



# LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

JUNE  
2012

## ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

### *Rakhine State*

**18 June 2012 Graham Jones** : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with the Burmese Government on inter-ethnic and inter-religious violence in the west of that country.

**Jeremy Browne** : I issued a press statement on 10 June which expressed my deep concern at the ongoing violence in Rakhine state. I called on all parties to act with restraint, and have urged the authorities and community leaders to open discussions to end the violence and protect all members of the local population.

On 12 June our ambassador met Burmese President Thein Sein to discuss the ongoing peace negotiations with ethnic groups. The President emphasised his commitment to the peace process, and to resolving ethnic conflict. He said that the success of this process was essential to the sustainability of ongoing reforms.

Our ambassador informed the President of our concern over the recent hostility in Rakhine state, and made clear that we stood ready to support all efforts—including the President's—to end the violence. The UK and international community continues to monitor the situation very closely.

### *Humanitarian Aid*

**13 June 2012 Valerie Vaz** : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he is taking to assist the delivery of humanitarian aid to conflict victims in Burma.

**Alan Duncan** : British aid is supporting humanitarian assistance in Kachin state, Burma, which is being delivered by a number of Kachin-based NGOs. Around 27,000 internally displaced people have received assistance in the areas of food security, shelter, water, sanitation, health and bedding. Further support is planned.

Along the border between Thailand and Burma, British aid supports humanitarian needs for internally displaced people inside Burma by providing food security, sanitation and grants to help with the cost of schooling. We also provide food, shelter, other necessities and improved access to legal assistance to approximately 140,000 Burmese refugees in camps in Thailand. The total allocation for this work from 2009 to 2012 is more than £8 million. DFID will be implementing a new programme of humanitarian assistance for those fleeing conflict along the Thai-Burma border later this year.

During visits to Burma from the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend Mr Mitchell, all pressed the Burmese Government on the need for humanitarian access to conflict areas in Burma. I also raised this issue with Shwe Mann, Burma's Speaker of the Lower House, when he visited the UK in May.

## DEBATE ON BURMA

### *Aung San Suu Kyi*

**21 June 2012 Angela Eagle :** The visit to the UK by Aung San Suu Kyi is an opportunity for us to pay tribute to her enormous courage and determination in leading peaceful opposition to the Burmese dictatorship. The personal sacrifices that she has made in spending most of the last quarter of a century under house arrest have been enormous. Her bravery and fortitude have been an inspiration to many and deserve the deepest admiration. Members in all parts of the House will be looking forward to the speech she will deliver to both Houses later today. Because of the courage of Aung San Suu Kyi and others, Burma is finally taking the first tentative steps on the road to democracy. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is important for the UK to do all we can to help to ensure democratic reform in Burma?

**George Young :** May I, too, start on a consensual note and endorse what the hon. Lady said about the visit of Aung San Suu Kyi? We are all looking forward to her address in Westminster Hall. It is a sign of the progress that has been made in Burma that she feels able to leave Burma confident that she will be able to return. It is quite right that this iconic person should be given the opportunity to address both Houses in Westminster Hall later on. It is indeed our objective to play a key role in supporting genuine democratic change in Burma. Aung San Suu Kyi will be seeing the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Development, and that dialogue will take forward the agenda for change. There is a heavy weight of expectation on her shoulders, and I feel some sympathy with her for carrying that burden.

## ANSWERS TO SPOKEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

### *Aung San Suu Kyi*

**19 June 2012 Valerie Vaz :** I thank the Foreign Secretary for his answer. Will he join me in wishing Aung San Suu Kyi a happy birthday? She is the embodiment of peace and reconciliation. Does he agree with me that the controversial constitution of 2008 still puts the defence services at the heart of the Burmese Government? Will he assure Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the people of Burma that we will walk alongside them in their long walk to peace and reconciliation?

**William Hague :** Absolutely, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. I think that the whole country will wish Aung San Suu Kyi well and will be delighted to see her this week. I am delighted that at your invitation, Mr Speaker, and that of the other place she will be coming to address us here in Parliament. It is important to recognise that there is still a long way to go in Burma. Although her party has won the 40 recent by-elections, that represents only a small part of the Parliament. I do believe that the President of Burma is sincere in his intentions, but there will be a variety of views about the democratic progress of Burma within the regime, so it is vital for all of us who believe in freedom and democracy across the world to work with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi over the coming months and years.

**20 June 2012 Harriet Harman :** We know that there is still a long way to go before the people of Burma get the democracy to which they are entitled, but the fact that progress has been made is due to the extraordinary commitment and courage of one woman who has endured more than two decades of house arrest. Will the Foreign Secretary join me in expressing our utmost admiration for Aung San Suu Kyi?

