



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

A summary of Burma-related issues in the British Parliament

JUNE
2015

Answers to Written Parliamentary Questions

Rohingya

1 June 2015 Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent reports he has received on the situation of the Rohingya; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Philip Hammond: UK officials frequently visit Rakhine State and receive regular reports about the situation of the Rohingya, which remains of grave concern. The Rohingya continue to suffer from severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, on their access to livelihoods, schools, healthcare and places of worship. Burma's refusal to ensure humanitarian access or recognise citizenship claims of the Rohingya has compounded the denial of the most basic rights. We continue to urge the Burmese authorities to work towards a long-term solution that brings peace and reconciliation and ensures the civil and human rights of all communities within Rakhine State, including full citizenship for the Rohingya.

The UK has been concerned by the dramatic rise in the number of people taking boats from the Bay of Bengal to the wider region this year. We were deeply concerned by the discovery of mass graves in Thailand and, more recently, in Malaysia. Tackling this issue requires a coordinated regional response and we welcome the Government of Thailand's decision to hold the 29 May regional meeting to discuss solutions.

It is vital to address the scourge of human trafficking. The desperate living conditions faced by the Rohingya in particular, and their lack of basic rights, are driving many of these people to make the dangerous journey to other countries in the region. We will maintain our own humanitarian commitment in Rakhine State; DFID has provided over £18million in humanitarian support since 2012. We urge Burma, in turn, to address the dire situation of the Rohingya community there.

2 June 2015 Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the provision of support to stranded Rohingya migrants; and what the outcome was of such discussions.

Mr Hugo Swire: We are deeply concerned about the crisis in the Bay of Bengal, and particularly for the thousands of people adrift in the Andaman Sea and Malacca Straits.

It is vital that Burma addresses the longer-term issues which lie at the root of the problem - namely the desperate conditions in which Rohingya communities are living in Rakhine State. I asked the Burmese Ambassador in London to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 18 May to express our concern at the situation, and press Burma to take urgent steps to deal with the humanitarian implications of the crisis, as well as the underlying causes in Rakhine. I also met the Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary on 20 May and raised the need for Bangladesh to work within the region to address people trafficking and irregular migration.

It is clear that this is an issue that requires a comprehensive regional response, and as such we welcomed the Thai authorities' decision to call a regional summit on 29 May to tackle the broader issues. Our Ambassador in Bangkok attended this summit as an observer. We also very much welcome the 20 May decision, from the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, to provide humanitarian assistance those stranded at sea.

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As I made clear in a Parliamentary debate in January, we have long encouraged a wider UN leadership role to help bring about a long term solution to bring peace and reconciliation to all communities in Rakhine State. UN Secretary General Ban-ki Moon called Burmese President Thein Sein on 20 May to discuss this issue. It was also discussed at the UN Security Council on 28 May.

The UK is playing its part to resolve the dire situation in Rakhine. Since 2012, the UK has been one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors in Rakhine State. We have invested over £18m in humanitarian support there, which helps to provide shelter; water sanitation and hygiene; nutrition and protection activities; and non-food items for over 122,000 people. We also strongly support the UN's coordination of the international humanitarian response.

2 June 2015 Louise Haigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to the Burmese authorities about the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: We remain deeply concerned by the situation of the Rohingya. They continue to suffer severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, on their access to livelihoods, schools, healthcare and places of worship. The UN and other agencies continue to struggle to gain unhindered humanitarian access in Rakhine State. Burma's refusal to recognise citizenship claims of the Rohingya has compounded the denial of the most basic rights.

We have raised our concern at the situation of the Rohingya community in all of our recent Ministerial contacts with the Burmese government. Most recently, I asked the Burmese Ambassador in London to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 18 May to express our concern at the situation of Rohingya and the related migrant crisis in the Bay of Bengal. I urged Burma to take swift steps to deal with the humanitarian implications of the crisis, as well as the underlying causes in Rakhine.

2 June 2015 Mr David Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to (a) raise urgently the situation of Rohingya people on the Andaman Sea with the governments of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia and the Association of South-East Asian Nations and (b) urge those governments to rescue Rohingyas still at sea and not send boats away.

Mr Hugo Swire: We are deeply concerned about the crisis in the Bay of Bengal, and particularly for the thousands of people adrift in the Andaman Sea and Malacca Straits.

It is vital that Burma addresses the longer-term issues which lie at the root of the problem - namely the desperate conditions in which Rohingya communities are living in Rakhine State. I asked the Burmese Ambassador in London to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 18 May to express our concern at the situation, and press Burma to take urgent steps to deal with the humanitarian implications of the crisis, as well as the underlying causes in Rakhine. I also met the Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary on 20 May and raised the need for Bangladesh to work within the region to address people trafficking and irregular migration. It is clear that this is an issue that requires a comprehensive regional response, and as such we welcomed the Thai authorities' decision to call a regional summit on 29 May to tackle the broader issues. Our Ambassador in Bangkok attended this summit as an observer. We also very much welcome the 20 May decision, from the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, to provide humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants.

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2 June 2015 Mr David Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to the UN Secretary-General to urge him to (a) lead personally a response to the situation of Rohingya people on the Andaman Sea and (b) lead negotiations with the government of Burma on addressing the root causes of that situation and securing unhindered access for international humanitarian aid to Rakhine state.

Mr Hugo Swire: We are deeply concerned about the crisis in the Bay of Bengal, and particularly for the thousands of people adrift in the Andaman Sea and Malacca Straits.

It is vital that Burma addresses the longer-term issues which lie at the root of the problem - namely the desperate conditions in which Rohingya communities are living in Rakhine State. I asked the Burmese Ambassador in London to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 18 May to express our concern at the situation, and press Burma to take urgent steps to deal with the humanitarian implications of the crisis, as well as the underlying causes in Rakhine. I also met the Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary on 20 May and raised the need for Bangladesh to work within the region to address people trafficking and irregular migration.

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As I made clear in a Parliamentary debate in January, we encourage a wider UN leadership role to help bring about a long term solution to bring peace and reconciliation to all communities in Rakhine State. UN Secretary General Ban-ki Moon called Burmese President Thein Sein on 20 May to discuss this issue. It was also discussed at the UN Security Council on 28 May.

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3 June 2015 Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what support her Department is providing to Rohingya migrants stranded in South East Asia.

Mr Desmond Swayne: DFID is working closely with and provides central funding to humanitarian agencies active in the region, and is working with FCO to encourage a regional response to the crisis. DFID is one of the largest humanitarian donors in Rakhine. We have now increased our support by a further £6.2 million, bringing the total to over £18 million since 2012.

4 June 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the circumstances faced by Rohingya refugees; what action they have taken to encourage the international community to support these refugees; and, in particular, what discussions they have had with the Burmese authorities about the challenges facing the Rohingya people.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We remain deeply concerned by the situation of the Rohingya, including those in Rakhine State, and the thousands of people, including Rohingya, reported to be adrift in the Andaman Sea and Malacca Straits in desperate circumstances.

It is vital that Burma addresses the longer-term issues which lie at the root of the problem - namely the desperate conditions in which Rohingya communities are living in Rakhine state. On 18 May the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), called the Burmese Ambassador in London to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to express our concern at the situation, and press Burma to take urgent steps to deal with the humanitarian implications of the crisis, as well as the underlying causes in Rakhine State. Furthermore, on 18 May, our Ambassador in Rangoon joined EU and US Ambassadors in delivering a collective demarche to the Burmese government.

We have had many similar conversations in the region and more widely, urging all those involved to work together towards a regional solution. The UK is playing its part to resolve the dire situation in Rakhine. Since 2012, the UK has been one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors in Rakhine State. We have invested over £18m in humanitarian support there, which helps to provide shelter; water sanitation and hygiene; nutrition and protection activities; and non-food items for over 122,000 people. We also strongly support the UN's coordination of the international humanitarian response.

But it is also clear that this is an issue that requires a comprehensive regional response, and as such we welcomed the Thai authorities' decision to call a regional summit on 29 May to tackle the broader issues. Our Ambassador in Bangkok attended this summit as an observer. We also very much welcome the 20 May decision from the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, to provide humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants.

4 June 2015 Louise Haigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had on the situation of ethnic minorities in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: Our Officials regularly discuss a wide range of human rights issues with the Burmese government, including the treatment of ethnic minorities in Burma.

We are particularly concerned by continued intercommunal tensions in Rakhine State, the plight of the Rohingya, and an increase in anti-muslim hate-speech and intolerance. We have raised our concern at the situation of the Rohingya community in all of our recent Ministerial contacts with the Burmese government. Most recently, I called the Burmese Ambassador to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss this issue on 18 May, and urged Burma to take swift action to address the persecution and dire situation of the Rohingya in Rakhine. This should include an end to restrictions on freedom of movement; humanitarian access; and a path to citizenship for eligible Rohingya residents of Rakhine State.

We also share the view of UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma, Yanghee Lee, in her report of March 2015, that the government of Burma must "address hate speech and incitement to violence as part of its obligation to ensure a safe and secure environment for all persons, including ethnic minorities, religious minorities and women".

9 June 2015 Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make an assessment of whether human rights violations against the Rohingya in Burma meet the international legal definitions of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Mr Hugo Swire: International legal definitions are a matter for international tribunals, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies.

10 June 2015 Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what support her Department is giving to the Rohingya people in Rakhine State.

Justine Greening: DFID has provided over £18m since 2012 making it one of the largest humanitarian donors in Rakhine, providing over 126,000 displaced and conflict-affected people with water and sanitation as well as reducing malnutrition and gender based violence. The UK Government continues to make representations to both the Government of Burma and the state authorities in Rakhine regarding humanitarian access and aid.

