



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

JUNE
2011

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Humanitarian Aid

6 June 2011 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what meetings they have held with United Nations humanitarian agencies regarding the potential humanitarian crisis in Burma following the breakdown of the ceasefire agreement. [HL9418]

Baroness Verma: The Department for International Development (DfID) has ongoing discussions with the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs over the impacts that might arise from an increase in conflict in Burma. We are also in touch with local non-government organizations and community based organizations on both sides of the Thailand-Burma border.

DfID has significantly increased its aid to Burmese refugees in Thailand and internally displaced people inside Burma in recent years to approximately £1.9 million in 2010.

Shan State

6 June 2011 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have held with fellow members of the European Union regarding the intensified conflict in Shan State, Burma, and the risk of the conflict escalating. [HL9419]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): We regularly discuss developments in Burma (including human rights and ethnic issues) with EU partners in Brussels, with EU head of missions on the ground in Rangoon, and with EU member states who follow the situation in Burma from Bangkok. Our embassy in Rangoon specifically discussed the ongoing conflict in Shan State with EU colleagues on 19 May. The UK also raised our deep concern about the situation in Shan State during a meeting of the Asia-Oceania Working Party on 25 May. The UK underlined the importance of the EU following the situation closely and standing ready to urge constraint.

6 June 2011 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what reports they have received that the Burmese Army is launching military attacks against civilians in Shan State, Burma; and what is their response to the reports. [HL9420]

Lord Howell of Guildford: The Government are deeply concerned that the reported breakdown of a ceasefire agreement with the Shan State Army North has led to renewed conflict in Shan State. We have received reports, which allege that the Burmese army has attacked local communities, whom they suspect of assisting the armed groups, and perpetuated human rights abuses. We understand that the fighting is taking place in the north-central area of Shan State, which is difficult to access and as such the information is hard to verify. In a Security Council debate on 10 May we called upon all armed actors, including the Burmese army and ethnic militia, to protect the civilian population. The Government secured a strongly worded human rights resolution at the March UN Human Rights Council which called on the Burmese Government to end continuing grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including the targeting of civilians in conflict areas. The UK also highlighted our serious concern during a meeting with other EU member states on 25 May.

7 Jun 2011 Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received of the treatment of civilians by the Burmese army in Shan state, Burma. [56941]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The Government are deeply concerned that the reported breakdown of a ceasefire agreement with the Shan State Army North has led to renewed conflict in Shan state. We have received reports which allege that the Burmese army has attacked local communities, whom they suspect of assisting the armed groups, and perpetuated human rights abuses. We understand that the fighting is taking place in the north-central area of Shan state, which is difficult to access and as such the information is hard to verify. In a Security Council debate on 10 May, we called upon all armed actors including the Burmese army and ethnic militia to protect the civilian population. The Government secured a strongly worded human rights resolution at the March UN Human Rights Council which called on the Burmese Government to end continuing grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including the targeting of civilians in conflict areas. The UK also highlighted our serious concern during a meeting with other EU member states on 25 May and underlined the importance for the EU to monitor the situation.

Armed Conflicts

7 June 2011 Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the ceasefire between Burmese government forces and the Shan State Army-North in Shan state, Burma. [56940]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The Government are deeply concerned by the reported breakdown of a ceasefire agreement with the Shan State Army North that has led to renewed conflict in Shan state. We understand that the fighting is taking place in the north-central area of Shan state, which is difficult to access and as such the information is hard to verify. We believe that the recent fighting was caused by the Burmese army's failed attempt to force the Shan State Army North to join a national border guard force. Our ambassador raised the issue of the ongoing conflict with the Burmese Government on 10 May underlining the importance of a political solution. The UK also highlighted our serious concern during a meeting with other EU member states on 25 May and underlined the importance for the EU to monitor the situation.

Political Prisoners

6 June 2011 Lord Avebury: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken, either on their own or in collaboration with other states and international organizations, to secure the release of 250 Buddhist monks detained in Burma.[HL9520]

Lord Howell of Guildford: The unconditional release of Burma's over 2,000 political prisoners, including at least 200 Buddhist monks, is an important benchmark by which the UK judges the Burmese Government. We raise our concerns at their continued detention and press for their release with Burma's leaders at every opportunity. In their meeting with the new Burmese ambassador to the United Kingdom on 5 May 2011, senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials urged Burma to release all political prisoners. Our ambassador to Rangoon reiterated this message during meetings with Burmese Ministers on 10 May 2011.

6 June 2011 Lord Kennedy of Southwark: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the authorities in Burma to stop the practice of placing prisoners in cages designed for dogs as a punishment.[HL9797]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): We are aware of a number of reports including from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma, and Amnesty International, that seven Burmese political prisoners were kept in dog cells as punishment for their hunger strike. The Government unequivocally condemns this appalling and inhumane practice. We also continue to have serious concerns about the treatment of all political prisoners, many of whom suffer from poor health as a result of being incarcerated in appalling conditions in locations remote from their families and without access to proper medical care.

Our ambassador in Rangoon raised the issue of political prisoners with senior Burmese Ministers in May

and June and he has pressed the Government to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to carry out independent and unsupervised visits.

We continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all of Burma's over 2,000 political prisoners. We have made clear that the Burmese Government's recent prisoner release fell far below the expectations of the international community.

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Drugs

6 June 2011 Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on involvement of the President of Burma with drug-related activities in Shan state, Burma. [56939]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We have received no reports to suggest that the President of Burma is involved in drug related activities.

