



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

MARCH
2013

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Rohingya

20 March 2013 Julie Elliott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Burmese Government on citizenship for the Rohingya in Burma.

Mr Swire: I met Burmese Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin on 11 February, together with the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) and the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr Duncan). During the meeting, the need for a long-term resolution on citizenship for the Rohingya in Burma was raised. Concerns over the security situation, access for aid agencies, emergency accommodation and justice were also raised directly with the Burmese Foreign Minister.

Our ambassador visited Naypyidaw on 6 and 7 March and raised the situation in Rakhine State with the Defence Minister, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Border Affairs. He asked about the prospects for a long-term political solution, including on citizenship for the Rohingya. He also pressed for urgent action on humanitarian needs as the rainy season approaches.

British officials in Rangoon regularly visit Rakhine State to discuss the situation with both the Rakhine and Rohingya communities, most recently on 11 and 12 March.

26 March 2013 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture on the treatment of prisoners in Buttdaung Prison in northern Rakhine State.

Mr Swire: We have not had any recent discussions with the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. However, we have regular discussions with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights situation in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana. These meetings cover the full range of human rights issues in Burma, including the issue of political prisoners. Mr Quintana's report on 6 March highlighted concerns about the ongoing practice of torture in places of detention in Burma, and set out allegations that Muslim prisoners detained in Buthidaung prison in Rakhine State after last June and October's violence had been tortured and beaten to death.

On 7 March, our ambassador discussed the plight of Rohingya prisoners in Buthidaung jail with the Burmese Minister for Border Affairs.

We continue to press for full and prompt implementation of the mechanism set up by the Burmese Government for reviewing disputed cases and for the unconditional release of political prisoners with senior members of the Burmese Government, as I did during my visit to Burma in December 2012.

7 March 2013 Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Walsall South of 31 January 2013, Official Report, column 945W, on Burma, what steps he is taking to ensure that the humanitarian assistance being provided by the Government to people displaced in Rakhine State, will not be misused.

Mr Duncan: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for International Development. DFID is funding a consortium of international non-governmental organisations to provide humanitarian assistance to people displaced in Rakhine State. Before agreeing funding, the financial management and audit systems of the consortium was fully assessed to safeguard against improper use of funding. The outcome of DFID's funding is regularly monitored by our staff in Burma, including by visits to Rakhine.

11 March 2013 Mrs Main: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcomes were of the Senior Minister of State's recent visit to Bangladesh.

Alistair Burt: The Senior Minister of State, my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Warsi, had a very successful trip to Bangladesh. She discussed a wide range of topics with various interlocutors.

With Bangladesh set for its next parliamentary elections by January 2014, the visit was an opportunity to deliver messages on the importance of free, fair and participatory elections to Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, and the leader of the opposition, Khaleda Zia. Baroness Warsi also met with the Chief Election Commissioner to discuss Bangladesh's election preparations and the role of the Election Commission in helping to deliver free and fair elections.

The Minister raised our concerns about the International Crimes Tribunal and our absolute opposition to the death penalty in meetings with Sheikh Hasina and the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Dipu Moni, during her visit. Furthermore, she raised the issue of disappearances, including that of Elias Ali and his driver and extra-judicial killings. Baroness Warsi, also became the first British Minister to visit the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and witnessed the seriousness of this humanitarian situation. She called on the Government of Bangladesh to continue allowing international aid to reach the Rohingya community and repeated our call for Burma to find a long-term solution for the Rohingya people.

The British Government will continue to discuss these issues with the Bangladesh Government at all opportunities.

Kachin State

26 March 2013 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the treatment of Kachin men accused of belonging to the Kachin Independence Army by the government of Burma; and whether he has discussed this issue at UN or EU level.

Mr Swire: We are aware of credible reports of the arbitrary arrest and torture of Kachin men accused of belonging to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), most recently raised by UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, in his report to the UN Human Rights Council. We remain deeply concerned over recent military action and reported wider human rights abuses against civilians in Kachin State.