10 June 2015 Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what representations she has made to the government of Burma to increase access for humanitarian aid to Rakhine State.

Justine Greening: DFID has provided over £18m since 2012 making it one of the largest humanitarian donors in Rakhine, providing over 126,000 displaced and conflict-affected people with water and sanitation as well as reducing malnutrition and gender based violence. The UK Government continues to make representations to both the Government of Burma and the state authorities in Rakhine regarding humanitarian access and aid.

10 June 2015 Andy Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, with which ministers and officials of the Burmese government she has spoken to about restrictions on humanitarian access in Rakhine State in the last six months.

Mr Desmond Swayne: The former Home Office Minister of State for Crime Prevention and DFID Parliamentary Under Secretary of State raised restrictions on humanitarian access in Rakhine during her visit in January 2015. I raised this issue repeatedly during my visit in August 2014, I raised it again with the Immigration and Population Minister and Rakhine Chief Minister when they visited London in October 2014. DFID's Director General for Country Programmes was in Burma 2-4 June 2015. She visited Rakhine and Naypyidaw and raised the issue of restrictions on humanitarian access with the state authorities in Rakhine, and with senior Ministers of the central Government in Naypyidaw.

15 June 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the level of financial assistance that is being provided to Rohingya refugees in camps in Rakhine State, Burma and Bangladesh.

Baroness Verma: The UN Humanitarian Response Plan budget for Rakhine State, Burma in 2015 totals \$118m. This is for overall humanitarian assistance including, but not limited to, the camps. The UK's bilateral humanitarian funding to Rakhine is £18 million since 2012 including needs identified in the UN humanitarian response plan. DFID visits displaced persons camps in Rakhine regularly and assesses the UN response plan and budget to be realistic. We are also the largest donors to a major \$44m rural livelihoods programme in Rakhine. Addressing the political challenges is equally important and we are pushing for improved humanitarian access, greater protection and accountability and sustainable solutions to displacement, intercommunal relations and citizenship.

A range of donors including the UK, Australia, the European Commission and the US have committed approximately £19 million for 2014 – 2017 towards humanitarian activities for Rohingyas living in camps and host communities in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh the UK's Rohingya related humanitarian programme totals £4.75 million of which £2.25 million will target Rohingya refugees living in camps.

15 June 2015 Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the humanitarian situation affecting the Rohingya people in Rakhine State; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Hugo Swire: We remain deeply concerned by the dire humanitarian situation faced by the Rohingya in Rakhine State. The UK is one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors in Rakhine State, contributing over £18m since 2012. We regularly raise the underlying political problems and human rights abuses both bilaterally and in international fora, where for several years the UK has sponsored Resolutions at both the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly. We will continue to keep it high on both the bilateral and international agenda.

15 June 2015 Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations his Department has received from the Burmese government on the humanitarian situation affecting the Rohingya people in Rakhine State; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Hugo Swire: We have received no such representations. The UK raises the humanitarian situation of the Rohingya with the government of Burma at every opportunity. Most recently in relation to the crisis in the Andaman Sea, I called the Burmese Ambassador to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 18 May to make clear the need for an urgent humanitarian response and regional coordination. Our Ambassador in Rangoon delivered the same message in a demarche to Burmese Ministers, on 18 May and on 4 June.

16 June 2015 Sarah Champion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to tackle the current situation of Rohingya Muslims (a) fleeing Burma and (b) being persecuted in Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Hugo Swire: Following the discovery of a mass grave in Thailand containing the bodies of Rohingya on 1 May, and the subsequent crackdown on trafficking networks, the UK lobbied governments in the region to address the urgent humanitarian needs of those stranded at sea. We also lobbied the government of

Burma at Ministerial level to take action to address the issue. Our Ambassador in Bangkok attended the international coordination meeting hosted by Thailand on 29 May, and we welcome ASEAN's commitment to discussing the issue further.

Now that the crisis is receding, our efforts are focused on addressing the underlying causes of the migration, including the dire living conditions and persecution faced by Rohingya Muslims in Burma. Since 2012, the UK has been one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors in Rakhine State, contributing over £18m to humanitarian relief there. We also regularly raise the underlying political problems and human rights abuses both bilaterally and in international fora, and will continue to do so.

16 June 2015 Sarah Champion: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what specific aid her Department is making available for Rohingya Muslims (a) fleeing Burma and (b) being persecuted in Burma.

Mr Desmond Swayne: DFID provides assessed contribution and core funding to the International Organisation for Migration (IoM) and UNHCR respectively for their work on migration issues and crises. These organisations are coordinating humanitarian responses in the region including in relation to Rohingya Muslims fleeing Burma.

At over £18 million since 2012, DFID is one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors in Rakhine, providing over 126,000 displaced and conflict-affected people, including Rohingya, with water and sanitation as well as reducing malnutrition and gender based violence. We also work on community dialogue and reconciliation, and are one of the largest donors to a major rural livelihoods programme in Rakhine.

16 June 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with representatives from South Asian countries on Rohingya refugees; and what the outcome of those discussions has been.

Mr Hugo Swire: On 20 May, I met the Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary to stress the need for Bangladesh to work within the region to address people trafficking and irregular migration. Bangladesh has agreed to accept Bangladeshi migrants back, and this process is already taking place. Long term, there will need to be both a political solution to the status of the Rohingya in Burma, which we are encouraging, and an effective strategy to address the urgent development needs of the region. The UK's programme in Bangladesh was £190m in 2014/15. By 2015, this programme will help lift 1.5m people out of extreme poverty.

16 June 2015 Debbie Abrahams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent reports he has received on the situation in Rakhine State, Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond) on 1 June 2015 (PQ 292).

Which was:

1 June 2015 Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent reports he has received on the situation of the Rohingya; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Philip Hammond: UK officials frequently visit Rakhine State and receive regular reports about the situation of the Rohingya, which remains of grave concern. The Rohingya continue to suffer from severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, on their access to livelihoods, schools, healthcare and places of worship. Burma's refusal to ensure humanitarian access or recognise citizenship claims of the Rohingya has compounded the denial of the most basic rights. We continue to urge the Burmese authorities to work towards a long-term solution that brings peace and reconciliation and ensures the civil and human rights of all communities within Rakhine State, including full citizenship for the Rohingya.

The UK has been concerned by the dramatic rise in the number of people taking boats from the Bay of Bengal to the wider region this year. We were deeply concerned by the discovery of mass graves in

Thailand and, more recently, in Malaysia. Tackling this issue requires a coordinated regional response and we welcome the Government of Thailand's decision to hold the 29 May regional meeting to discuss solutions.

It is vital to address the scourge of human trafficking. The desperate living conditions faced by the Rohingya in particular, and their lack of basic rights, are driving many of these people to make the dangerous journey to other countries in the region. We will maintain our own humanitarian commitment in Rakhine State; DFID has provided over £18million in humanitarian support since 2012. We urge Burma, in turn, to address the dire situation of the Rohingya community there.

16 June 2015 Debbie Abrahams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure the human rights of the Rohingya people in Burma are protected.

Mr Hugo Swire: We remain deeply concerned by the dire living conditions facing the Rohingya people in Rakhine State, which is leading thousands to flee by sea to other countries in the region. It is vital that Burma addresses the longer-term issues which lie at the root of the problem, including the persecution of the Rohingya. The UK is playing its part to resolve the situation in Rakhine State. Since 2012, the UK has been one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors in Rakhine State, contributing over £18m in humanitarian aid there. We will continue raise the underlying political problems and human rights abuses both bilaterally and in international fora.

17 June 2015 The Marquess of Lothian: To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to prevent the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar; and when they last held discussions with the government of Myanmar on this subject.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We have raised our serious concern at the situation of the Rohingya community in all of our recent Ministerial contacts with the Burmese government. On 18 May, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right Hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), called the Burmese Ambassador in London to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to express our concern at the situation of Rohingya and the related migrant crisis in the Bay of Bengal. He made clear the need for Burma to work towards a long-term solution that brings peace and reconciliation and ensures the civil and human rights of all communities within Rakhine State. The UK is one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors in Rakhine State. We have invested over £18m in humanitarian support there since 2012.

22 June 2015 Lord Ahmed: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they plan to make representations to the government of Myanmar regarding the treatment of Rohingya Muslims.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We continue to raise the problems in Rakhine with the government of Burma at every opportunity, and will continue to do so. Most recently in relation to the humanitarian crisis in the Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea and Straits of Malacca, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), called the Burmese Ambassador to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 18 May to express concern, calling for an urgent humanitarian response and regional coordination. In parallel, our Ambassador in Rangoon delivered the same message with the EU and US in a demarche to Burmese Ministers, and again bilaterally on 4 June.

22 June 2015 Lord Ahmed: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to encourage international action to prevent Rohingya Muslims from becoming victims of human trafficking.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Ministers have instructed our Embassies and High Commissions in South East Asia to lobby governments in the region to take a coordinated response to address people trafficking and irregular migration from the Bay of Bengal, including that of Rohingya Muslims. We are also lobbying the EU and international partners to the same end. In addition, we have engaged with non-governmental organisations and international organisations, including the International Organisation for Migration and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and supported a discussion of the crisis in the UN Security Council on 28 May. We welcome the international coordination meeting hosted by Thailand on 29 May, which we attended as an observer. We also welcome the Association of Southeast Asian Nation's commitment to raising the issue in its forum.

22 June 2015 Stephen Gethins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with international partners and his counterparts in South East Asia on (a) resolving the situation of Rohingya migrants and (b) ensuring that search and rescue operations take place in the Andaman Sea.

