to rearrange his visit, which we look forward to. One of the first things that Cardinal-elect Bo did on his appointment was to call for the citizenship of Rohingyas to be recognised. He argued that “true peace and real freedom hinge on respect for Burma’s ethnic and religious diversity”.

I wholeheartedly agree. I am sure that the Minister does, too, and I look forward to his response to the points I have put on the record.

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire):** I am grateful to you, Mrs Main, for giving me so long to respond to the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth): many hours, if what you said originally was correct and we are not finishing until after 10 o’clock this evening. I shall try to condense my remarks to ensure that we end a little bit sooner than that.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate, as I congratulate other hon. Members across the political divide for continuing to keep Burma firmly in the spotlight. This is the second debate on Burma within the last two months, both sponsored by the hon. Gentleman, which shows how interested and concerned the House is, particularly in a year so significant in that country’s transition to democracy. As I said in the House on 19 November, I, too, take a close personal interest, having visited Rakhine state in 2012, including some camps to which the hon. Gentleman alluded, and Kachin state last year. I was the first western Minister to travel to the former and the first British Minister to visit the latter since Burma’s independence. Since that time, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for International Development, visited Rakhine in August. During that visit, he announced an increase in our development funding to Burma up to £82 million in 2015-16. That underscores our commitment to Burma’s future.

As I have said, 2015 is a critical year for Burma. The elections in November will be followed closely by the international community. This will be a chance for the current Burmese Government to show their commitment to progress and transition. We remain in close touch with all those involved and continue to assist in any way we can. Of course, as we have said on many occasions, this path will be neither smooth, nor without challenges, nor indeed without setbacks. We have made our concerns extremely clear on numerous occasions.

However, I cannot agree with those who are wholly negative about the progress that has been made, or indeed with those who argue that no progress has been made at all. I believe it is naive in the extreme to think that this would have been an easy transition. Praise is due where significant change for the better has taken place. I can only pray in aid what Yanghee Lee, the new UN special rapporteur on human rights in Burma, said: “far-reaching reforms have dramatically transformed the political, economic, social and human rights landscape”.

That is not to say that we are in any way complacent. That is why we established, last year, the cross-Government Burma unit, to better co-ordinate our work there, and why we published, I believe for the first time ever, a public paper, “UK Activities in Burma”, which sets out all that the Government are doing. Of course, I share the hon. Gentleman’s concerns for the Rohingya. I use that term now and I shall continue to use it as I always have done. Their plight remains one of the greatest challenges Burma faces. I have raised this issue during my visits to Burma and I raised it with the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister in June, with the Minister for Electric Power in July, and when the Burmese Minister for Immigration and the new Rakhine Chief Minister came to London in October. I have also met Rakhine community and religious leaders, hearing from them directly about the many issues they are facing. Officials at the British embassy in Rangoon remain in close contact with Rohingya representatives and international organisations.

In addition to raising our concerns in private, we comment in public. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office annual report on human rights, and its quarterly updates, give a frank assessment of Burma’s human rights performance, including in Rakhine. We were instrumental in pushing for the resolutions at the UN—we definitely agree that the UN could take on a greater leadership role here—comprehensively setting out our concerns about the situation in Rakhine state, and calling on the Government of Burma to uphold international human rights standards.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about access and humanitarian aid. In parallel to all those moves, what we have been doing at the UN and our conversations with Ministers, we are helping to alleviate the dire situation on the ground. We are giving £12 million in aid to Rakhine state to support much-needed shelter—some of the shelters I saw when I went there were woefully inadequate and must be even worse now—food, water sanitation and hygiene programmes, and giving a further £4.5 million towards projects that support livelihoods.

The hon. Gentleman is right when he talks about the problems that some of the non-governmental organisations are facing, including access. I discussed Rakhine and humanitarian access with the Burmese Minister for Immigration and the Rakhine Chief Minister in October last year. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for International Development, specifically raised with them the difficulty of getting humanitarian assistance to displaced people in Rakhine.