British officials regularly raise the situation in Kachin State bilaterally with the Burmese Government, through the EU, most recently during a visit to Kachin State from 12-13 March, as well as at the UN, including the latest Human Rights Council session. We also continue to press urgently for humanitarian access to KIA-controlled areas.

05 March 2013 Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the emergency component of the Myanmar Education Consortium to support children whose education has been disrupted by conflict in Kachin state will provide for internally-displaced children in areas under the control of the Kachin Independence Organisation as well as those in government-controlled areas.

Mr Duncan: As the Myanmar Education Consortium has just been launched, it is not possible to state precisely who will apply for grant funding in Kachin and in what areas they will be working. As some of the greatest needs are in the areas under the control of the Kachin Independence Organisation we will encourage applications from partners working effectively in these areas. DFID already provides support in Kachin to distribute teaching supplies and train teachers in camp schools under the control of the Kachin Independence Organisation.

Karen State

12 March 2013 Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the government of Burma spent on aid to internally displaced people in Karen State in 2012.

Mr Duncan: Neither Her Majesty's Government nor the United Nations currently hold this information; the level of published data on Government expenditure in Burma is limited.

Human Rights

11 March 2013 Lord Kennedy of Southwark: To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their assessment of the situation in Burma.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi): We acknowledge the encouraging reforms in Burma over the past 18 months. In particular, the significant releases of political prisoners; credible by-elections; initial ceasefire agreements signed between the Government and 10 of 11 major armed groups; and steps towards increasing humanitarian access to conflict areas. UK policy has evolved in line with this progress. We are engaging with the government and all parties to support the reform process and Burma's transition to democracy.

However, we also recognise that many challenges remain: several hundred political prisoners are still in jail; Kachin state remains the scene of armed conflict between the Government and armed ethnic groups and the most serious human rights violations; UN agencies continue to struggle to gain unhindered humanitarian access; and the Rohingya continue to be denied citizenship and basic rights.

In order to help Burma address these challenges, we will continue to be a constructive, supportive and critical partner, committed to supporting reform moves under the President and Aung San Suu Kyi.

Child Soldiers

7 March 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on how many child soldiers remain in the Burmese army.

Mr Swire: The British Government notes the recent report by Child Soldiers International, published in February 2013, which estimates that there are 5,000 child soldiers in the Burmese army. However, as the report notes, the numbers in border guard forces and in ethnic armed groups are difficult to estimate due to limited access to these groups.

In July 2012, the UN and the Burmese Government announced a joint action plan to eliminate the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The British Government welcomed this plan, but noted that implementation was vital to ensure that the practice of recruiting child soldiers is eradicated. I raised our concerns with Burmese Defence Minister, Lt Gen Wai Lwin, during my visit to Burma on 12 to 15 December 2012. The appointment of a new Defence Attaché to Burma, who was formally accredited on 22 February 2013, will be a further opportunity to press the Burmese military to introduce and adopt measures which prevent recruitment of underage soldiers in the future.

Land Confiscation

7 March 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on whether there has been a significant increase in confiscation of land from farmers and villagers by the Burmese Government in the last two years; and whether he has made representations on this issue to his Burmese counterpart.

Mr Swire: We are aware of reports in February of land confiscation in Burma. During his visit to Burma in February, Mr Tomas Ojea Quintana, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma, noted the potential for development projects to have a detrimental effect on the human rights of the people of Burma through land confiscation and forced eviction.

Neither the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), nor I have to date raised the specific issue of land confiscation with the Burmese Government. But since the suspension of EU sanctions in April 2012, the British Government has encouraged responsible trade and investment in support of Burma's democratic reform process. The British Government has provided funds to support the implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, through which civil society and community leaders engaged in decisions over investments in the natural resources and extractives sectors.

Armed Conflict

26 March 2013 Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which countries are considered to be fragile and conflict-affected by the Government.

Lynne Featherstone: DFID identifies 21 of its 28 focus states as being fragile or conflict-affected. These are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe. This list was last updated in May 2011 and is updated every two years.

Political Prisoners

20 March 2012 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with UN special rapporteur on human rights in Burma on the torture and ill treatment of political prisoners by the Government of Burma.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi): We closely follow the work of the UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, and have regular discussions with him. These have covered the full range of issues highlighted by Mr Quintana in his reporting, including the issue of political prisoners. Our officials most recently met with Mr Quintana in Geneva on 11 March.