Mr Hugo Swire: Following the discovery on 1 May of a mass grave in Thailand containing the bodies of Rohingya, and the ensuing humanitarian crisis at sea in South East Asia, the UK lobbied governments in the region to address the urgent humanitarian needs of those stranded at sea. In particular, we urged countries in the region to uphold their obligation of rescue at sea for vessels in distress, and to take a coordinated approach to people trafficking.

On 18 May, I called the Burmese Ambassador to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to press for an immediate humanitarian response and to urge Burma to take part in regional coordination efforts. On 20 May, I met the Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary to stress the need for Bangladesh to work within the region to address people trafficking and irregular migration originating from Bangladesh. Our officials have also discussed the issue with EU partners. Permanent Representatives in New York discussed the crisis in the UN Security Council on 28 May. While the immediate crisis is now receding, we are also pushing for a long term solution to the underlying problems, including the status of the Rohingya and an improvement to the dire socio-economic conditions faced by the Rohingya in Rakhine which is a key driver of their migration.

23 June 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to encourage Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia to (a) protect the human rights of Rohingya refugees and (b) provide those refugees with asylum.

Mr Hugo Swire: In response to the humanitarian crisis at sea in South East Asia, I instructed our network of Embassies and High Commissions to lobby regional governments, including Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, urging them to uphold the international obligation of rescue at sea. We also tasked them to work together to tackle the smuggling and trafficking rings and address the underlying causes of irregular migration of people by sea, specifically raising the plight of the Rohingya. We welcomed the 20 May decision of the governments of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia to provide humanitarian aid to those at sea, and the decision by Thailand to hold a regional coordination meeting on 28 May, which we attended as an observer. We also welcome the decision by the Association of South East Asian Nations to look into this issue further.

It is not for the UK to determine the asylum policy of other countries, but we encourage all States that have not done so to sign and ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention, and to adhere to its obligations.

Aid to the Burmese Government

10 June 2015 Andy Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what financial assistance her Department is providing (a) directly and (b) indirectly to the government of Burma.

Mr Desmond Swayne: DFID is providing no financial assistance directly to the government of Burma. Indirect financial assistance happens in two projects. DFID supports a World Bank trust fund to assist the Government's Public Financial Management (PFM) modernisation programme. Part of the fund is transferred into designated accounts which the Government and Parliament can use to procure goods and services to support the PFM modernisation programme. Use of the money must be approved by the World Bank and must follow World Bank procurement guidelines. DFID also supports the 3MDG health trust fund which uses some of its funds in support of the Government's national health programmes, but without actual transfer to government bank accounts.

24 June 2015 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government how much money has been spent to date, and how much money is allocated to be spent in the future, on training the Burmese army.

Earl Howe: We do not provide combat training to the Burmese army. Since 2013, we have undertaken a limited number of carefully calibrated education courses with the Burmese military focussed on modernisation and reform of the army and which adhere to the core principles of democratic accountability,

international law and human rights. As the single most influential institution in Burma, it is right that we engage with the military to encourage them to support Burma's continuing transition to democracy.

From late 2013 to March 2015, the UK spent £105,905 on these educational activities. In financial year 2015-16, £74,210.82 has been allocated for the provision of English Language Training at the Defence Services Academy of Burma and a further £85,000 towards the delivery of leadership and reform activities. We are continuing to carefully assess what additional educational activities we might undertake with the Burmese military in future years in order to encourage reform.

24 June 2015 Baroness Nye: To ask Her Majesty's Government what equipment has been exported from the United Kingdom to Burma for use by the Burmese police force in the past two years.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: The Export Control Organisation only holds data on licences issued and refused that fall within strategic export controls. No such licences have been granted for the Burmese police force.

Education

9 June 2015 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what funding her Department provides to religious organisations in Burma for education programmes; and what conditions her Department places on such funding.

Mr Desmond Swayne: DFID supports the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) which has the key objective of increasing the number and proportion of children who complete a quality basic education. MEC works with a range of Non-Governmental Organisations, including faith-based organisations, provided that i) the education services are available to members of different religious communities, ii) the project activities supported by MEC do not aim to proselytize or explicitly promote a particular religion and iii) the organisations do not engage in any action that could promote inter-communal tensions and where possible promote inter-communal peace and conflict resolution.

9 June 2015 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assistance her Department has provided to the government of Burma on the drafting of legislative proposals in that country on education reform.

Mr Desmond Swayne: The UK Government has not provided any funding directly to the government of Burma in developing the National Education Law. DFID, together with other international development partners (donors, NGOs etc), has funded technical inputs to the Burmese Ministry of Education's evidence-based review of the education sector. This review has informed the development of the National Education Law.

Rape and Sexual Violence

8 June 2015 Ms Diane Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the government of Burma regarding implementation of the Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in the last six months; and at what levels these discussions took place.

Mr Hugo Swire: The then-Minister of State for the Home Office, Lynne Featherstone, visited Burma in January, in her role as UK Champion for Tackling Violence Against Women. She raised this issue with senior members of the Burmese government, including Ministers of the President's Office, U Soe Thane and U Aung Min, and also with Deputy Foreign Minister U Thant Kyaw.

In our efforts to promote UNSCR 1325 (on Women, Peace and Security) in Burma, in addition to high-level lobbying, the UK has encouraged women's full participation in the peace process, supported the drafting of forthcoming legislation on violence against women, and funded work to increase women's participation in the electoral process. We have supported access to justice for the survivors of sexual violence. As one of the largest humanitarian donors to Kachin and Rakhine states, we have funded the coordination of activities to prevent violence against women.

25 June 2015 Baroness Deech: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to ensure the investigation of the allegations of the use of rape and sexual violence by the Burmese army against women in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We regularly raise our serious concerns about the use of rape and sexual violence in conflict with the Burmese government, and emphasise the requirement to investigate allegations. The then Minister of State at the Home Office, the Rt Hon Lynne Featherstone, in her role as UK Champion for Tackling Violence Against Women, discussed these issues with senior members of the Burmese government in January, including with Ministers of the President's Office, U Soe Thane and U Aung Min, and also with Deputy Foreign Minister U Thant Kyaw.

Kachin

29 June 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to address the continuing humanitarian situation for internally displaced people in Kachin state, Burma.

Baroness Verma: Since 2011 we have committed over £17m in humanitarian funding in Kachin and Northern Shan states in Burma which includes food and cash, health services, and water and sanitation to sites for internally displaced people (IDP). We have also provided £5m of humanitarian health programming. We also fund UN agencies for coordination and capacity building around gender based violence, camp management and water and sanitation. Minister of State Rt. Hon. Desmond Swayne TD MP visited Kachin in August 2014 and met with IDPs and camp officials to discuss their situation. DFID's head of office visited Kachin in June 2015, visiting IDP camps around Laiza and discussing IDP issues with the Kachin Chief Minister.

29 June 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that food rations for internally displaced peoples in Kachin state, Burma, are not cut.

Baroness Verma: Since 2011 we have committed over £17m in humanitarian funding in Kachin and Northern Shan states in Burma which includes support for food and cash. We are also working with the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) to investigate development work on livelihoods for those displaced by conflict in Kachin State Burma.

Refugee camps on Thai-Burma border

10 June 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to encourage the reversal of rations cuts for refugees from Burma in camps on the border between Thailand and Burma; and what is their current estimate of the number of men, women and children in those camps.

Baroness Verma: The Department for International Development engages regularly with other OECD donors on assistance to the refugees from Burma in camps on the border between Thailand and Burma, and convened a donor conference with The Border Consortium (TBC) in April 2015, partly with the aim of encouraging other donors to maintain appropriate support to TBC. DFID approved a renewed project for conflict affected people from October 2012 to November 2015, totalling over £27million. This project includes our support to the refugees for food, shelter and other relief items. In March 2015 DFID agreed a £6.67m additional cost extension for the project to January 2017.

24 June 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Verma on 10 June (above), what is their current estimate of the number of men, women and children in those camps; why that estimate was not given in that Answer; and what is their estimate of the average number of years refugees have been living in the camps on the Burma–Thai border.

Earl of Courtown: According to latest reports from The Border Consortium (TBC) at the end of December there were 110,094 refugees who had been verified in the TBC database and were living in the camps. According to UNHCR's refugees profiling report on years of residency, as of 2014: approximately 64% of the refugees have lived in the shelter for less than 10 years. Almost 30% have lived in the shelter between 11-20 years and only 7% have lived in the shelter over 20 years.

Nationwide ceasefire

24 June 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the nationwide ceasefire talks in Burma, and the prospects for peace in the ethnic states, particularly Kachin state.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: On 31 March the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team and government negotiators successfully agreed a draft text of the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA). Following this agreement, a series of consultations has taken place to discuss the detail of the Accord, including a meeting between 2 – 9 June in Karen State attended by over 100 representatives from 17 ethnic armed groups as well as UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Burma, Vijay Nambiar. As a result, amendments to the text were proposed, and the ethnic armed groups agreed to form a new committee, comprising more senior representatives, to engage in further negotiations with the Burmese government. Prospects for a NCA ahead of the elections in Burma scheduled for November 2015 remain uncertain. However, even in the absence of a NCA, we do not anticipate a return to widespread conflict. Bilateral ceasefires remain in place between the government and the majority of armed groups, and a timetable for further negotiations is being discussed. We remain actively engaged in the peace process and stand ready to provide whatever additional assistance is required.

Political Prisoners

9 June 2015 Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will take steps to encourage reform of the Prisoners of Conscience Affairs Committee in Burma; and if he will seek the empowerment of that Committee to ensure the release of all political prisoners.

Mr Hugo Swire: We welcome the release of thousands of political prisoners under the current Burmese government. However, we remain concerned by the continued arrests, detentions and sentencing of political activists, with an estimated minimum of 150 remaining behind bars at the end of April 2015, and a further 450 awaiting trial following arrests throughout 2014 and early 2015.

