



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

MARCH
2012

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Aung San Suu Kyi

1 March 2012 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with Aung San Suu Kyi on the situation in Burma. [97152]

The Prime Minister: I last spoke to Aung San Suu Kyi on 28 January to congratulate her on the incredible progress that had been made in Burma in recent weeks, and to seek her advice on how the international community should respond.

She was optimistic about Burma's prospects and we share that optimism. We agreed on the need to make progress on ethnic conflicts, the release of the remaining political prisoners, and the holding of free and fair by-elections in April.

We are concerned about reports of restrictions on campaigning in recent weeks, and urge the Government of Burma to do all they can to ensure that elections are indeed free, fair and credible.

By-elections

5 March 2012 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of (a) electoral, (b) censorship and (c) security laws in Burma on the potential for free and fair elections. [97252]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We welcome any steps taken by the Burmese authorities that may improve the prospects for credible and inclusive political participation. Recent amendments to the Political Parties Registration Law, including removing the ban on serving prisoners being members of a political party addresses one of the National League for Democracy's (NLD) key concerns and allowed Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD to re-register to contest the upcoming by-election in April.

The NLD have raised concerns about difficulties they have encountered while campaigning in recent weeks, including an apparent ban on rallies in sports stadiums. Despite the Union Election Commission's rapid response allowing some rallies to take place, we note that the ban on use of sports stadiums still appears to be in place.

In recent months we have seen some welcome changes to the censorship system, and I hope to see further relaxation of media restrictions when the draft media law is finalised.

The international community will be carefully scrutinising all aspects of the conduct of the 1 April by-elections, not only on polling day and advance voting, but throughout the full campaign process. Post-election, we hope to see the strong involvement of the opposition as the reform process goes forward.

UN Security Council

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of Burma's compliance with United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820. [97537]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The human rights situation in Burma and its compliance with UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 remains a serious concern, particularly in the areas of the country where there is ethnic conflict. Limited access to these areas makes the provision of humanitarian assistance and collection of accurate data problematic.

We have continued to receive reports of gender-based violence by the military in the conflict areas. The Burmese Government has done little to investigate these cases. During Burma's Universal Periodic Review session at the UN, we urged the Government to prosecute those responsible for human rights violations. We have supported UN statements calling on the Burmese Government to take urgent measures to end the targeting of civilians in military operations, and rape and other forms of sexual violence.

During his recent visit to Burma, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), made it very clear to the Burmese Government that humanitarian access to conflict areas, as well as a clear process of national reconciliation were some of the benchmarks by which we and the EU would assess whether EN restrictive measures should be eased.

22 March 2012 Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames: Does my noble friend agree that future successful referrals to the court are imperilled by the absence of the countries that the noble Baroness mentioned and also those that he mentioned? By way of example, what steps have been taken to secure commissions of inquiry into crimes committed in Myanmar and in North Korea, with a view to UN Security Council referrals to the court in respect of crimes against humanity in those two countries?

Lord Howell of Guildford: My noble friend has mentioned two more countries that are not signatories: Burma and North Korea. In reality, the only way that the ICC can raise charges, commence prosecutions or anything similar with regard to non-signatories is through a resolution from the UN Security Council. That would have to be the way forward, as it was, for instance, with Libya, Sudan and Darfur. So if the UN Security Council could agree, there could be a reference to the ICC in relation to Burma and North Korea. However, my noble friend knows as well as I do that the UN Security Council has differing opinions within it; and on many issues, including the sort he has raised, there are problems.

Ethnic

7 March 2012 Stephen Phillips: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what steps he is taking to encourage the government of Burma to end the conflict between the national army and ethnic groups in Kachin and Shan states; [98371]
(2) What steps he is taking to ensure that peace between the Government of Burma and the Karen National Union is long-lasting and that all political prisoners are released. [98372]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We remain deeply concerned about ethnic-based conflicts in Burma, particularly in Shan, Kachin and Karen States. During his visit to the country in January, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), set out clearly to the Burmese President and Ministers the steps necessary to address these concerns and that need to be taken before a more fundamental shift in our relationship could take place. These are: humanitarian access to areas affected by conflict; the release of all political prisoners and free and fair by-elections; and a clear process of reconciliation between ethnic groups.