North Korea and Burma

7 Jun 2011 Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on North Korean assistance to Burma in relation to the development of long range missiles. [56938]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We are aware of reports alleging that the Government of Burma is attempting to manufacture a range of weapons, including various types of missiles, under its memorandum of understanding with North Korea. Our ambassador to Rangoon raised concerns about these reports when he met the Burmese Defence Minister on 10 May. The Government takes all such allegations seriously and reminds all states to adhere to their obligations under relevant UN sanctions. We continue to monitor the situation closely.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

Early Day Motion 112: Human Rights in Burma

John Pugh

30.06.2010

Signed by 147 MPs

That this House sends its best wishes to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who will spend her 65th birthday in detention on 19 June 2010; calls for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political

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

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

Valerie Vaz

11.10.2010

Signed by 41 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 788: BBC World Service and Human Rights

11.10.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 57 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 989: Elections in Burma and Advance Voting

11.11.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 26 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 1014: Release of Aung San Suu Kyi

16.11.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 47 MPs

That this House welcomes the unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from her house arrest in Rangoon on 13 November 2010; supports her calls for a peaceful revolution and for dialogue with the ruling regime in order to work towards change in Burma; urges continued international attention to the political

system in Burma; and further supports Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's belief that nothing can be achieved without the participation of the people.

Early Day Motion 1034 : Imprisonment of Zarganar by Burmese Authorities

17.11.2010

Harris, Tom

Signed by 62 MPs

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

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

02.12.2010

Ritchie, Margaret

Signed by 23 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 1649 : BURMA AND THE EU

23.03.2011

Vaz, Valerie

Signed by 37 MPs

That this House notes that despite holding an election in November 2010, Burma has failed to meet the requests of the EU Common Position, last renewed on 26 April 2010, which called on Burma to take steps to bring about a peaceful transition to a democratic, civilian and inclusive system of government, to release political prisoners, to provide for free and fair elections, to engage with the international community and to respect international human rights and humanitarian law; further notes with concern that these requests have not been met; further notes that the November 2010 elections were widely dismissed as neither free nor fair, and that although Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been released more than 2,000 political prisoners remain in detention; and calls on the Government to make representations in support of a UN Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma, ahead of the EU Council Position renewal in April 2011.

Early Day Motion 1659 : BURMA EARTHQUAKE

28.03.2011

Vaz, Valerie

Signed by 29 MPs

That this House notes with grave concern reports of an earthquake of magnitude 6.8 in north east Burma near to the Thai border; sends its sincere condolences to those affected by the fatalities, casualties and destruction of homes and infrastructure; acknowledges the logistical and political challenges of providing assistance in this situation; and calls on the Government to take all possible steps to offer emergency aid and assistance to the people of Burma.

Early Day Motion 1739 : AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND THE BRIGHTON FESTIVAL

26.04.2011

Vaz, Valerie

Signed by 13 MPs

That this House welcomes Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as guest director of the 2011 Brighton Festival; notes that although Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will not attend the festival she plays a significant role in inspiring the programme through her plea to 'use your liberty to promote ours'; congratulates the Festival organisers for their choice of guest director and planning of a wide-ranging and vibrant programme; looks forward to a dynamic celebration of arts, culture and freedom over the three weeks of the Festival; and urges the Government to maintain pressure on the Burmese regime to free the more than 2,000 political prisoners still in detention and to move towards free and fair democracy in Burma.

Early Day Motion 1800 : HUMAN RIGHTS IN MALAYSIA

12.05.2011

Blomfield, Paul

Signed by 31 MPs

That this House notes with concern that Mr Charles Hector Fernandez, a Malaysian human rights lawyer, faces defamation charges in Malaysia for having detailed labour rights violations of 31 Burmese migrant workers at a Japanese firm based in Malaysia on his blog; further notes that Mr Hector Fernandez had raised his allegations with the firm prior to publishing them to his blog, in order that they might correct misinformation, without response; further notes that on 11 April 2011 Mr Hector Fernandez was restricted from all further communication through his blog and Twitter; expresses deep concern at the lack of adequate labour protections for migrant workers in Malaysia and condemns discriminatory treatment of Burmese migrants in particular; further notes the critical role of human rights defenders in upholding the labour rights of migrant workers, who often suffer rights violations and deprivations; expresses deep concern at the threat to free speech in Malaysia this trial poses; calls on the Government to ensure its representatives in Malaysia are present during the hearing and trial of Mr Hector Fernandez on 13 May 2011 and 28 and 29 June 2011 respectively; and further calls on the Government to make strong representations in this regard, in particular calling on the Malaysian Government to ensure that the principles enshrined in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders are upheld.

Early Day Motion 2101 : AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND THE MARTYR'S DAY MARCH

18.07.2011

Pugh, John

Signed by 15 MPs

That this House notes that the winner of the Burmese general election and pro-democracy and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been invited to march in the city of Yangon on Martyr's Day, 19 July, to mark the tragic assassination of her father, General Aung San, and eight other independence leaders in 1947; seeks the reassurances of the Burmese government that it will protect the security of both Aung San Suu Kyi and those supporters who are expected to join her; further notes with concern that, despite the release of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2010, the reported human rights situation in Burma has not improved; calls on the Burmese authorities to permit free speech and peaceful protest; and further calls on the Government to make representations to the Burmese government to ensure these protestors are not exposed to danger.

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www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



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