**Yasmin Qureshi:** The Minister said that he had been to some of the camps. The assistant secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, Kyung-wha Kang, said:

“I witnessed a level of human suffering in IDP camps that I have personally never seen before...appalling conditions...wholly inadequate access to basic services including health, education, water and sanitation.” What has changed?

**Mr Swire:** As I said, I was the first western Minister to travel to Rakhine, but that was in 2012. From my conversations with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for International Development, who was there in August, I do not imagine that the situation has got better. If anything, it has got worse. I saw inadequate shelter, lack of access to food and much worse things, in a sense, than that, including a real feeling of fear. We insisted at the time that the Burmese Government should ensure that those people were properly secured. They looked as if they were surrounded by the military, but that was to protect



themselves. There was also a feeling where new communities were being built that they were away from their traditional communities, and that that was going to entrench segregation, which is completely counter-productive in trying to bring both communities together.

Beyond tackling immediate needs, we are supporting Burma's transition to a stable, prosperous and democratic country that can play a positive role in the international community. That is why human rights must remain at the heart of the British Government's efforts to support Burma down the path of reform it embarked on in 2011, why we will continue to be an honest and critical friend to Burma, raising our concerns unapologetically, and why we are helping to create the conditions for credible elections in November this year. It is why we support the peace process in Burma, moving negotiations towards a nationwide ceasefire agreement and a framework for future political dialogue. We will continue to work closely with the Burmese Government, the opposition, civil society, businesses and communities, and the military, to achieve tangible progress.

**Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab):** Everyone acknowledges the superb work that the Foreign Office has done on the diplomatic front and to support a fledgling democracy, but I have three questions for the Minister. Has he met with the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK? What assessment has he made of the Rohingya not being counted in the census in Burma? Does he agree with some of the organisations that have said that crimes against humanity have been committed?

**Mr Swire:** Let me deal with the last question first. Some have talked about crimes against humanity and genocide and such things, but that is for international courts to decide. To answer the hon. Lady's second question, we have made our views clear on the whole census process, the fact that some of the Rohingya were excluded and the process of self-designation. We are extremely unhappy about the census. Her first question was about whether I had met a group. I have met so many that I might have met it, but I do not want to mislead the House. In the interests of accuracy, I will write to her on that subject, if I may.

Let us be clear: the many challenges faced by all communities in Rakhine are deep-rooted, complex and interrelated. We acknowledge that the Burmese Government have begun to take steps to address those issues, including the appointment of the new Rakhine Chief Minister last year.

In June, the Burmese Government began a pilot citizenship verification process for those in Rakhine whose citizenship status has not been recognised. It was conducted in a camp for internally displaced people. More than 1,200 applications were processed, with many obtaining naturalised citizenship and some obtaining full citizenship, but that falls far short of what the international community expected. We and others have consistently stressed the need for a transparent, consistent and inclusive citizenship verification exercise that adheres to international standards, and we will continue to do so. That should include consultation with all communities in Rakhine.

That having been said, we welcome the Burmese Government's efforts to produce a comprehensive action plan for Rakhine. The hon. Member for Leicester South said he did not like some of the things in that action plan, but it has not, to the best of my knowledge, been published yet. Only a draft has been seen, and we still hope the Burmese Government will amend it before the final version is printed.

I made all those concerns clear to the new Burmese Minister for Immigration and the Rakhine Chief Minister during their visit to London in October. As with the citizen verification exercise, it is vital that all communities within Rakhine are consulted over the action plan. Our ambassador in Rangoon, along with our international partners, has made those concerns clear to the Burmese authorities. While welcoming the steps taken, we will judge progress on action, not words. Many severe challenges remain and the humanitarian situation in particular must be addressed urgently.

I continue to update the House as best I can. On 8 January, two letters written by me and dated 4 January were published on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website. One was on Burma's political reforms, in which I refer, the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear, to the rights of the Rohingya. The other was on sexual violence in Burma. The publication of both letters, in response to huge amounts of interest from Members and their constituents, shows that we are not complacent. We take these things extremely seriously and follow events in Burma extremely closely.