**William Hague :** I absolutely will, and I think it highly appropriate to raise this matter during Prime Minister's Question Time. I believe that I was the first European Foreign Minister to visit Aung San Suu Kyi and to visit Burma at the beginning of the year, and I found her, not only in reputation but in substance, an inspirational figure.

As the right hon. and learned Lady says, there is still a long way to go, not only in bringing democracy to Burma but in ending ethnic conflicts, one of which is still going on in Kachin state. We look to the Government of Burma to continue to travel on this road and to release remaining political prisoners, and I think that across all parties we look forward to giving Daw Aung San Suu Kyi a tremendous welcome tomorrow.

## **Human Rights**

**19 June 2012 Nic Dakin :** Two Nobel peace laureates are in the United Kingdom today: Aung San Suu Kyi and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to update the House and the country on what steps the Government are taking to work with those Nobel laureates and the authorities in Burma and Tibet to address ongoing human rights issues?

**Mr Hague:** I mentioned a few moments ago our support for democratic change and human rights in Burma, including the resolving of the conflicts that continue, such as that in Kachin state. Ethnic conflicts have continued although there is a ceasefire in place in many of them. All that work will continue. We have a regular and formal human rights dialogue with China. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we, like the previous Government, recognise Tibet as part of the People's Republic of China—let there be no mistake about that—but we certainly speak up for human rights in China, as we have done regularly and will continue to do.

## **Political Prisoners**

**19 June 2012 Duncan Hames:** As Daw Aung San Suu Kyi reminded us in her speech from Oslo last week, while we celebrate her freedom there remain many prisoners of conscience in Burma. Will the Foreign Secretary urge the Government there to establish a review of the cases of all prisoners so that it is possible to determine the actual reason for their arrest?

**Mr Hague:** Absolutely. I have discussed this issue regularly with the Burmese authorities including with the President of Burma directly. I was pleased that in January there was such a large-scale further release of political prisoners in Burma, but the hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that some remain. In many cases, the Government of Burma allege that there is a responsibility for a violent crime or particular crime—not just the holding of a political opinion. That means that these cases have to be gone through and resolved individually. We will certainly encourage the Government of Burma to do that.

## **Sanctions**

**20 June 2012 Harriet Harman :** I thank the Foreign Secretary for his answer. He was right to visit Burma when he did. We support the suspension of sanctions on Burma, but will he reassure us that the position of the British Government will remain that sanctions will be re-imposed unless there is sustained progress towards democracy and the rule of law?

**William Hague :** That is very much our position, and I have said so in terms to the Foreign Minister of Burma. Indeed, we have argued in the European Union that sanctions and other restrictive measures should not be lifted unconditionally, but should be suspended so that they can be re-imposed if necessary and if progress comes to a stop. They have been suspended for 12 months, and we will of course continue to review progress throughout that period.

Having met the President of Burma on my visit, I believe that he is absolutely sincere in his intentions, but there will of course be elements in the Government of Burma who are not so enthusiastic about these changes and who will be alarmed by the success of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party in recent by-elections. We will keep up the pressure, as well as the welcome, for these changes.

## **Aung San Suu Kyi's Westminster Hall address to both Houses of Parliament**

**21 June 2012**

“Lord Speaker, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister, my lords, and members of the House of Commons. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you here in this magnificent hall.

I am very conscious of the extraordinary nature of this honour. I understand that there was some debate as to whether I would speak here in this splendid setting, or elsewhere within the Palace of Westminster. I welcome that debate and discussion; it is what Parliament is all about.

I have just come from Downing Street. It was my first visit there. And yet, for me, it was a familiar scene, not just from television broadcasts, but from my own family history. As some of you may be aware, the best known photograph of my father Aung San, taken shortly before his assassination in 1947, was of him standing in Downing Street with Clement Atlee and others with whom he had been discussing Burma's transition to independence. He was pictured wearing a large British military-issue greatcoat. This had been given to him by Jawaharlal Nehru en route to the UK, to protect against the unaccustomed cold. And I must say, having not left my tropical country for 24 years, there have been the odd moments this week when I have thought of that coat myself.

My father was a founding member of the Burmese Independence Army, in World War Two. He took on this responsibility out of a desire to see democracy established in his homeland. It was his view that democracy was the only political system worthy of an independent nation. It is a view, of course, that I have long shared.