11 March 2013 Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether the Burmese government's committee on political prisoners will be an inclusive and transparent review mechanism; and whether the Government is in discussions with the Burmese government to ensure that the mandate of this new committee will extend to all prisoners who have been unfairly detained.

Mr Swire: The British Government welcomes the creation by the Burmese Government of a committee on political prisoners and notes the range of independent civil society organisations taking part. This committee builds on earlier steps by the Burmese Government to grant access to the International Committee for the Red Cross to prisoners and prisons. It will be important that all cases are reviewed promptly, impartially and transparently.

We have not been in touch with the Burmese Government on whether they plan to extend the mandate of the committee to review all prisoner cases, though we do note the challenges faced with regards to rule of law and the status of the judiciary in Burma more generally.

26 March 2013 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the number of political prisoners in Burma; and what steps he is taking to secure their release.

Mr Swire: Independent reports indicate that around 200 political prisoners could remain in Burma's jails. We remain in regular contact with released political prisoners and their representatives.

We welcome the creation by the Burmese Government of a committee on political prisoners and note the range of independent civil society organisations taking part. This committee builds on earlier steps by the Burmese Government to grant the International Committee for the Red Cross access to prisoners and prisons. We continue to press for all cases to be reviewed promptly, impartially and transparently.

20 March 2012 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government when they last made representations to the Government of Burma about the cases of political prisoners Win Myint, Kan Min Thar, and Tun Oo; and what was the response.

Baroness Warsi: We have not made specific representations regarding Win Myint, Kan Min Thar, and Tun Oo. We continue to press for the unconditional release of political prisoners with senior members of the Burmese Government, as the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), did during his visit to Burma in December 2012; and as the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), did during the recent visit of the Burmese Foreign Minister to London in their meeting on 11 February.

Aid

7 March 2013 Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Walsall South of 31 January 2013, Official Report, column 945W, on Burma, what response has been received from the Government's call for an increase in the level of humanitarian aid to affected communities.

Mr Duncan: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for International Development.

As of January 2013 nearly \$36 million of humanitarian assistance had been provided to the victims of violence in Rakhine, including the UK's contribution of £2 million. The UK continues to call on other donors to increase their contribution.

12 March 2013 Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which projects are being funded or otherwise supported by his Department in relation to capacity building for the government of Burma.

Mr Swire: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not currently fund directly any projects which build the capacity of the Government of Burma. Our embassy in Rangoon funds a number of projects through its bilateral programme budget. Two of these projects provided funding to non-governmental organisations to support Burma's peace process, and included capacity-building elements to Government, opposition, civil society and ethnic groups by sharing experiences of peace processes.

The majority of the projects funded by our bilateral programme budget aim to build the capacity of civil society groups in areas such as human rights, peace processes, interfaith dialogue, advocacy for disability rights, revenue transparency and responsible investment, labour rights and conservation.

The British Government, through the Department of International Development, has made the largest bilateral commitment of aid to Burma—allocating £187 million for development from 2011-15. This includes capacity-building support to Government and non-government institutions through trusted expert organisations to support reform in Burma. This capacity-building also includes support to Burma's Parliament; for example, the visit of three Burmese MPs to the UK in December 2012 to learn about parliamentary process and legislative drafting.

05 March 2013 Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what the (a) gender, (b) ethnicity and (c) religion is of those children targeted by the Myanmar Education Consortium;
(2) in which states and regions of Burma the Myanmar Education Consortium will operate;
(3) what steps she is taking to ensure that Chin and Karenni children are reached by the Myanmar Education Consortium;
(4) what criteria her Department will use to select those monastic schools targeted for support by the Myanmar Education Consortium.

Mr Duncan: The Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) will target the most marginalised children to ensure equity access to quality education. One of the first steps the MEC will take is to conduct a study to identify the greatest education needs across the country and the capacity of local partners. Criteria used

for funding will then include poverty, access to schooling and educational attainment. Particular attention will be given to the needs of children in the ethnic states and where educational and development data indicates the greatest need, including in Chin and Karenni States.