The President told the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs that the reforms would continue and that he was confident that the Burmese Government would soon achieve ceasefires nationwide. He acknowledged the need for humanitarian assistance in conflict areas, and also said that Burma's progress to democracy is irreversible. All Ministers that the Secretary of State met said that all political prisoners would be released. A reversal on this commitment would have serious implications for any further easing of EU restrictive measures.

Since the visit we have seen some encouraging developments. On 12 January the Burmese Government and Karen National Union signed an initial agreement that puts them on the path to a ceasefire. The following day, there was a significant release of political prisoners which will contribute to greater democratic participation in the parliamentary by-elections. We have seen a number of initial peace agreements in various ethnic areas, but the process remains fragile. We also hope to see further prisoner releases in near future.

We will remain in close dialogue with EU partners on next steps, and with Aung San Suu Kyi, to ensure any further decisions support her dialogue and the process of reform. We will, of course, continue to raise our concerns with the Government, through the UN and countries in the region.

Refugees

8 March 2012 Stephen Phillips: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent steps his Department has taken to help internally displaced people and refugees in Shan and Kachin states in Burma. [98539]

Mr Duncan: The Department for International Development (DFID) is supporting non-government organisations which are providing assistance to 27,500 internally displaced people (IDP) in Kachin State over the next four months by providing humanitarian assistance in the areas of food security, shelter, water, sanitation, health and bedding.

In Shan State DFID is supporting the work of the Shan Women's Action Network, including grants to help with the costs of schooling for IDPs.

Human rights

19 March 2012 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account he is taking of the use of forced labour in Burma in his negotiations over the revision of the EU Common Decision on Burma. [100315]

Mr Jeremy Browne: In recent months there has been significant progress made with regards to labour rights in Burma, not least the Labour Organisations Bill that came into force on 9 March which allows the free formation of workers organisations. However the use of forced labour, particularly in conflict areas, remains a serious concern.

The International Labour Organisation and Burmese Government are planning to increase their level of co-operation and plan to put in place a comprehensive strategy that aims to tackle forced labour—both civilian and military—by 2015.

This will involve setting up a joint working group with Burmese authorities to deepen co-operation on several issues, including forced recruitment, under-aged recruitment, human trafficking, forced child labour, forced labour in the private sector, use of conflict porters, and forced labour associated with land confiscation.

The resolution of these issues forms part of a broader agenda of reconciliation with ethnic groups on which the UK expects the Burmese authorities to have made progress before we can consider lifting EU restrictive measures. However, we are cautiously encouraged by the developments we are now seeing. We hope this process will continue to address what are extremely serious issues, and make a positive difference to the people of Burma. We shall stay in close contact with international bodies and local contacts to keep updated on how these policies are implemented.

Aid to Burma

7 March 2012 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with European Union Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva regarding the cutting of European Union aid to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium. [HL15938]

Baroness Northover: Department for International Development (DfID) staff frequently discuss financial support for the Thailand Burma Border Consortium with European Commission counterparts as well as with other donors. DfID has consistently made clear that the well-being of Burmese refugees in Thailand should not be adversely affected by funding reductions.

7 March 2012 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what funding for civil society capacity-building in Burma they provided in 2011; and what funding will be provided in 2012.[HL15939]

Baroness Northover: In 2011-12 the combined total expenditure on civil society capacity building in Burma was around £1.2 million. Forecast expenditure for 2012-13 is around £2 million.

Additionally, through the British embassy, the UK provided support for capacity building and for programmes on democracy, human rights and governance with funding of around £500,000 in 2011-12 to civil society in Burma.

Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government why some organisations working in the Thailand-Burma border that receive grants from the Department for International Development reclaim costs incurred from the Department for International Development rather than receiving a normal grant.[HL15941]

Baroness Northover: As standard practice the Department for International Development (DfID) does not make advance payments through grants, but instead requires organisations to reclaim costs in arrears. This helps ensure better management of British aid funds. Some organisations working in the Thailand-Burma border, on an exceptional basis, receive grants from DfID as it would be too difficult for them to operate without first receiving an advance. Before agreeing to advances full justification, on a case-by-case basis, is required. Such arrangements are kept under review to ensure that they continue to be necessary and meet the required standards of financial accountability. In all such cases our determination is to ensure the full value of British taxpayers' money.