General Slim, commander of the 14th Army, who led the Allied Burma Campaign, wrote about his first encounter with my father in his memoir *Defeat Into Victory*. The meeting came towards the end of the war, shortly after my father had decided that the Burmese Independence Army should join forces with the Allies. General Slim said to my father: 'you've only come to us because we are winning'. To which my father replied 'It wouldn't be much good coming to you if you weren't, would it'.

Slim saw in my father a practical man with whom he could do business. Six decades later, I strive to be as practical as my father was. And so I am here, in part, to ask for practical help, help as a friend and an equal, in support of the reforms which can bring better lives, greater opportunities, to the people of Burma who have been for so long deprived of their rights and their place in the world. As I said yesterday in Oxford, my country today stands at the start of journey towards, I hope, a better future. So many hills remain to be climbed, chasms to be bridged, obstacles to be breached. Our own determination can get us so far; the support of the people of Britain, and of peoples around the world, can get us so much further.

In a speech about change and reform, it is very appropriate to be in Westminster Hall, because at the heart of this process must be the establishment of a strong Parliamentary institution in my own country.

The British Parliament is perhaps the preeminent symbol to oppressed peoples across the world of freedom of speech. I would imagine that some people here, to some extent, take this freedom for granted. For us in Burma, what you take for granted, we have had to struggle for, long and hard. So many people in Burma gave up so much, gave up everything, in Burma's ongoing struggle for democracy. And we are only now just beginning to see the fruits of our struggle.

Westminster has long set a shining example of realising the people's desire to be part of their own legislative process. In Burma, our Parliament is in its infancy, having been established only in March 2011. As with any new institution, especially an institution which goes against the cultural grain of forty-nine years of direct military rule, it will take time to find its feet, and time to find its voice. Our new legislative processes, while undoubtedly an improvement on what went before, are not as transparent as they might be. I would like to see us learn from established examples of parliamentary democracies elsewhere, so that we might deepen our own democratic standards over time.

Perhaps the most critical moment in establishing the credibility of the Parliamentary process happens before Parliament even opens: namely, the people's participation in a free, fair, inclusive electoral process. Earlier this year, I myself participated in my first ever election as a candidate. To this day I have not yet had the chance to vote freely in any election. In 1990, I was allowed to cast an advance vote while under house arrest, but I was prevented from contesting as a candidate for my party, the National League for Democracy. I was disqualified on the grounds that I had received help from foreign quarters. This amounted to BBC broadcasts that the authorities considered to be biased in my favour.

What struck me most ahead of this year's by-elections was how quickly people in the constituencies across Burma grasped the importance of participating in the political process. They understood first hand that the right to vote was not something given to all. They understood that they must take advantage when the opportunity arose, because they understood what it meant to have that opportunity taken away from them.

During the years that I lived in the UK, I never had the right to vote myself. But I can remember, even during my university days, that I was always trying to encourage my friends to exercise their right to vote. It was never clear to me whether they followed those instructions. But it was clear to me even then that if we do not guard the rights we have, we run the risk of seeing those rights erode away. To those who feel themselves to be somehow above politics, I want to say that politics should be seen neither as something that exists above us, nor as something that happens beneath us, but as something integral to our everyday existence.

After my marriage I constantly preached my gospel of political participation to my late husband, Michael. I can still distinctly recall the occasion when a canvasser knocked on the door of our Oxford home, during an election campaign. Michael opened the door and when he saw the gentleman, poised to deliver his campaigning pitch, he said 'it's no use trying to win me over, it's my wife who decides how I should vote. She's out now; why don't you come back later?' The canvasser did come back later, mainly I think to see what a wife who decided how her husband should vote looked like.

It has been less than 100 days since I, together with my fellow National League for Democracy candidates, was out on the campaign trail across Burma. Our by-elections were held on April the first- and I am conscious that there was a certain scepticism that this would be another elaborate April Fools joke. In fact it turned out to be an April of new hope. The voting process was largely free and fair, and I would like to pay tribute to President Thein Sein for this, and for his commitment and sincerity in the reform process. As I have long said, it is through dialogue and through cooperation that political differences can best be resolved, and my own commitment to this path remains as strong as ever.

Elections in Burma are very different to those in many more established democracies such as yours. Apathy, especially amongst the young, is certainly not an issue. For me the most encouraging and rewarding aspect of our own elections was the participation, in such vast numbers and with such enthusiasm, of our young people. Often our biggest challenge was restraining the crowds of university students, school children, and flag-waving toddlers, who greeted us on the campaign, blocking the roads through the length of towns. The day before the elections, on my way to my constituency, I passed a hillock which had been "occupied" by a group of children, the oldest about ten or eleven, their leader standing at the summit holding the NLD flag. The passion of the electorate was a passion born of hunger for something long denied.