We welcomed the announcement in January that a mechanism to review cases of political prisoners would remain in place under the newly constituted Prisoners of Conscience Affairs Committee. We have reinforced with the Burmese authorities that consultation and the involvement of civil society must be part of this process.

Officials from our Embassy in Rangoon meet regularly with civil society on this issue, and we continue to raise our concerns with the government of Burma at the highest levels. Most recently, the then Minister of State at the Home Office, Lynne Featherstone, raised this issue directly with Minister for the President's Office, U Soe Thein, during her visit to Burma in January. 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.

10 June 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assistance they are providing Philip Blackwood, who is imprisoned in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: The New Zealand Embassy in Burma is leading on providing consular assistance to Mr Blackwood as he travelled to Burma on his New Zealand passport. They have been in contact with his family who are resident in New Zealand.

Our Embassy in Rangoon has provided advice and support to the New Zealand Embassy on Mr Blackwood's case and we will continue to discuss with them what further assistance we can provide. We have raised the case with the Burmese authorities and made them aware of our interest in Mr Blackwood's welfare.

10 June 2015 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to his Burmese counterpart seeking the release of Philip Blackwood, Tun Thurein and Htut Ko Ko Lwin from prison in that country.

Mr Hugo Swire: We continue to monitor these cases and provide consular support and advice to the New Zealand Embassy in Rangoon on Mr Blackwood's case. Our Embassy in Rangoon regularly lobbies the Burmese government on issues of fundamental rights including freedom of expression. While we have not raised these cases bilaterally, there will be an opportunity to raise freedom of expression cases during the EU Burma Human Rights Dialogue on 18 June.

22 June 2015 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the United Kingdom Ambassador to Burma raised the case of Philip Blackwood when he met the Minister of the President's Office earlier this year; and if so, whether he specifically requested Mr Blackwood's release from prison.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Our Ambassador in Rangoon informed the Minister of the President's office that we were following Mr Blackwood's case closely. We continue to provide advice and support to the New Zealand Embassy, who are providing consular assistance to Mr Blackwood who is a dual British/New Zealand national.

Elections

29 June 2015 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of whether the forthcoming elections in Burma can be free and fair, in the light of the withdrawal of temporary voting rights given to Rohingya Muslims and the fact that the military is allocated one quarter of seats.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Burma's elections in November are a milestone in its transition to democracy, and we have consistently called for democratic, inclusive, credible and transparent elections in which all the people of Burma, including persons belonging to minorities, can fully exercise their political rights and cast their vote. This was reiterated in the EU Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on 22 June.

However, there are significant challenges in holding Burma's first credible elections in decades. The withdrawal of temporary residence cards for Rohingya Muslims is a major concern. We have also long made clear that the military should step back from politics. In assessing the overall standard of the election, we will look at these and a range of other factors, including the assessments of both local and international observers on the ground at the time. The UK has supported the EU in sending an Election Observation Mission to observe the elections.

VJ Day

30 June 2015 Lord West of Spithead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what commemorative events they have planned for the 70th anniversary of Victory over Japan Day.

Earl Howe: The Ministry of Defence, in collaboration with The Royal British Legion, will lead national commemorations in central London on Saturday 15 August 2015 to mark the 70th Anniversary of Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day 70).

The event will begin with a special commemoration on Horse Guards Parade, attended by senior political and military representatives, veterans and their families, which will include at its heart a traditional Drumhead Service. Current members of the Armed Forces will then lead veterans and their families in a parade down Whitehall, past the Cenotaph and the statue of Field Marshal Lord Slim, who famously led the 14th Army.

Further details of the VJ Day 70 programme will be announced in due course.

Invitations to participate in VJ Day 70 have been issued to representatives from all declared allies of the UK, Commonwealth countries, overseas territories and Crown Dependencies. In this way, the contribution and sacrifices made during the Far East campaign by communities such as the Burmese hill tribes will be recognised on this milestone anniversary.

Answers to Oral Parliamentary Questions

Rohingya

3 June 2015 Valerie Vaz: What implications are there for the UK as a result of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations conference on 29 May in Bangkok?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady rightly points out that while we in Europe grapple with the challenges we face on migration, comparable challenges are being faced by other countries. It is absolutely right that Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia are now working far more carefully together, and the UK will be playing its role to support them in doing that.

Kerry McCarthy: What support her Department is giving to the Rohingya people in Burma.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne): The Department for International Development is one of the biggest international donors in Rakhine state. We have just increased our support by a further £6.2 million, bringing our support since 2012 to £18 million.

Kerry McCarthy: Does the Minister agree that the time is long overdue for Burma to address the persecution and poverty that force the Rohingya to flee? Does he think that the time is now right for the UN Secretary-General to lead the negotiations, so that humanitarian non-governmental organisations can gain access to Rakhine state?

Mr Swayne: Yes, and a director general of DFID is in Rakhine state as we speak, and we take every opportunity to push forward these matters.

Mr David Burrowes: Surely, the plight of thousands of Rohingya people adrift in the bay of Bengal must call for greater leadership from not only the United Nations but the United Kingdom. Should we ensure not only that we make representations in meetings with ambassadors but that our taxpayers' aid and access to our diplomatic doors are made contingent on ensuring proper recognition of the Rohingya and full respect of human rights?

Mr Swayne: Absolutely. I have taken every opportunity to raise this matter with Burmese Ministers. My caution with respect to my hon. Friend's suggested course of action is that I am not prepared to withdraw British aid from poor people simply because of the regime under which they suffer.

Paul Scully: What is the UK doing to encourage a co-ordinated response to the south-east Asian boat migrant situation?

Mr Swayne: Our ambassador attended the recent conference with Malaysia and Bangladesh. We participated with a *démarche* of Burmese Ministers, along with the United States and the French, and we are doing everything that we can precisely to make this a regional response.

9 June 2015 Louise Haigh: Yesterday, Nobel peace prize winner Malala Yousafzai called on world leaders to halt the inhuman persecution of Burma's Muslim minority Rohingya people. It is time for the international community to back up its words with action. Will the Minister unequivocally condemn the Myanmar leadership and tell the House what steps he has taken to secure equal rights and opportunities for the Rohingya?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): The hon. Lady will have had an opportunity to take part in the Adjournment debate last week, on 4 June, on the whole issue of the Rohingya people and Rakhine. If she reads the Hansard report, she will see that this Government have been right at the forefront in urging the Government of Burma to treat the Rohingya in the way to which they are entitled.

9 June 2015 Richard Graham: The Burmese Government often give the impression that the Rohingya people are not really Burmese. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister for Asia confirm that the Foreign Office has seen a map from the 18th century that confirms very clearly that the Rohingya people were part of

Burma at that time and that this has been shared with the Burmese Government?

Mr Swire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have got charts, which we have shared with the Burmese Government, and they show very clearly that there were Muslims, as they were described in the ledger, going right back to the 18th century. It is absolutely certain, as far as we are concerned, that the Rohingya have been in Rakhine for many, many years. Of course they are mixed in with probably more recent arrivals from Chittagong and the Chittagong area in Bangladesh, but a significant number of these people have clearly been in Burma for a significant amount of time.

10 June 2015 Stephen Twigg: The G7 leaders' declaration refers to the appalling suffering of the Rohingya people in the bay of Bengal. This is a humanitarian crisis and there is rising public concern in this country about it. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is time for the UN Secretary-General to take personal charge of dealing with this crisis?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this issue. Again, we need to trace it back to the country from which the problem is coming, and we need greater action by the Burmese Government to represent all the people in Burma.

Burma Veterans

8 June 2015 Andrew Percy: Last year I received a very moving letter from a veteran in Goole, Edgar Sheppard, whom I subsequently visited in his care home. He told me how concerned he was that young people did not know the sacrifice that he and his Burma veterans had endured. Can we ensure that our cadet forces and the Ministry of Defence work with the Department for Education to ensure that the school children of today know about the sacrifices of yesterday?

Mark Lancaster: My hon. Friend makes an important point. He will be aware of the Government's commitment to the cadet forces expansion programme. We increased the number of cadet forces by over 100 during the previous Parliament, and we are committed to increasing it to 500. I am a great fan of the cadet force, having previously been a member of it, and am determined that we should expand it.

Adjournment Debate in House of Commons on the Rohingya Community (Burma)

4 June 2015 Jonathan Ashworth: It is a pleasure to see you re-elected and in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. Please accept my congratulations on your re-election.

I want to bring to the House an opportunity to talk about the human rights situation in Burma/Myanmar and the migrant boat crisis that we have seen reported on in recent weeks in the media. We have seen heartbreaking coverage as thousands of Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants have remained stranded in squalor in smugglers' boats at sea while initially Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia refused to allow them to land.

Some estimates suggest that 88,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants have taken to the seas over the past 15 months. Indeed, between January and March this year 25,000 boarded smugglers' boats, which is double the number for the same period in 2014. It was only after media reports and international pressure that the Thai, Malaysian and Indonesian authorities allowed migrants to arrive on their shores and, in recent weeks, between 3,500 and 4,000 have been allowed into Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia or have returned to Burma/Myanmar.

Fiona Bruce: I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing this extremely important issue to the House's attention. Does he agree that the circumstances in which so many of those people are living in Burma need to be looked at, and that urgent representations need to be made to the Government of Burma—or Myanmar—on granting humanitarian access to those areas so that they can be improved radically, which is very much needed?

Jonathan Ashworth: I thank the hon. Lady, who hits the nail on the head with that intervention. I will come later in my remarks to the persecution of the Rohingya in Burma, which is what is driving the migrant crisis.