While this comprehensive assessment is undertaken a limited number of partners will be supported to work in Mandalay, Magway, Ayeyawaddy and Yangon regions and Mon, Kayin and Shan States. In addition, it is expected that all monastic schools will benefit in some way through the training and mentoring provided by the programme.

05 March 2013 Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of links between the monastic schools targeted for training support by the Myanmar Education Consortium and the Burmese Government's Ministries of Religious Affairs and Border Affairs.

Mr Duncan: Links between the Burmese Monastic School system and the Ministries of Religious Affairs and Border Affairs are limited. There is no role played by the Ministries in terms of quality assurance, school systems development or management. The Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG) that will be supported by the Myanmar Education Consortium is seeking to work more closely with the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Constitution & Law

11 March 2013 Lord Hollick: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the Government of Burma regarding the democratic legitimacy of the constitution, given that the military have the ability to veto constitutional reform.

Baroness Warsi: The Government support constitutional reform in Burma and are working with key Burmese institutions involved in the reform process including the Burmese military. The recent appointment of a defence attaché to our embassy in Rangoon will provide an important channel for engagement with the Burmese military.

During his visit to Burma in December 2012, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), raised with Burmese ministers the prospects for Burma's transition towards democracy and offered support as Burma seeks to reform its laws and processes. He repeated this offer of support to members of the Burmese parliament including Aung San Suu Kyi.

19 March 2013 Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will hold discussions with the government of Burma on ensuring that that country's new media laws allow freedom of speech and expression.

Mr Swire: We regularly raise freedom of speech and expression with the Burmese Government. Freedom of expression was raised prominently when Burmese Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin met the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), and myself in London last month.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr Maude), also held extensive discussions on media freedom with a number of Burmese Ministers, including the Minister responsible for the new legislation (Minister for Information Aung Kyi), in the context of a visit to promote the Open Government Partnership in February 2013.

We have welcomed the steps taken by the Burmese Government to end pre-publication censorship of print media, and the establishment of a Press Council in September 2012. The British Government is investing in capacity-building of the media, focusing on supporting civil society and independent media outlets. We will monitor the passage of the key media legislation through parliament in 2013 to ensure progress is sustained.

11 March 2013 Lord Hollick: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assistance they are providing to the Government of Burma regarding reviewing and redrafting legislation; on which laws they have provided assistance; and with which Burmese government ministries they are working on each of these laws.

Baroness Warsi: UK assistance to Burma in relation to reviewing and drafting laws has been principally to Burma's Parliament and civil society, rather than directly to the Burmese Government. In December 2012, the UK hosted a visit by the Burmese Bills Committee to Parliament, and the UK has arranged visits of advisers to Burma who have discussed with Burmese Members of Parliament the foreign investment law and the central bank law.

The UK, through the British Council, is also assisting the parliamentary committee in Burma to draft the new higher education law. In addition, again through the British Council, we have supported a civil society consultation process on forest and land laws.

Parliament

20 March 2012 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what projects they are supporting to build parliamentary institutions in Burma.

Baroness Warsi: The Government see Burma's Parliament as crucial to the country's reform process and to the long term development of an effective democracy. We began our engagement by hosting a visit from the Lower House Speaker Shwe Mann to the UK in April 2012.

The Department for International Development is funding the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) to facilitate exchange visits between the UK and Burmese Parliaments. The first stage of this project included a scoping visit by cross-party British MPs in July 2012. WFD will facilitate a visit by the chair and key members of the Burmese Public Accounts Committee to the UK in spring 2013, to be followed up with a training session for MPs in Burma. In December 2012, at the request of Aung San Suu Kyi, we also facilitated a visit to the UK by three Burmese MPs from the Draft Bills Committee. Following that visit, we are working with Aung San Suu Kyi and Shwe Mann to identify where else the UK could in future best support the development of Burma's Parliament.

Sanctions

11 March 2013 Lord Hollick: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the European Union has conducted an assessment of the benchmarks for suspending sanctions against Burma; and, if so, whether they will take steps to ensure that that assessment will be made public.