Following Burma's independence in 1948, our Parliamentary system was of course based on that of the UK. The era became known, in Burmese, as the Parliamentary Era- a name which by the mere necessity of its application speaks of the unfortunate changes which followed. Our Parliamentary Era, which lasted- more or less- until 1962, could not be said to have been perfect. But it was certainly the most progressive and promising period until now in the short history of independent Burma. It was at this time that Burma was considered the nation most likely to succeed in South East Asia. Things did not, however, go entirely to plan. They often don't, in Burma, and indeed in the rest of the world.

Now, once again, we have an opportunity to reestablish true democracy in Burma. It is an opportunity for which we have waited many decades. If we do not use this opportunity, if we do not get things right this time round, it may be several decades more before a similar opportunity arises again.

And so it is for that reason that I would ask Britain, as one of the oldest Parliamentary democracies, to consider what it can do to help build the sound institutions needed to support our nascent Parliamentary democracy. The reforms taking place, led by President Thein Sein, are to be welcomed. But this cannot be a personality-based process. Without strong institutions this process will not be sustainable. Our legislature has much to learn about the democratisation process, and I hope that Britain and other democracies can help by sharing your own experiences with us.

Thus far, I have only spent a matter of minutes inside the Burmese parliament, when I took my oath as a new MP last month. I must say that I found the atmosphere rather formal. Men are required to wear formal headgear. There is certainly no heckling. I would wish that over time perhaps we will reflect the liveliness and relative informality of Westminster. I am not unaware of the saying that more tears have been shed over wishes granted than over wishes denied. Nevertheless, it is when Burma has its own satisfactory

equivalent of Prime Minister's Questions that we will be able to say that Parliamentary democracy has truly come of age. I would also like to emphasise the importance of establishing requisite Parliamentary control over the budget.

In all this, what is most important is to empower the people, the essential ingredient of democracy. Britain is living proof that a Constitution does not need to be written down in order to be effective. It is more important that a Constitution should be accepted by the people, that people should feel it belongs to them, that it is not an external document imposed upon them.

One of the clearly stated aims of the NLD is constitutional reform. Burma's original constitution was drawn up following the meeting between my father, Aung San, and Clement Atlee, here in London in 1947. This constitution may not have been perfect, but at its core was a profound understanding of and respect for the aspirations of the people. The current constitution, drawn up by the military government in 2008, must be amended to incorporate the basic rights and aspirations of Burma's ethnic nationalities.

In over sixty years of independence, Burma has not yet known a time when we could say that there was peace throughout the land. At this very moment, hostilities continue between Kachin forces and the state armed forces in the north. In the west, communal strife has led to the loss of innocent lives and the displacements of tens of thousands of hapless citizens. We need to address the problems that lie at the root of conflict. We need to develop a culture of political settlement through negotiation, and to promote the rule of law, that all who live in Burma may enjoy the benefits of both freedom and security. In the immediate term, we also need humanitarian support for the many many people, in the north and in the west, largely women and children, who have been forced to flee their homes.

As the long history of the United Kingdom shows clearly, people never lose their need to preserve their national or ethnic identity. This is something which goes beyond, which supersedes, economic development. And that is why I hope that in working for Burma's national reconciliation, the international community will recognise that it is political dialogue and political settlement which must be given precedence over short-term economic development. If differences remain unresolved, if basic aspirations remain unfulfilled, there cannot be an adequate foundation for sustainable development of any kind-economic, social or political.

Britain has for so long under successive governments, including the present Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, and the previous Labour government, been a staunch and unshakeable supporter of aid efforts in Burma. I hope you can continue to help our country through targeted and coordinated development assistance. Britain has been until now the largest bilateral donor to Burma. It is in education in particular that I hope the British can play a major role. We need short-term results so that our people may see that democratisation has a tangible positive impact on their own lives. Vocational training and creation of employment opportunities to help address Burma's chronic youth unemployment are particularly important. Longer-term, Burma's education system is desperately weak; reform is needed, not just of schools and curriculum, and the training of teachers, but also of our attitude to education, which at present is too narrow and rigid.

I hope also that British businesses can also play a role in supporting the democratic reform process, through what I have termed democracy-friendly investment. By this, I mean investment that prioritises transparency, accountability, workers' rights, and environmental sustainability. Investment, particularly in labour-intensive sectors, when carried out responsibly and with positive intent, can offer real benefits to our people. One test will be whether new players will benefit from the investment coming in. Britain has played an important role in facilitating the forthcoming visit, next month, of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative secretariat. I hope this will be the start of many similar initiatives in the months ahead.