I saw her statement a few weeks ago on behalf of the Conservative party human rights commission, which I entirely endorse. I am pleased that she has been able to put her point on the record this evening.

Throughout early May it seemed that every day brought another report of abandoned migrants found at sea: 10 May, 575 migrants were rescued near Indonesia; 11 May, 1,018 migrants were found on the Malaysian coast; 11 May again, a vessel carrying 400 migrants was intercepted by the Indonesian navy; 13 May, a boat carrying 300 migrants was turned away from Langkawi island near Malaysia; 13 May again, another boat carrying 500 migrants was turned away from Penang island near Malaysia; 14 May, a boat carrying 300 migrants left the Thai shore, having been given food and water but refused refuge; 15 May, 700 migrants were rescued by a fishing boat after their vessel sank near Indonesia; and last week more than 700 refugees were brought ashore in Burma/Myanmar, having been found drifting in the Andaman sea in an overloaded fishing boat that was taking in water.

The coverage we have seen—I pay tribute to the BBC and al-Jazeera, in particular, for their reporting—has shown desperate scenes of dehydrated refugees and emaciated, starving children. On the boats women endure rape and other sexual violence, and many are forced into marriage with the men who pay for their journey.

Nia Griffith: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that no preconditions were set before the British Army started training the Burmese military, despite allegations of continued sexual violence? Given that Burma has now been included in the initiative on preventing sexual violence, will he join me in asking the Minister to look into what is being done about that?

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. I hope that the Minister will reflect upon that and perhaps say something when he responds to the debate.

The people traffickers had abandoned those boats, leaving those on board with no food or water. The migrants were then refused sanctuary by the countries to which they were trying to escape. The Rohingya people are often described as the most persecuted in the world. Those men, women and children were fleeing Burma/Myanmar to escape what have been described as apartheid-like conditions, hoping to reach predominantly Muslim counties such as Malaysia via the jungles of southern Thailand. Yet many meet certain death; if they are not swallowed up by the south-east Asian seas, they are slung into mass graves when they eventually reach the Thai-Malaysian borders.

One migrant, Ziaur Rahamn, spoke to the Financial Times. He escaped from Burma/Myanmar to Bangladesh, but he was then kidnapped and trafficked to Thailand before being sold on and making it to Malaysia. He said:

“I have an ambition to help my mother and help my nation... Everywhere is dying for the Rohingya. Everywhere is killing and beating and trafficking, everywhere.”

Today it is not clear how many migrants remain at sea in boats abandoned by the people traffickers; search and rescue vessels from Malaysia and Indonesia have not yet located any more migrant ships. So many of the boats have been abandoned as a tragic consequence of Thailand's seeking—for entirely the right reasons, I emphasise—to stamp out its appalling record on people trafficking in the region. As a result, many of the smugglers, no longer able to bring people ashore, have resorted to abandoning boats or dumping their human cargo on islands near the coastline—essentially, they have killed some of their human cargo. The circumstances are tragic. The Thai authorities have found graves with 150 bodies along the Thai-Malaysian border, many thought to belong to Rohingya migrants.

The US and EU have criticised the authorities for failing to deal adequately with people trafficking. In recent months, the Thai authorities have arrested several Government officials, from army colonels to town mayors, thought to have been involved in people trafficking. Indeed, in the past 24 hours there have been reports of a senior major-general's involvement in trafficking the Rohingya.

The problem is that no single Government in the region is prepared to show any leadership or take any real responsibility; it is no wonder that the UN has described the situation as a “massive humanitarian crisis”. Yes, there was a conference in Bangkok on 29 May to respond to the crisis. Yes, it is welcome that the countries attending agreed to intensify search and rescue operations and that the Indonesians

and Malaysians agreed to offer shelter to migrants—albeit temporarily and in the expectation that the international community will resettle them within a year. Yes, there was a welcome agreement to tackle the causes of migration through job creation and the promotion of “full respect for human rights and adequate access of people to basic rights and services, such as housing, education and health care”.

Those commitments are all welcome; I will be interested in the Minister’s assessment of them. However, was it not hugely disappointing that the conference refused even to utter the word “Rohingya” publicly? It refused to recognise that driving this issue is the persecution of the Rohingya people in Burma/Myanmar and the fact that to this day Burma/Myanmar refuses to recognise the citizenship of the Rohingya.

Like many Members here tonight, I have spoken before in the House about the citizenship issue and I will reiterate some of the points in a moment. Before that, let me say a brief word about the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. I hope the Minister will agree that the crisis has become a major test of the association. If those nations want to launch a single economic market by the end of the year, as is their plan, does that not imply rules on movement of labour—and not trafficked labour with smugglers’ networks in which it seems Government officials are complicit? The single economic market that ASEAN wants to create by the end of the year needs to face up to the human rights abuses of the Rohingya in Burma.

Valerie Vaz: I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. I want to follow on from the point made by the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who went to Burma with Mr Speaker and me two years ago. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a classic case for the involvement of the United Nations? Should not the Secretary-General take personal control of this enormous and overwhelming humanitarian crisis?

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I pay tribute to the work she did in the last Parliament, and I know she will continue to do in this Parliament, on raising the issue of Burma. She has been a strong and persuasive voice. I am pleased that she has got her point, which I agree with and will come to, on the record.

The Minister has my appreciation for having been the first western Minister to visit Rakhine state. Some 1.1 million Rohingya in western Burma, particularly in Rakhine state, are denied citizenship and access to jobs and basic services. Indeed, he knows, after the brutal sectarian violence in 2012, many of the Rohingya were forced out into some of the worst camps ever seen, according to the UN.

In the past year, conditions have worsened for the Rohingya. They have been denied voting rights unless they are prepared to register themselves as Bengali, and they do not recognise themselves as Bengali, as the Minister is well aware. He will also be aware that the violence in Rakhine a few years ago when Rohingya were driven from their homes often occurred with the complicity of local officials, if not national Burmese officials. Certainly, local officials appeared to turn their back on some of the communal violence. Is it not an absolute disgrace that when the UN adopts resolutions, as it did in December 2014, urging the Myanmar Government to grant the Rohingya full citizenship and calling for the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to be opened in Myanmar without delay, the response of the Myanmar-Burmese regime is still to refuse even to acknowledge the Rohingya as an ethnic group, and then to say that reports of Muslim persecution are a “fabrication”? I agree with the President of the United States when he says, rightly, that Burma/Myanmar should end this discrimination against the Rohingya.

There are going to be elections later this year. Given the migrant boat crisis over the past few weeks, should not the British Government take the view that it is time for all Burmese political leaders now to speak up and do what they can for the Rohingya and say that Rohingya citizenship should be recognised? The Minister will be aware that there is one particular prominent leader who many of us are keen to see speak up and say that Rohingya citizenship should be recognised. According to reports, US Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard said recently in Jakarta that while the US was not considering imposing more sanctions, they remain “in the diplomatic toolbox”. What is the Minister’s view of sanctions given the migrant crisis we have seen over the past few weeks?

I recall that in our previous parliamentary debate in Westminster Hall in January the Minister rightly told us of the Government’s commitment of £12 million in aid for Rakhine state. Of course, I support that. However, given that we are set for a rollercoaster ride in the future projections of public expenditure, can he indicate

the Government's future thinking on aid and humanitarian assistance for Rakhine and in the region more generally? Picking up on the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), does he agree that now is the time for the UN Secretary-General to be given personal responsibility for negotiating unrestricted international humanitarian access to Rakhine state? What representations has he made at the UN level on that matter?

On the boat crisis, will the Minister update the House on the discussions that he and the FCO have had with the ASEAN nations in recent days? Is there any more support that we can offer to Thailand, for example, in dealing with people-trafficking in the region? Will he agree to lobby the ASEAN nations to ensure that genuinely life-saving measures are set up to offer support on search and rescue operations so that when migrants disembark from ships they are given appropriate access to humanitarian assistance? Will he raise particularly the issue of children? Many of the children coming off these boats are unaccompanied. Will he undertake to lobby for the provision of child-friendly spaces and learning spaces in the shelters and camps in Malaysia, Indonesia and elsewhere so that they are protected and have access to education?

I am very grateful for this opportunity to put some of these points on the record so early in the Parliament. I look forward to a full response from the Minister, because whether it is the migrant crisis in the south Asia seas or the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, we simply cannot walk by on the other side.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) on his re-election and on securing this debate—his second on this important subject within six months. I also thank other hon. Members for their contributions. That this debate comes so soon after the House's return demonstrates the importance that Parliament rightly places on the situation of the Rohingya and on the recent humanitarian crisis in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman sea. The crisis has been made even more alarming by the discovery of mass graves in Thailand and Malaysia, and by boats either avoiding landing or being prevented from doing so.

With conditions at sea becoming increasingly desperate, we welcome the 20 May decision by the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia to provide vital humanitarian assistance. Clearly, tackling this issue requires a strong and co-ordinated regional response. I am glad that Thailand called last Friday's regional co-ordination meeting in Bangkok, at which our ambassador represented the United Kingdom. I welcome the agreement of the countries involved to meet again soon.

Those discussions were a positive step, but much more remains to be done. South-east Asian countries must continue to work together to tackle the appalling trade in human lives and its root causes, and, in particular, to press Burma to address the situation of the Rohingya in Rakhine state. With that, I can associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's comments about ASEAN and its future.

According to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, over 130,000 Rohingya left by sea between 2012 and 2014. However, the numbers this year are something new, with a further 25,000 leaving in the first three months of 2015—nearly double the numbers during the same period last year. I share the hon. Gentleman's deep concern about the many issues they face. That so many are willing to risk this highly dangerous journey speaks of increasing desperation within the community. It is a community where, three years since the ethnic violence of 2012, over 140,000 remain displaced in "temporary" camps, where humanitarian conditions—as I saw at first hand during my visit in 2012—are, quite frankly, dreadful. The February decision to cancel the temporary identity cards held by many Rohingya looks set to disenfranchise the community and leave them open to further restrictions, intimidation and abuse.