7 March 2012 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what funding they provide to women's organisations for projects supporting women and children who have been subjected to rape and sexual violence by the Burmese army.[HL15942]

Baroness Northover: The UK does not have programmes in Burma that provide direct assistance to women and children who have been raped by members of armed forces. However, the Department for International Development does provide support for legal assistance centres in Burmese refugee camps in Thailand, which can help in dealing with rape cases.

During Burma's Universal Periodic Review session at the UN, the UK urged the Government to end impunity for human rights violations. At the Human Rights Council in March and the UN General Assembly in November, the UK supported text that strongly called on the Government to take urgent measures to end the targeting of civilians in military operations, and rape and other forms of sexual violence.

7 March 2012 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent meetings Department for International Development officials have held with civil society organisations from Burma that are based on the Thailand-Burma border.[HL15943]

Baroness Northover: Department for International Development (DfID) officials regularly meet with civil society organisations and non-government organisations based along both sides of the Thailand-Burma border, both bilaterally and at meetings of the Committee for the Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand. Most recently DfID officials attended the Committee for the Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons on 26 January, and met bilaterally with the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium in February.

12 March 2012 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what financial support they provide to the International Labour Organisation Office in Burma.[HL15940]

Baroness Northover: The UK Government do not directly fund the International Labour Organisation Office (ILO) in Burma. Following the Multilateral Aid Review, the Department for International Development has ended voluntary core funding to the ILO.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

EDM 2800 – SANCTIONS RENEWAL

29.02.2012

That this House is aware of the significantly different approach adopted by the rulers of Burma over the past year; remains however cautious until such times as action is actually taken by the regime to bring irrevocable and lasting change to the country; believes such actions must include the unconditional release

of all political prisoners, announcement of an immediate ceasefire, agreement to begin the process of political dialogue between parties involved in the present conflicts, the ending of strict censorship, abolition of repressive laws and the setting of timescales to hold free and fair elections in the country; and calls on the Government to maintain the present arrangements of sanctions beyond the April 2012 renewal date, until such times as actual changes take place, rather than simply undelivered promises being made.

Total number of signatures: 19

EDM 2719 - AID TO VICTIMS OF CONFLICT IN BURMA

08.02.2012

That this House welcomes the continued increase in UK aid to Burma and the visit to Burma in 2011 by the Secretary of State for International Development; further welcomes political reforms made by the government of Burma; is, however, deeply concerned that the number of people displaced last year in that country by conflict and human rights abuses doubled to almost 150,000; is alarmed that the government of Burma is continuing to block humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands of people in conflict zones; calls on the British Government to increase aid to populations displaced by conflict, including significant increases in cross-border aid which can be the only way to access large numbers of displaced people; expresses deep concern that refugees in camps in neighbouring Thailand who have fled conflict are facing cuts in rations of 22 per cent. Which could cause increased malnutrition in children; looks forward to free and fair elections with the participation of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party; and calls on the Government to significantly increase funding for Burma to support food and shelter for refugees.

Total number of signatures: 62

EDM 2710 - BURMA

08.02.2012

That this House welcomes the steps taken by President Thein Sein to release some political prisoners, enter into ceasefire negotiations with armed ethnic groups and allow more political space in Burma; further welcomes the visit to Burma by the Foreign Secretary and his meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; expresses continued support for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the people of Burma in their ongoing efforts to secure human rights and democratic reform; notes with concern that hundreds of political prisoners remain in Burma's jails, and that there has been an increase in human rights abuses in ethnic states; further notes that reforms made so far have mostly not been enshrined in law and no constitutional changes have been made; believes that international pressure has played an important role in encouraging reforms so far; and calls on the Government to ensure that EU sanctions on Burma are not relaxed prematurely before substantially more political prisoners are released, conflict is ended and there is an inclusive dialogue process to secure further and irreversible reform.