Baroness Warsi: On 23 April 2012, EU Foreign Ministers agreed to suspend all EU sanctions on Burma for one year, apart from the arms embargo and restrictions on the supply of equipment which could be used for international repression. This was in recognition of the significant progress made by the Burmese Government against the EU's benchmarks as set out in council conclusions of January 2012. This included the release of a significant number of political prisoners, the signing of ceasefires with ten of eleven major armed ethnic groups and the largely free and fair conduct of parliamentary by-elections on 1 April 2012.

The EU Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 22 April. Foreign Ministers from EU member states will consider whether to lift, suspend or reimpose sanctions on Burma at this time. The decision will be guided by the Foreign Ministers' collective views on the Burmese Government's efforts to make further progress against them. If unanimity cannot be reached, sanctions will fall away in their entirety. The nature of these discussions will be reflected in EU Foreign Affairs council conclusions, which will be made public.

Trade & Investment

7 March 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings officials in his Department have had with Shell where Burma was discussed since May 2010.

Mr Swire: According to available records, officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have

discussed Burma with representatives from Shell at least five times since May 2010.

Since the suspension of EU sanctions in April 2012, the British Government has made a commitment to promoting responsible trade and investment in support of Burma's democratic reform process. The British Government urges all UK companies entering Burma to abide by international standards of corporate governance and social and environmental responsibility. In particular, this means adhering to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

11 March 2013 Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the benefits of increased trade between the UK and Burma.

Mr Swire: In response to positive political developments in Burma, in April 2012 the British Government adopted a policy of encouraging responsible investment in Burma. We believe such investment will support Burma's ongoing political and economic transition taking place. To help strengthen responsible business in Burma, including those investing in the country, the UK through the Department for International Development will provide £600,000 to establish a responsible investment resource centre in Rangoon. We urge all companies considering investing in Burma to abide by international standards of corporate governance and social and environmental responsibility. UK Trade and Investment also has a presence in Burma and is able to provide services to UK businesses, including tailored market research, to help them plan how to invest in the market sustainably and responsibly.

11 March 2013 Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the potential trade opportunities in Burma.

Michael Fallon: Since the suspension of EU sanctions in April 2012, the British Government has made a commitment to promoting responsible trade and investment in support of Burma's democratic reform process. The UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) office in Rangoon opened in July 2012 and provides support to British companies looking to export or invest in the country.

UKTI are currently carrying out a mapping exercise to identify where these opportunities best match British business excellence. Initial results of this exercise indicate that there are early opportunities in the energy, power generation, telecoms, financial services and education/training sectors. UKTI are also working closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to understand and support the economic reform process; this will allow UKTI to better advise British business on the opportunities in Burma.

UKTI can offer practical support and advice to British companies who are interested in the opportunities in Burma, details can be found on the UKTI website along with FCO political and economic updates. The British Government urges all UK companies entering Burma to abide by international standards of corporate governance and social and environmental responsibility. In particular, this means adhering to the OECD guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

18 March 2013 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what meetings Ministers have held with British companies in which Burma was discussed.

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Green of Hurstpierpoint): Since the suspension of EU sanctions in April 2012, the British Government have made a commitment to promoting responsible trade and investment in support of Burma's democratic reform process.

UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) organised two trade missions to the market in 2012. The July multi-sector mission was led by Lord Marland and my right honourable friend the Minister of State (South-East Asia/Far East, India and Nepal, Latin America, Falklands, Australasia and Pacific, Commonwealth) led a delegation of UK power companies in December.

My right honourable friend the Minister of State, Department for International Development and my right honourable friend the Minister of State (South-East Asia/Far East, India and Nepal, Latin America,

Falklands, Australasia and Pacific, Commonwealth) attended the November Wilton Park conference, "Burma/Myanmar, Business and Human Rights: Setting Standards for Responsible Business", at which a number of British and international company representatives were present. They welcomed the Minister for the President's Office to the UK and discussed the benefits that responsible investment can bring to Burma.

Where companies have expressed interest in Burma Ministers have been able to refer them to the UKTI office which opened in Rangoon in July 2012 and which offers practical support and advice to British companies interested in investing in the country.