As the crisis emerged last month, I took action in calling the Burmese ambassador to the Foreign Office in order to express our concern and press Burma to take urgent steps to deal with the humanitarian implications of the crisis, as well as the underlying causes in Rakhine.

I met the Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary in London on 20 May and urged Bangladesh to work within the region to address people trafficking and irregular migration in the Bay of Bengal.

Paul Scully: My father was born in Burma, so I take a great interest in these issues. What is going on there is horrific, so I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) on securing this debate. As he and the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) have said, Ban Ki-moon should take a

personal interest in the matter. Burma Campaign UK, Christian Solidarity Worldwide and a number of other organisations have also called for such action. I would be grateful if the Minister could let us know what the UK Government are doing in that regard.

Mr Swire: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House and the fact that we now have somebody interested in these matters who perhaps has closer Burmese connections than any of the rest of us. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called Burmese President Thein Sein on 20 May to discuss Rakhine and Burma's response to the migration crisis. With our support, the issue of Rakhine was also discussed at a briefing of the UN Security Council on 28 May. My hon. Friend may be unaware of this, but in the past few years we have had a Friends of Myanmar—Friends of Burma—meeting at the General Assembly in New York, and we will be pressing for just such a meeting again this autumn.

In Rangoon, our ambassador joined EU and US colleagues in delivering a joint démarche to Burmese Ministers. Through our network of missions, we lobbied extensively throughout the region and co-ordinated regular discussion with like-minded states, non-governmental organisations and international organisations, including the International Organisation for Migration and the UNHCR.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who has taken a very close interest in this issue, raised the wider issue of Rakhine itself. We will continue to raise the problems in Rakhine at every opportunity. In particular, we continue to press the Burmese authorities for progress in a number of vital areas: improved humanitarian access, greater security and accountability, the protection of civil and political rights for everyone in Burma, and a sustainable solution on citizenship.

The hon. Member for Leicester South spoke about the vast amount of money the British taxpayer gives to Burma. I confirm that as part of our continuing commitment to support progress in Burma, we will continue with our funding, which increased to £82 million this financial year.

Patrick Grady rose—

Mr Swire: I will make progress, if I may.

In Rakhine state, we are one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors. We have given it over £18 million in humanitarian support since 2012. I am pleased to say that an additional £6.2 million was recently announced for 2015-16.

The hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) raised our training of the Tatmadaw, the Burmese military. It remains a key force in Burma and we believe that it is right to continue to engage with it. It is not true to say that we have not consulted; we have consulted extensively with members of ethnic groups, civil society and the political Opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi, who is supportive of this approach. We cannot ignore the fact that it still has a bloc in Parliament, and it needs to be taught to behave like a responsible military in a democratic country in the 21st century. It is key to repeat that we provide only non-combat education and training, and we will continue to do so.

In addition to our other bilateral work, we continue to operate through the UN and the EU. The Secretary-General has called Burmese President Thein Sein, as I said, and the UN Security Council discussed Rakhine on 28 May. The UK has been instrumental in securing strong UN resolutions on Burma, including the Human Rights Council resolution in March, which extended the mandate of the special rapporteur for human rights in Burma, Professor Yanghee Lee, who has done so much to shine a spotlight on the plight of the Rohingya.

To conclude, we have made our concerns extremely clear to the Burmese Government, and we will continue to do so. We will continue to work with the Burmese and our international partners for progress. The hon. Member for Leicester South asked about the other people—he said I would know who he was speaking about, and indeed I do. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has a remarkable record of defending human rights and democracy, and we encourage all parties in Burma to work together to improve the humanitarian conditions and ensure that there is respect for the human rights of all communities in Rakhine. Ultimately, of course, it is the Burmese Government that have the executive power.

Patrick Grady: Very briefly, does the Minister have any indication of the number or proportion of refugees who might be making their way to these islands? What support are the British Government prepared to offer any of them who do end up here?

Mr Swire: As far as we can ascertain, this is a regional issue that needs to be addressed by the countries that I have mentioned. It is an ASEAN problem. Where the majority of these people are coming from is quite uncertain. It is our assessment that it is a combination of people coming from Rakhine itself, possibly some people getting on boats and coming across the Bay of Bengal, and others coming down. It is pretty mixed. The key thing is the immediate humanitarian alleviation, such as getting them off the boats and getting them watered and fed. At the same time, on a parallel track, we need to get Burma and Bangladesh to play their part. As far as we know, there are no people heading here. That is not to say that we are not interested or that we do not care. We care passionately about the situation, but at the moment it is for the countries in the neighbourhood to deal with it.

Mr David Burrowes: The Minister says that this is a regional issue, but is it not an international issue? There are grave international precedents of community groups and ethnic groups effectively being pushed out and cleansed, and being left to find their own way on boats. Surely we must recognise that this is an international issue that demands an international and United Nations response.

Mr Swire: I hoped to demonstrate our interest and that of the international community—I have obviously failed—by mentioning the fact that we have been pressing for the meeting that took place. I have discussed the matter with the Burmese ambassador and the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, and we have been pushing in the UN and will do so again in the autumn. The international aspect of the matter is about Burma's future transition to a democratic country with democratic values and tolerance of people's ethnicity, religion, sex and so on, which we take for granted. It is also about the humanitarian aspect of the crisis. However, the immediate issue is local. It is happening on the borders of the countries to which I have alluded, and it is for them to deal with it at first hand. That does not mean that the international community is turning its back on the situation—quite the reverse.

We have repeatedly made our concerns extremely clear to the Burmese Government, and we will continue to work with the Burmese and our international partners to make progress. Some have criticised our continuing engagement with the Burmese Government, whether with the military or through our aid programme. However, we believe, in consultation with our international partners, that the best way to help Burma achieve real progress is to engage with all parties, including the Rakhine community itself, about their concerns.

It is important that the international community demonstrates that it is listening to all sides, so that the arguments do not become more polarised than they already are, particularly in the run-up to the forthcoming election. That is the way to help embed reform and encourage the transition towards peaceful and democratic government for the benefit of all Burma's people. With elections set for November, and in the light of the situation that we have seen in the Bay of Bengal, that need is more starkly apparent than ever.

I thank the hon. Member for Leicester South for this opportunity to set out the Government's position once again. I very much welcome the involvement in the debate of Members in all parts of the House, and I am particularly pleased that the shadow Foreign Secretary is on the Front Bench to listen to it. I particularly welcome my new colleague my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), who has close genealogical connections with a country that we all care passionately about. We want to see it transition from an extraordinarily difficult, dark period. We can expect to see more challenges, and we will maintain our levels of interest and support, but not at the cost of turning our back on an appalling humanitarian situation.

Debate in the House of Lords on Rohingya

9 June 2015 Baroness Warsi: To ask Her Majesty's Government what emergency support they have provided in response to the flight of Rohingya refugees from Burma.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development (Baroness Verma): My Lords, at over £18 million since 2012, DfID is one of the largest humanitarian donors in Rakhine, providing over 126,000 displaced and conflict-affected people with water and sanitation and reducing malnutrition and gender-based violence. We are also working on community dialogue and reconciliation and are one of the largest donors to a major rural livelihoods programme in Rakhine.

Baroness Warsi: My Lords, I am sure that the whole House commends the Government for their consistent efforts in this tragedy. However, does my noble friend also understand the sentiments of Abdul Hashim, a Rohingya refugee now in the United Kingdom, who said last week: “We don’t need food, we don’t need shelter, we don’t need education. We need rights”? Could she detail the latest discussions that have taken place with the Burmese Government on what human rights groups have now defined as “systematic ethnic cleansing” and a “state policy of persecution” of Rohingyas by Burma?

Baroness Verma: My noble friend is absolutely right that there are some real, complex concerns and issues that need to be addressed. As she rightly pointed out with reference to one individual’s case—and there are many such cases—of course there is a great need for the Burmese to do a lot more and to be more inclusive of all communities in Burma. My noble friend will know from her own experience in her past role in the Foreign Office that the Government are very much involved in talking to the Burmese Government and in looking at how we can empower civil society organisations to work much closer within Burma. So a number of issues need to be addressed, but I think the Government are right in their position of working closely with Burma while being a critical friend and highlighting areas where we need to work much better.

Lord Avebury: My Lords, the Foreign Office Minister, Hugo Swire, had to summon the Burmese ambassador in April to complain about lack of access and protection for humanitarian aid workers in Rakhine. Can my noble friend say whether that had any effect, and how much of the generous aid which the Government are giving to succour the victims of persecution in Rakhine is getting through to those victims? Can she also say what is happening about the 7,000 people at sea and whether ASEAN is mounting any sort of rescue operation to prevent them from losing their lives?

Baroness Verma: The noble Lord is absolutely right to raise the issue of those people who are taking to the seas. There has to be much greater regional co-operation in that area. My right honourable friend Hugo Swire was right to call in the Burmese ambassador to speak to him on issues that concern the rights of people within Burma and what we need to do to address them. As the noble Lord is aware—I know that he also takes a very keen interest in this area—these discussions are ongoing, but we need to continually push hard to ensure that progress is being made. However, he is also right to highlight that the amount of aid we are giving in that country is there to help support a change in approach to helping people in Rakhine and to ensure that their rights are fully recognised.