Total number of signatures: 66

EDM 112 HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

That this House sends its best wishes to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who will spend her 65th birthday in detention on 19 June 2010; calls for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in Burma; rejects the elections planned by Burma's generals later this year which, due to election laws and ongoing repression in Burma, cannot be free and fair; condemns Burma's new constitution which is designed to maintain dictatorship in civilian guise and does not grant rights or protection to Burma's ethnic minorities; notes that all diplomatic efforts to reform the dictatorship's sham roadmap to democracy have failed; recalls that the United Nations Security Council, General Assembly, Secretary General and Human Rights Council have all stated that the solution to the problems in Burma lies in dialogue between the dictatorship, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, and ethnic representatives; and calls on the Government to support a United Nations-led effort to pressure the dictatorship to enter into such dialogue.

Total number of signatures: 145

EDM 787 AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND ELECTIONS IN BURMA

That this House acknowledges reports that Burmese political prisoner Aung San Suu Kyi may be released on the completion of her current term of arrest on 13 November 2010; is concerned that, as this date falls six days after scheduled elections in Burma on 7 November, Ms Suu Kyi may not be permitted to utilise her vote; is further concerned that her National League for Democracy party will play no part in the election, having boycotted it on the grounds of Ms Suu Kyi's and others' continued political imprisonment, her exclusion from political office and party membership and the Burmese junta's new election laws, which ban

groups including civil servants and Buddhist monks from joining a political party; firmly believes that Aung San Suu Kyi should be released unconditionally as a matter of urgency; and calls on the Government to condemn strongly the Burmese junta's recent election laws as obstacles to the free and fair conduct on democracy.

Total number of signatures: 41

EDM 788 BBC WORLD SERVICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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

Total number of signatures: 57

EDM 989 ELECTIONS IN BURMA AND ADVANCE VOTING

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

Total number of signatures: 26

EDM 1014 RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI

That this House welcomes the unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from her house arrest in Rangoon on 13 November 2010; supports her calls for a peaceful revolution and for dialogue with the ruling regime in order to work towards change in Burma; urges continued international attention to the political system in Burma; and further supports Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's belief that nothing can be achieved without the participation of the people.

Total number of signatures: 46

EDM 1649 BURMA AND THE EU

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

Total number of signatures: 37

EDM 1659 BURMA EARTHQUAKE

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

Total number of signatures: 29

EDM 1739 AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND THE BRIGHTON FESTIVAL

That this House welcomes Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as guest director of the 2011 Brighton Festival; notes that although Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will not attend the festival she plays a significant role in inspiring the programme through her plea to 'use your liberty to promote ours'; congratulates the Festival organisers for their choice of guest director and planning of a wide-ranging and vibrant programme; looks forward

to a dynamic celebration of arts, culture and freedom over the three weeks of the Festival; and urges the Government to maintain pressure on the Burmese regime to free the more than 2,000 political prisoners still in detention and to move towards free and fair democracy in Burma.

Total number of signatures: 13

EDM 1966 BIRTHDAY OF DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

That this House recognises Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 66th birthday and Burma Women's Day, celebrated on 19 June 2011; welcomes Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Reith lectures on the theme of securing freedom, to be broadcast on 28 June and 5 July 2011 on BBC Radio 4; is concerned that despite the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest on 13 November 2010 the human rights situation in Burma has not improved; notes that more than 2,000 political prisoners remain in detention; is gravely concerned by the Burma Campaign UK reports that the breaking of the ceasefire between the Burmese regime and the Shan State Army has resulted in violence including against civilians in the area; and urges the Government to call for a nationwide ceasefire, to support humanitarian efforts to provide assistance in these areas and to call for the release of political prisoners in Burma.

Total number of signatures: 41

EDM 2101 AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND THE MARTYR'S DAY MARCH

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

Total number of signatures: 32

EDM 2241 RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BURMA

That this House warmly welcomes the release of political prisoners in Burma, particularly that of Zarganar, the comedian and film maker, who was originally sentenced to 58 years' imprisonment for alleged public order offences; and calls on the Burmese authorities to follow up this gesture with the further release of all prisoners of conscience and the introduction of genuine democratic reforms.

Total number of signatures: 43

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