To conclude, we know that a great deal remains to be done in Rakhine, and we will not let up in our calls for the human rights of all Burma's people, not least the Rohingya, to be respected. We believe that the best way to achieve progress is to engage with all parties in Burma to help embed reform, and to encourage its transition towards peaceful, democratic governance. I again thank the hon. Gentleman and all who have contributed to the debate for giving me this and the previous opportunity to set out the Government's position.

Question put and agreed to.

Sitting adjourned.

## Burma mentioned in House of Lord's debate on Counter-terrorism and security bill

**13 January 2015 Baroness Berridge:** (...) It is very sad to note that only a few hours ago on the Times Twitter feed there was the report—and I will note with interest the response of Chancellor Merkel—that the anti-Islam demonstration in Dresden this evening made a demand for the German Government to ban the return of jihadi fighters. I am not that comfortable with those bedfellows in relation to this power, but with it we are in danger of undermining the fundamental aspect of collegiality in international law and international relations. The collegiality principle underpins the system that countries accept their own citizens back, without condition or permit to return, so that they can prosecute their case on their own soil. I hope that Her Majesty's Government can answer the concern that has been raised by the independent reviewer and in the Joint Committee on Human Rights. What will we do if other nations start doing this to us, nations who may use—in our view—spurious national security reasons, such as those mounted by Burma about Rohingya Muslims, to introduce conditions for the return of their citizens to their countries? I fear some kind of long-term tit-for-tat like the Cold War, and pockets of citizens in different countries who cannot go home to their respective nations. (...)

For full debate, see:

[http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/150113-0002.htm#st\\_101](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/150113-0002.htm#st_101)

## Burma mentioned in Child Abuse Inquiry Debate

**22 January 2015 Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab):** (...) Moreover, the Minister for Crime Prevention, the right hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone), who is sitting next to the Home Secretary and who has responsibility for these issues, said that she had not seen the letter that the Home Secretary had sent to the panel, because she was in Burma. (...)

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150122/debtext/150122-0001.htm#15012261000007>

## Burma mentioned in Sustainable Development Goals debate

**28 January 2015 Mary Creagh:** (...) This year, 2015, is an historic year for development. The countries of the world will come together at the United Nations in September to agree the sustainable development goals, and in Paris in December we will agree a framework to tackle climate change. These agreements would be priorities for a Labour Government. We have called today's debate—the first since the debate on Burma in 2008—to set out the differences that we see between this coalition Government and Labour on these vital issues. (...)

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150128/debtext/150128-0003.htm#15012846000001>

## Early Day Motions

### **BURMA (Early Day Motion 182)**

Date tabled: 25.06.2014

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

Signatures: 21

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

Date tabled: 22.07.2014

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

Signatures: 65

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

Date tabled: 02.12.2014

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

Signatures: 34

### **SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN BURMA (EARLY DAY MOTION 748)**

Date tabled: 29.01.2015

That this House condemns the rape and murder of Maran Lu Ra, aged 20 and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin, 21, by members of the Burma Army; notes that these two women were Kachin teachers working with the Kachin Baptist Convention; further notes that local police have taken no action; further notes that the Kachin Women's Association Thailand has documented over 70 cases of gang-rape, rape and attempted sexual violence by Burma Army troops in Kachin and northern Shan states since the Burma Army broke a 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army in June 2011; also notes that the government

of Burma signed the Declaration to End Sexual Violence in Conflict last year but has failed to implement its provisions; calls on the Government to urge the government of Burma to stop immediately the military offensives in these ethnic areas and bring the perpetrators of sexual violence to justice; and further calls on the Prime Minister to enact provisions in the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative to send a team of experts to Burma to hold an inquiry and investigate this case.

Signatures: 1

**Did you find this useful?**

If so, please make a donation to support our work: [www.burmacampaign.org.uk/donate](http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/donate)

Thank you.

**Published by Burma Campaign UK, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT  
[www.burmacampaign.org.uk](http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk) tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



**for Human Rights, Democracy  
& Development in Burma**