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: My Lords, does the Minister recognise that forcing desperate people into fleeing by sea is only the latest in a series of ethnic cleansing efforts against the Rohingya people in Burma? When the independent evidence of systematic genocidal cruelty which we heard about earlier is so clear, why do not our Government do what President Obama has done and restore sanctions to at least the level recently renewed by the United States?

Baroness Verma: My Lords, our priority remains to address the immediate humanitarian situation and human rights abuses that are occurring, while we develop more broadly with other partners a comprehensive plan that seeks to address the challenges that are facing that state. It is our responsibility to deliver that, and that is what we are focusing on at the moment.

Baroness Afshar: My Lords, what is the evidence that the aid that is intended for those groups is getting to them? When discrimination operates at the kind of level when a whole part of society is regarded as being non-people, there is no way that humanitarian rights and entitlements can be bestowed on them without having some kind of control over the Government.

Baroness Verma: The noble Baroness is right to address that particular area of concern, but we are working very closely with civil society groups there and DfID is present there, so we are doing a lot on

the ground. However, the overall problem needs to be addressed, and we must make sure that there is a collective response in addressing that particular serious issue.

Lord Collins of Highbury: My Lords, I welcome the noble Baroness to the Front Bench and to her new responsibilities. Can she tell us what discussions the Government have had with Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia regarding the safety of the Rohingya fleeing Burma?

Baroness Verma: First, I thank the noble Lord for his welcome. The issue is absolutely about getting those neighbouring countries to be better supported. We are trying to make more progress on that through our work in DfID and through our dialogue with those countries. It is right and proper that the neighbouring countries take greater responsibility for the refugees fleeing there, and we need to have a dialogue with nations such as Thailand and Malaysia and others in order to be able to respond with the assistance that is desperately needed. By providing food and shelter, we are assisting the refugees in their camps, and we are trying to be as supportive as we can be in this situation, which is becoming dire. Of course, we need to work much harder, and we need to get the neighbouring countries to work harder, towards the comprehensive plan that is so desperately needed.

Debate on Rohingya in the House of Lords

18 June 2015 Baroness Berridge: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the Government of Burma concerning the persecution and trafficking of the Rohingya Muslims and ethnic minorities in Burma.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Anelay of St Johns): My Lords, the United Kingdom raises the problems in Rakhine with the Government of Burma at every opportunity. The Minister of State for Asia Pacific called the Burmese ambassador to the FCO on 18 May to express concern, calling for an urgent humanitarian response and regional co-ordination. In parallel, our ambassador in Rangoon delivered the same message, with the EU and US, in a démarche to Burmese Ministers and again bilaterally on 4 June.

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, I thank my noble friend the Minister for that Answer. Approximately 90,000 Rohingya Muslims have been trafficked this year alone. Laws are now proposed to restrict religious conversion and to make it punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment should a Buddhist marry a non-Buddhist, and Rohingya Muslims have been stripped of their right to vote. The root cause of this is militant Buddhist nationalism, which seeks to link Myanmar's identity to that of being a Buddhist. What representations have Her Majesty's Government made about the recent case of Htin Lin Oo, a Buddhist, who was sentenced to two years in prison earlier this month after being charged under the penal code with insulting Buddhism simply because he tried to argue that the conduct of extremist Buddhist nationalists, who were preaching hatred and inciting violence, was contrary to the teaching of Buddhism?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, first, I recognise the work that my noble friend does so well for all of us as co-chair of the All-Party Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief. We are extremely concerned about the approach of the Burmese Government to those who wish to express their own religious identity. We are one of the most outspoken countries in the world about not only freedom of religion and belief but freedoms generally. The Burmese Government are left in no doubt. As to those who are prisoners of the regime, we make it clear that there should be proper treatment of prisoners and proper judicial process. It is wrong around the world if people are inhibited from practising their own belief.

Lord Anderson of Swansea: To be credible we have to be consistent, as the noble Baroness and her committee have always been. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom puts Burma in the worst category and states that its Government are wholly unwilling to investigate and prosecute those who are guilty of abuses against Muslims. The US puts Burma in its "country of particular concern" category. I am pleased that the Government and the EU are making representations with the US, but is it normal to make this joint démarche when, to be powerful and credible, we always ensure that we work with the EU and the US?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Indeed, yes. We work with both the EU and the US on these matters. With UK support, the issue of Rakhine was discussed at a briefing of the UN Security Council on 28 May, where

I raised the matter of Burma with Prince Zeid, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Geneva on Monday. I will continue to do so. Later this morning, I meet the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and I will discuss the matter with him personally.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: My Lords, as one in five Rohingya has now fled since 2011, does the Minister agree that hate speech is a key issue here and that many admirable Buddhist monks and civil society actors are speaking out against this? Can we not do more to help them in what they are doing? Will she also say a word about Kachin state, which is covered by this Question on ethnic minorities, where some 100,000 people have been displaced and more than 200 villages have now been burned to the ground?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, with regard to freedoms—or lack of freedoms—in Burma, we have made it clear that it is essential for Burma to address the dire situation not only of the Rohingya community, but of other persecuted communities, regardless of the region. We want to see improved humanitarian access, greater security and accountability and a sustainable solution on citizenship applying country-wide.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: My Lords, can the noble Baroness say something about the critical engagement we have with the current Burmese Government? For example, I understand that we are training Burmese military. How much leverage does the closeness of our relationship with the Burmese Government give us to make constructive criticism of this sort?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, the noble Lord is right in his assumption that this relationship gives us more leverage. It is not merely a matter of providing technical training to the military so that they know the proper way to behave within the confines of reacting to what they may consider to be public disorder. We are also providing technical support in advance of the November elections so that they may be carried out in a proper manner.

Baroness Warsi: My Lords, is my noble friend aware of the allegations of sexual violence perpetrated by the Burmese army against a number of ethnic minorities during this conflict? I congratulate her on her new role as the Prime Minister's special representative on preventing sexual violence in conflict. What specific work do she and the Foreign Office intend to do in this area?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: I am grateful to my noble friend. It was an honour to be appointed last week by the Prime Minister as his special representative on preventing sexual violence in conflict. When I had meetings in Geneva, it became clear that colleagues—not only in the United Nations but in countries and NGOs around the world—are ready and willing to work with the UK on these matters. As to what happens next in practical terms, I assure my noble friend that I have already identified countries where specific action can be taken by me and those around the world with whom I am working. Burma is clearly at the top of the list, as are Syria and Iraq.

Baroness O'Loan: My Lords, the Minister is clearly aware that the new protection of race and religion laws in Burma will make life much harder for Burmese minorities to marry, start a family or change religion. Do the Government agree with Burma's Cardinal Charles Bo that these laws represent an unacceptable and regrettable erosion of religious freedom?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: I absolutely agree.

Baroness Kinnoch of Holyhead: My Lords, does the Minister agree that the recent disenfranchisement of the Rohingya by the withdrawal of their ID cards is a further, outrageous attack on an already severely persecuted group? Does she accept that the forthcoming elections in Burma cannot possibly be free and fair when hundreds of thousands of people are being denied the right to vote and while the military maintains its 27% stake in the Burmese Parliament?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, I entirely agree with the noble Baroness that the withdrawal of what are known as the white cards from the Rohingya was an improper act. This is the politest phrase I can think of in the circumstances. It severely imperils the appropriateness of the election results. However, we must recognise that Burma is on the cusp of having the opportunity to elect a civilian Government for the first time. This does not prevent our remaining outspoken about the fact that the Rohingya should not have had their ability to vote withdrawn.

Burma mentioned in House of Commons debate on Britain in the World

1 June 2015 Jonathan Ashworth: I am extremely grateful to the Foreign Secretary for giving way. He is at great pains to convince us that the UK is not retreating from the world stage, despite increasing commentary that it is. In that spirit, will he tell us what representations he has made to the Burmese authorities about the Rohingya refugees and migrants? Will he tell us from the Dispatch Box that it is UK policy to say to the Burmese that they should grant citizenship to the Rohingya?

Mr Hammond: Yes, that is our policy, and we have made representations in that respect. I am cautiously optimistic that there is a change going on in Burma among the political elite about this issue, under pressure from the international community in the face of what is another humanitarian disaster in that part of the world.

(...)

Rehman Chishti: In tackling extremism, one has to create a tolerant world, but in 130 countries there is persecution of people based on their faith. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we have to do much more to protect religious freedom, whether it is reforming blasphemy laws in Pakistan affecting Christian and other minority communities or in respect of Burma and the Rohingya community? Does he agree that that should be a key pillar of our foreign policy?

(...)

Hilary Benn: I am happy to give my right hon. Friend that assurance.

Each of these conflicts has its own causes but, as well as being about who has power in a country, one of the threads that runs through many of the conflicts is the uneasy relationship between the secular and the religious. We should understand that all too well in this country, given our history of power struggles, religious intolerance and persecution, but we have now reached a state in which we have shown that it is possible both to uphold universal human rights and to enable people to be absolutely free to practise their religion. That is one of the reasons why Britain is admired by many countries across the world for its genuine freedom, but we cannot be complacent here and we have to be on our guard against the rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as we stand up against religious and other persecution across the world, whether it be of Christians, of those who are lesbian, gay, transgender or bisexual, or of the Rohingya who have been affected by the recent crisis in Burma. (...)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150601/debtext/150601-0001.htm#1506013000003>

Stephen Twigg: (...) The second was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth)—the plight of the Rohingya people in Burma, who face extraordinary persecution. Many of them are now living in camps, while others have escaped on boats. This is an urgent humanitarian crisis, in which the Governments of Burma and its neighbours surely have a responsibility to protect the Rohingya people. (...)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150601/debtext/150601-0002.htm>

Mary Creagh: (...) Britain helped draft the European convention on human rights after the genocide of world war two. What message does it send to the bigots and tyrants of the world if we leave that convention? If we turn our back on human rights, what hope is there for those awaiting the death penalty in prisons around the world? What message does that send to Burma, Syria, North Korea, Sri Lanka and Iran? (...)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150601/debtext/150601-0003.htm>

Rohingya mentioned in House of Commons debate on European Union Referendum Bill

9 June 2015 Holly Lynch: (...) We have been instrumental in the establishment and promotion of modern human rights, but, as we look to the rest of the world, as we take a stand against the atrocities committed

by ISIL, as we speak up for Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar, when we strive to lead the world in bringing about an end to the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, and call for an end to human rights violations in Kashmir and in Palestine, is our credibility not undermined when we are taking a backward step on human rights here on our own shores? (...)