Drugs Trade

12 March 2013 Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the links between elected officials in the Burmese national and regional parliaments and the illegal drugs trade in that country.

Mr Swire: We are aware of media and non-governmental organisation reports which have linked elected officials in the Burmese national and regional parliaments and the illegal drugs trade.

The illegal drugs trade in Burma is of serious concern. The British Government is actively looking for opportunities to engage with Burmese law enforcement authorities to tackle the trade of illicit drugs in Burma.

Debt

11 March 2013 Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what amount of debt is currently owed to the UK by Burma.

Mr Duncan: The UK had approximately £56 million outstanding debt owed by Burma at end 2012. In line with the Paris Club agreement, reached on the 24 and 25 January 2013, the UK will provide 50% cancellation of arrears due to the UK, with remaining amounts rescheduled over 15 years, with a seven year grace period. The exact amount of cancellation is to be determined following the detailed reconciliation of debt numbers with Burma.

Spitfires

20 March 2012 Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what expenses the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has incurred in relation to Spitfires allegedly buried in Burma.

Baroness Warsi: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not incurred any expenses, over and above those attributable to the normal day-to-day activities of operating our embassy in Rangoon, in relation to Spitfires allegedly buried in Burma.

ANSWERS TO SPOKEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Discussion about Burma at Westminster Hall Debate: FCO: Human Rights Work Thursday 14 March 2013

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con): It is generally accepted that there are occasions on which public pressure, particularly concerted multilateral action, can be valuable in indicating widespread disapproval of a foreign state's human rights practices; whether or not it works is another matter. On sanctions in Burma, it would not be difficult to argue that the EU sanctions on Iran have been effective in contributing to the current parlous state of the country's economy, but it would be harder to make that argument for the sanctions imposed on Burma by the EU.

The EU agreed last April to a partial suspension of its sanctions against Burma, for one year. The Committee was satisfied that enough progress had been made towards reform in Burma to justify that. We believe, however, that there is still some way to go. By current estimates, there are still some 200 political prisoners in Burma. We urge the FCO to press for better access for independent observers to Rakhine

state, where violence against the Rohingya minority reached a peak last year.

The EU Foreign Affairs Council will need to agree whether to extend the partial suspension of sanctions next month. We would be grateful to the Minister if he told us what the FCO's preferred outcome is for those discussions. If he is in favour of continuing the partial suspension, will the UK make that conditional on further commitments to reform by the Burmese Government? Will he clarify his statement in answer to a parliamentary question in February, when he said that, if unanimity at the EU Foreign Affairs Council cannot be reached, "sanctions will fall away in their entirety"?—[Official Report, 28 February 2013; Vol. 559, c. 668W.]

Kerry McCarthy: I was in Burma over the weekend and had the fantastic opportunity to attend the first-ever conference of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy. It had been banned for 25 years from holding a party conference. It gives one such hope to visit a country where there has been progress on both human rights and democracy. We hope that in 2015, there will be democratic elections which will see Aung San Suu Kyi become President of Burma. I wanted to mention my visit because it shows that improvements can happen. Last year, the EU took the decision to suspend sanctions. Given what I have observed of the situation in Burma, I think that that was the correct decision and indeed it is something that the NLD supported as well.

Mr Swire: In Burma, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary witnessed at first hand the positive changes that have taken place in the country when he became the first British Foreign Secretary to visit Burma since 1955. I subsequently visited Burma in December last year, and was able to visit Rakhine state, which is a subject of great interest to the House.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Swire: I will take just one intervention; I ask other Members to let me make some progress.

Jeremy Corbyn: I will make a very brief intervention. We obviously welcome all the democratic changes in Burma, but in his discussions in Burma did the Minister express any concern about the treatment of Muslim minorities and other minorities in the country at the present time?