It was through learning about two great British leaders, Gladstone and Disraeli, while at Oxford, that I first developed my understanding of Parliamentary democracy. I learnt the basics; that one accepts the decision of the voters, that the governing power is gained and relinquished in accordance with the desires of the electorate, that it is the system which goes on, and that ultimately everyone gets another chance. These are things taken for granted here in Britain. But in 1990 in Burma, the winner of the elections, the NLD, was never allowed even to convene Parliament. I hope that we can leave such days behind us, and that as we look forward to the future, it will be the will of the people that is reflected faithfully in Burma's changing

political landscape.

This journey out of Burma has not been a sentimental pilgrimage to the past, but an exploration of the new opportunities at hand for the people of Burma. I have been struck, throughout my trip, by how extraordinarily warmhearted and open the world has been to us. To experience this first hand, after so long physically separated from this world, has been very moving. Countries that geographically are distant, have shown that they are close to Burma in what really matters: they are close to the aspirations of the Burmese people. We are brought into proximity through our shared values- and no geographical distance, no human-made barriers, can stand in our way.

During the years of my house arrest it was not just the BBC and other broadcasting stations that kept me in touch with the world outside. It was the music of Mozart and Ravi Shankar, and the biographies of men and women of different races and religions, that convinced me I would never be alone in my struggle. The prizes and honours I received were not so much a personal tribute, as a recognition of the basic humanity that unites one isolated person to the rest of the world.

During our dark days in the 1990s, a friend sent me a poem by Arthur Hugh Clough. It begins 'Say not the struggle nought availeth...'. I understand that Winston Churchill, one of the greatest Parliamentarians the world has known, used the poem himself as a plea for the USA to step in against Nazi Germany. Today, I want to make a rather different point: that we can work together, combining political wisdom from East and West, to bring the light of democratic values to all peoples, in Burma and beyond. I will just read the final verse: And not by eastern windows only, When daylight comes, comes in the light, In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly, But westward, look, the land is bright.

I would like to emphasise in conclusion that this is the most important time for Burma, that this is the moment of our greatest need- and so I would ask that our friends, both here in Britain and beyond, participate and support Burma's efforts towards the establishment of a truly democratic and just society.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the members of one of the oldest democratic institutions in the world. Thank you for letting me into your midst. My country has not yet entered the ranks of truly democratic societies, but I'm confident we will get there before too long, with your help."

## **Child Soldiers International addresses members of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Democracy in Burma**

**20th June 2012**

The Burma APPG hosted a meeting with Child Soldiers International and discussed key issues related to child soldiers in Burma, the challenges faced by the international community in addressing this violation and the need for support and engagement by the United Kingdom Government.

Child Soldiers International has reported and advocated against underage recruitment in Burma for nearly a decade. In April-May 2012, Child Soldiers International conducted a research mission to Burma and the Thai-Burma border to gather fresh information on continuing underage recruitment and use by the Burmese armed forces.

Research conducted by Child Soldiers International shows that children continue to be recruited and used as soldiers by the Tatmadaw. Agents of the Burmese military routinely falsify ages and other documents to illegally recruit children into the army and to hinder parents or guardians from locating them. Once recruited child soldiers are required to perform a range of tasks, which include combat, exploding landmines, scouting, spying, guarding camps, portering, cooking and performing other support functions. The Burmese military have deployed underage soldiers on the frontlines during recent fighting with the Kachin Independence Army.

## **Rohingya Briefing at the British Parliament**

**27th June 2012**

The President of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK), Tun Khin, together with Benedict

Rogers (East Asia Team Leader, Christian Solidarity Worldwide) and Chris Lewa (Co-ordinator for Arakan Project) presented evidence of the persecution of Rohingyas in Arakan State at a meeting in the British Parliament. The meeting was chaired by Baroness Kinnock with the aim to draw attention to the suffering of the Rohingya people. BROUK appealed to the British government and the international community to put pressure on the government in Burma to stop its ongoing human rights violations against the Rohingyas.

## **EARLY DAY MOTIONS**

### **AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND VISIT TO PARLIAMENT 21 JUNE 2012**

**23. 05. 2012**

That this House welcomes Aung San Suu Kyi's election into Pyithu Hluttaw, the Lower House of the Burmese Parliament, as an indication of change in the country; congratulates the National League for Democracy on its success in the by-election; welcomes change in the Burmese government; notes that Burma still holds a considerable number of political prisoners, who should be released immediately; welcomes Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to speak to both Houses of Parliament on 21 June 2012; and calls on the Government to continue actively to promote the transition to free democratic government in Burma.  
Total number of signatures: 42

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