For full debate, see: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150609/debtext/150609-0003.htm>

Burma mentioned in House of Lords debate on Ghurkas

10 June 2015 Lord Sheikh: (...) Each time I visited Nepal, I found the people to be extremely friendly and hospitable. For me, the integrity of Nepalese culture and that of its Gurkha soldiers go hand in hand. The Gurkhas have been part of the British Army for 200 years. They fought loyally for our country all over the world and still continue to do so. They served alongside us in places such as Burma, Malaysia, Cyprus, the Falklands and China. More recently they played key roles in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan. (...)

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/150610-0002.htm#15061073000214>

Burma mentioned in House of Lords debate on Developing World: Women

11 June 2015 Baroness Uddin: (...) It is a fact that today's world is populated by wars and conflict, with the Middle East and many parts of Africa in flames. Thus, women remain vulnerable, in many conflicts, to rape being used as a weapon of war, while the peace process historically kept women outside and on the periphery of decision-making and peacebuilding, as has been said by many noble Lords. Women and girls continue to be devalued in the wider society, while sexual violence against women and girls remains pervasive in all societies, including our own. So it should not surprise us that women and children are the major victims in conflict and wars. As we speak, women are silenced by perpetrators in Burma, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and elsewhere. (...)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/150611-0002.htm#15061140000402>

Rohingya mentioned in House of Commons debate on Skills and Growth

17 June 2015 Imran Hussain: I have fought against injustice my whole life, not just within Bradford but wherever that may be in the world, and I will be a strong voice in this Chamber for the struggle of the sons and daughters of Kashmir, the suffering of the Palestinians and, as we have heard in this Chamber over the last few weeks, the plight of the Rohingya. Indeed, I have tabled an early-day motion this week, No. 121, that highlights the plight of the Rohingya people in Burma, and I would urge hon. Members from across the Chamber to consider signing it. We are witnessing an absolute human catastrophe and we cannot in these circumstances sit back and watch. We must act in relation to the Rohingya people, quickly and decisively.

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150617/debtext/150617-0002.htm>

Burma mentioned in Westminster Hall debate on Bangladesh

17 June 2015 Kerry McCarthy: (...) Finally, one area where Bangladesh has been less proactive is the boat crisis with Burmese and Bangladesh migrants. We have previously discussed our concerns that Bangladesh has returned Rohingya fleeing persecution in Burma and blocked aid agencies from accessing Rakhine state. The international community is horrified by the discovery of mass graves and scenes of migrants from Burma and Bangladesh packed on board ships and risking their lives in search of a new home in Malaysia, Thailand or Indonesia. I know that the Minister responded to an Adjournment debate in the Chamber only last week or the week before on the situation in Burma, but Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has dismissed the Rohingya as economic migrants who are "mentally sick", and said they should be

punished, as they were “tainting the image of the country”.

Will the Minister comment on the situation from the Bangladesh perspective?

I hope the Minister will agree that the international community needs to address not only the immediate crisis in the Andaman sea, but the underlying issues forcing people to flee their homes in Burma and Bangladesh. Bangladesh is of course part of the discussions about Rohingya citizenship and whether they can eventually be given rights of citizenship in Burma.

I regret that my remarks may appear rather negative; I started by saying that there was much in Bangladesh's future to be positive about, but it is important, as other Members have said, to highlight some of the issues, in a spirit of friendship, so that we can, with our common shared history and our role in the Commonwealth, work with Bangladesh to address them. (...)

Hugo Swire: (...) The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), mentioned the migrant crisis in the bay of Bengal and Andaman sea. I recently discussed the matter with the permanent under-secretary from the Bangladeshi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and urged Bangladesh to take steps to improve border security and address the root causes of the crisis. He invited me to go with him to Cox's Bazar and Chittagong to see for myself what is going on there. I very much hope to take him up on that offer.

In parallel, UK aid is providing £4.79 million for food security, livelihoods and relief co-ordination for the Rohingya and host communities in Bangladesh, in addition to the significant existing UK aid programmes in Rakhine. (...)

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150617/halltext/150617h0002.htm>

Rohingya mentioned in House of Lord debate on EU: Asylum Seekers

18 June 2015 Lord Desai: My Lords, let me move on from what people have said. I do not think that it matters very much whether we call them refugees, asylum seekers, or whatever. A lot of people want to migrate from where they are to where the economic prosperity is. That is not just a problem of Europe, where people are coming across from Africa or the Middle East; it is a global problem. There is the Rohingya problem; they are leaving Myanmar and ending up in Indonesia and Malaysia without any guarantee that they will be settled. If this is a global problem, it needs a global solution. (...)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/150618-gc0001.htm#15061883000353>

Burma mentioned in House of Lords debate on Commonwealth War Graves Commission

22 June 2015 Viscount Slim: (...) In Burma the Army was nearly a million. It had men of every religion in the world and of none and who spoke some 30 different languages, which was quite a problem. It was totally integrated with the air forces who came from Britain, India, Canada and America. They fought together, trained together, carried each other's wounded and died together. It was agreed that they would all be buried together in one cemetery down in Rangoon. You experience a very poignant and great feeling when you go into this cemetery. Hindus and Sikhs, of course, cremate but their names go up on the memorial. Muslims bury, Christians bury and Jews bury. (...)

Lord Black of Brentwood (Con): (...) As a trustee of the IWM, I would like to thank the commission for its effective partnership with us. We have worked incredibly well together in the nearly 100 years since we were both formed in 1917. We shared a beginning and share as much today. Together we have helped bring together all the dimensions of remembrance for the nation through, most recently, the First World War centenary to VE Day and beyond. Indeed, the commission is in so many ways a model of how to make effective partnerships work. The IWM is just one of the many organisations it works with. Other partners exist in veterans' organisations, battlefield tours and in many museums across the globe—from the Juno Beach Centre in France to the Thai Burma Railway Centre. (...)

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/150622-0002.htm#15062219000294>

Burma mentioned in Written Statements

16 June 2015 The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 June and I will attend the General Affairs Council on 23 June. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the General Affairs Council will be chaired by the Latvian presidency. The meetings will be held in Luxembourg.

Foreign Affairs Council

Asia

(...) Council conclusions on strengthening partnership between the EU and ASEAN and on Burma ahead of the November elections are also likely to be adopted. (...)

For full statement, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150616/wmstext/150616m0001.htm#15061661000007>

Early Day Motions

ACCESS FOR HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES TO RAKHINE STATE IN BURMA (Early Day Motion 58)

Date tabled: 01.06.2015

Signatures: 50

That this House expresses its concern at the number of Rohingya Muslims from Burma and Bangladesh who have fled their countries since the start of the year, risking their lives in order to reach Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand; calls on the Government to make clear to the Burmese government the need to address the reasons that people feel forced to do so; and further calls on the Government to ask the UN Secretary-General to take a personal lead in negotiating with the Burmese government to allow access for humanitarian agencies to Rakhine State.

TREATMENT OF THE ROHINGYA IN BURMA (Early Day Motion 121)

Date tabled: 15.06.2015

Signatures: 39

That this House notes that the continuing persecution of the Rohingya people in Burma has caused and continues to create a humanitarian disaster in the area; further notes that the Muslim Rohingya minority have been described as the most persecuted people in the world; further notes that they are subject to violence, murder, displacement and as a result many of them are forced to flee; further notes that the Burmese government's refusal to accept the Rohingya as full citizens alongside its failure to stop the toxic anti-Muslim rhetoric and propaganda has led to a situation that can only be described as ethnic cleansing; and further notes that this government along with the regional governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Bangladesh must act decisively to force the Burmese authorities to take action to defend the Rohingya people and restore their basic human rights and freedoms as a matter of the utmost urgency.

RESTRICTIONS ON JOURNALISTS IN BURMA (Early Day Motion 57)

Date tabled: 01.06.2015

Signatures: 48

That this House deplores the restrictions recently imposed on journalists in reporting proceedings in the Burmese parliament, the Assembly of the Union; notes that the restrictions have now been lifted; believes that the reporting of parliamentary proceedings is vital for public information and to hold Members

accountable; further notes the importance of the fight by John Wilkes to secure reporting of Parliament in the development of the UK's own democracy; further notes the latest report on Burma in 2015 by Human Rights Watch that highlights increasing intimidation of the media over the past year, including new restrictions on both foreign and domestic journalists; further notes the current imprisonment of 13 journalists and the shooting in October 2014 of the freelance reporter, Ko Par Gyi, by the army whilst held in custody; and calls on the Government to raise concerns about the restrictions on parliamentary reporting in Burma and to express its determination to monitor developments in media freedom in Burma in the future.

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Democracy in Burma

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Democracy in Burma held its annual general meeting on 25 June.

The group elected the following officers:

Rushanara Ali MP, Co-Chair and registered contact

Paul Scully MP, Co-Chair

Baroness Kinnock, Co-Chair

Sir Peter Bottomley MP, Vice-Chair

Lord Avebury, Vice-Chair

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