Mr Swire: Yes, I can confirm that I have been doing a lot of work on that issue. I was the first Minister from Europe to go to Rakhine; I went to Sittwe and five different camps, and ever since then I have been raising the issue of the Rohingya people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway), the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, asked a number of questions about Burma, including about the sanctions against Burma. The EU Foreign Affairs Council will review the sanctions against Burma in April. We have always said that the outcome of that review will depend on the progress that the Burmese Government have made against the benchmarks set out in the council's conclusions of 12 January, including the need for meaningful progress on reconciliation with armed ethnic groups.

My hon. Friend also asked about political prisoners in Burma, which is another issue I have raised repeatedly with the Burmese. Independent experts estimate that there remain about 240 political prisoners in Burma, and we welcomed the announcement by the Burmese Government that the International Committee of the Red Cross has access to all jails and prisoners. We also welcomed President Thein Sein's announcement on 7 February that the prisoner review mechanism will contain civil society leaders and Members of Parliament. We really want to see that happen.

On the issue of Rakhine, which was mentioned earlier, I have just told the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) about my work there.

BURMA MENTIONED IN A WRITTEN STATEMENT: FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

G8 UK Presidency: Foreign Ministers' Meeting

14 March 2013

Fourthly, support for Burma will also be a priority. Following a remarkable period of political reform we believe that the G8 should, in partnership with the Burmese leadership, support a framework for responsible international investment.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/g8-uk-presidency-foreign-ministers-meeting-progress-report>

FOREIGN OFFICE MINISTER ALISTAIR BURT CALLS ON ALL PARTIES TO END THE ONGOING VIOLENCE IN MEIKTILA IN CENTRAL BURMA.

21 March 2013 Alistair Burt said: I am deeply concerned by the violence in the town of Meiktila in central Burma, and by reports of deaths and casualties. I call on all parties for an immediate end to the violence, and urge the government to take all necessary action to protect civilians and to work with communities to tackle the hostility that is behind this. The Foreign Office is closely monitoring the situation and our Ambassador is urgently raising the matter with senior figures in the Burmese government and with senior religious leaders.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-office-expresses-deep-concern-over-violence-in-burm>

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR DEMOCRACY IN BURMA

On 26th March 2013, APPG Burma organized a meeting with Matthew Smith, researcher from Human Rights Watch. Baroness Cox, member of APPG Burma, chaired the meeting. In the meeting, Matthew Smith discussed the current situation in Kachin State and Rakhine State, focusing on the killings, unnecessary use of force, sexual violence, forced labour, and other ongoing human rights abuses that Human Rights Watch has documented. He also discussed the issues of internal displacement in Burma and humanitarian concerns.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

BURMESE ARMY IN KACHIN STATE

Date tabled: 13.02.2013

That this House notes the actions of the Burmese army in shelling Kachin which has killed civilians including children; further notes the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities; calls on the Burmese government to cease attacks on civilians and to actively protect Christians from persecution; and calls on the UK Government to influence and promote true religious freedom throughout Burma.

Total Signature: 27

BURMA - THAILAND REFUGEE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING CRISIS

Date tabled: 05.02.2013

That this House is alarmed that, whilst the government of Thailand has agreed in principle to allow the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access to hundreds of Rohingya refugees that have fled Western Burma's continuing sectarian violence, permanent access has still not been granted; welcomes the government of Thailand's pledge to work with the UNHCR to find a long-term solution but is further alarmed by recent statements indicating that that government is considering deporting refugees after six months, despite warnings that they will face persecution; expresses serious concern that human trafficking of refugees from Burma is a lucrative criminal activity and that traffickers are taking advantage of the violence and fuelling the growing wave of refugees; is especially concerned by a recent BBC report revealing that Thai officials have been selling refugees to traffickers; calls on the Government to urge the government of Thailand to grant the UNHCR full and permanent access to conduct refugee screening and to work with the European Union to push for a regional Association of Southeast Asian Nations-led response to the crisis; further calls on the Government to raise the Thai officials' reported selling of refugees to traffickers with the Thai government; further notes that growing numbers of refugees are risking their lives on smugglers' boats due to mounting frustration over the lack of immediate solution to their plight; and therefore again calls on the Government to work to ensure that unrestricted humanitarian access is granted by the Burmese authorities to Rakhine state.

Total number of signature: 64

WAR IN KACHIN STATE, BURMA

14.01.2013

That this House condemns the Burma Army's military offensive against the ethnic Kachin; expresses grave concern over the recent use of aerial bombardment in the offensive; notes with serious concern the significant escalation in the conflict, including a major increase in Burma Army troops and use of landmines on the frontlines; further condemns the continuing use of rape as a weapon of war; expresses serious concern about the displacement of over 100,000 people and the humanitarian crisis developing as a result of restrictions imposed by the government of Burma on international aid to the affected areas; calls on the government of Burma to stop attacks immediately and to engage in a meaningful political dialogue with the Kachin Independence Organisation to establish a peace process; further calls on the Government to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs arising from the conflict by increasing humanitarian assistance to internally-displaced people in Kachin State via local community organisations on the ground; and further calls on the Government to work within the EU to halt relaxation of economic sanctions and new trade and investments in Burma if there is not an immediate cessation of attacks.

Total Signatures: 22

ATTACKS AGAINST ROHINGYA IN BURMA

11.12.2012

That this House is concerned by the ongoing attacks against the Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority in Burma; notes that attacks have now begun against the Kaman Muslim ethnic minority; further notes that police, state security and national Burmese Army soldiers are reported to be taking part in some of the attacks; is further concerned by President Thein Sein's request for international assistance in deporting all Rohingya from Burma which gives encouragement to alleged mobs carrying out the attacks; calls on the Government to support the placement of UN-mandated international observers in Rakhine State; further calls on the Government to work to ensure unrestricted humanitarian access is granted to all Rohingya areas, to support a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into the violence, and to encourage the government of Burma to repeal or amend the 1982 citizenship law which deprives the Rohingya of citizenship.

Total number of signatures: 63

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN KACHIN STATE, BURMA

22.11.12

That this House is alarmed that whilst the world is celebrating the political reforms made in Burma, ethnic violence and persecution carried out by the Burmese military persists, largely unacknowledged, in Kachin State; notes that this includes the targeted killings of civilians, torture and the burning of 1,000 villages, illustrating the severe human rights violations the Kachin people are being subjected to by the Burmese Army; and urges hon. Members to ask the Government to put pressure on the international community to provide much needed humanitarian aid for the Kachin people, to put pressure on the Burmese government to stop attacking Kachin civilians and to allow international humanitarian organisations access in Burma to provide aid and to urge the United Nations to instate a UN envoy in Kachin to monitor and improve this worsening situation.

Total number of signatures: 21

IDENTIFICATION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BURMA

15.10.2012

That this House recognises the importance of identifying all the remaining political prisoners in Burma and recommends that a review mechanism should be initiated, with assistance from the United Nations and civil society; and believes that upon identification an individual should either be charged with an internationally recognised offence and tried by proceedings recognisable with international fair trial standards, or released without charge.

Total number of signatures: 38

HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

06.09.2012

That this House calls on the Government to work with the international community to encourage the Burmese government to use this period of political transition to take action to improve the human rights situation in that country; and congratulates the excellent work being done by Aung San Suu Kyi and other Burmese human rights campaigners to bring to the world's attention the greatly troubling situation that has

persisted for many decades, and tragically still continues, in Burma.

Total number of signatures: 44

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN BURMA

16.07.2012

That this House sends condolences to the families and friends of all those killed and affected by recent communal violence in Arakan (Rakhine) State in Burma; expresses concern that the government of Burma and local community leaders have not taken sufficient action to stop continuing sporadic violence; is deeply concerned by reports of widespread rape and of mass arrests, predominantly against the ethnic Rohingya minority; calls on the government of Burma to stop obstructing international agencies from delivering desperately needed humanitarian assistance to around 90,000 displaced people; further calls on the government of Burma to stop obstructing ethnic Rohingya from returning to their homes and villages; further calls on all parties in Burma to reform the 1982 citizenship law, which discriminates against ethnic minorities in Burma; and requests that the Government ensures the swift delivery of aid to the region.

Total number of signatures: 33

AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND VISIT TO PARLIAMENT 21 JUNE 2012

23. 05. 2012

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

Total number of signatures: 44

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



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