



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

A summary of Burma-related issues in the British Parliament

MARCH 2015

Answers to Written Parliamentary Questions

Student protests

23 March 2015 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications of the recent crackdown on protesting students in Burma for the credibility of Burma's reform process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Hugo Swire: We have made clear our concern about the use of force by police in Letpadan on 10 March and the use of irregular security groups in Rangoon on 5 March. These events undermined an otherwise disciplined approach to the policing of student protests over several weeks, and demonstrated the need for further policing reform.

More broadly, Burma is moving from decades of authoritarian government to a more democratic system. Such a complicated transition will of course not be quick or easy and will require significant reform in all of its institutions, not least the police. The UK will continue to engage as appropriate to encourage this reform.

23 March 2015 Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what support the Government is giving to the training of police in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: Since November 2013 twelve British police officers with specialist crowd management and public order experience have been deployed in support of an EU police training mission funded by the EU Instrument of Stability. The purpose of the project is to provide training on crowd management and community policing based on international standards and respect of humans. The project followed a request from the Burmese government and Aung San Suu Kyi for the UK and others, including the EU, for assistance reforming the Burmese police force. In January we also funded the attendance of two Burmese police officers at a regional course on the effective management of counter terrorism investigations, in line with international standards.

We have made clear our concerns at the use of force by police in Letpadan on 10 March, and also by the use of irregular security groups in Rangoon on 5 March. These incidents undermined an otherwise disciplined approach to policing student protests and demonstrate the need for further policing reform. We support the EU's call for a full investigation, and call on the government of Burma to release all remaining demonstrators.

19 March 2015 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the government of Burma on the detention of students and other activists protesting against the education reform law in that country.

Mr Hugo Swire: Our Ambassador raised the importance of restrained policing of the student demonstrations at an early stage of the protests with the Burmese Deputy Minister of Home Affairs. Officials from our Embassy in Rangoon have been in further contact with the Burmese authorities at various times during their course, and we have coordinated action through our EU counterparts locally. We have also been in touch with members of Burmese civil society, including the 88 Generation movement. We have publicly expressed our concerns at the violence that occurred in Letpadan on 10 March, which undermined an otherwise disciplined approach to policing these protests. The right to peaceful

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demonstration is a fundamental democratic freedom. The exact circumstances leading to these clashes remain unclear. The UK supports the EU's call for a formal investigation to be initiated swiftly. We also welcome the government of Burma's announcement of an investigation into the events of 5 March, in which irregular forces were used to break up a student protest in Rangoon. We encourage the government of Burma to extend this investigation to include the events of 10 March, and we call for all remaining demonstrators to be released. The development of a professional police force that respects and upholds human rights and the rule of law is fundamental to Burma's transition to full democracy.

17 March 2015 Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what reports he has received on the security situation in Myanmar following the arrest of protestors on 10 March 2015; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Hugo Swire: We are concerned by the violence which took place in Letpadan Burma, on 10 March. This follows the use of force, and the use of irregular security groups, to break up a peaceful protest in Rangoon on 5 March. These events have overshadowed the long period of disciplined policing in relation to these protests.

The exact circumstances leading to these clashes remain unclear, and the UK supports the EU's call for a formal investigation to be initiated swiftly. The government of Burma has announced an investigation into the events of 5 March. The development of a professional police force that respects and upholds human rights and the rule of law is fundamental to Burma's transition to full democracy.

War Crimes

23 March 2015 Mr David Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what review of his Department's co-operation with Burma's Home Affairs Ministry has been conducted.

Mr Hugo Swire: There has been no review of our cooperation with Burma's Home Ministry.

Rohingya

24 March 2015 Yasmin Qureshi: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he has taken in response to the Burmese government's refusal to investigate possible violations of international law in relation to the Rohingya in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: We remain deeply concerned by the situation in Rakhine State. Our approach is to seek an end to all human rights violations by encouraging a resolution of the underlying tensions. We have also made clear to the government of Burma that allegations of human rights abuses must be dealt with through a clear, independent and transparent investigative and prosecutorial process that meets international standards. This call was repeated in a UK co-sponsored Resolution in the UN General Assembly in November 2014. We have also put on record our view that an independent investigation, supported by appropriate technical assistance, would make a significant contribution to accountability and reconciliation.

We worked with international partners to develop a strong country resolution on Burma at the UN Human Rights Council in March last year, which calls on the Burmese government to tackle the situation in Rakhine and renewed the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma. We welcome her recent report and its constructive recommendations on Rakhine.

24 March 2015 Yasmin Qureshi: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how many ethnic Rohingya in camps in Rakhine State, Burma, have died in the last year; and what the main causes of deaths in those camps are.

Mr Desmond Swayne: The Burmese Ministry of Health and the UN did not collect this data last year.

23 March 2015 Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether he has discussed the Burmese government and the provision of aid to ethnic Rohingya in Burma with the UN Secretary General.

Mr Hugo Swire: I raised the situation in Rakhine State with the UN Secretary General at his “Friends of Myanmar” meeting in September 2013, and our Permanent Representative in New York has done so subsequently on a number of occasions with the Secretary General’s Special Advisor Vijay Nambiar. We also work closely with the UN Resident Coordinator in Burma and UN agencies in Burma to discuss the provision of aid to the ethnic Rohingya in Burma.

10 March 2015 Mr David Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what estimate her Department has made of the number of Rohingya people from Burma who have fled to Bangladesh since 2012; and what assistance the Government is providing to those people.

Mr Desmond Swayne: Whilst there is no officially agreed number of the Rohingya population, most international agencies estimate that there is up to 500,000 Rohingya people in Bangladesh. DFID provides core contributions to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which manages the official camps for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, as well as through other partners such as the European Commission. This support includes providing shelter, access to water and sanitation, vocational training and food supplies to malnourished refugees.

Peace Process

24 March 2015 Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Burmese counterpart on allowing international observers to monitor a future national ceasefire agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Hugo Swire: A national ceasefire agreement in Burma is still being negotiated. Negotiations include discussions on the nature and extent of ceasefire monitoring mechanisms and on the role international observers could play. Our Ambassador in Rangoon has made clear our strong support for international observers of any future ceasefire. Ultimately this is a matter for the various Burmese parties themselves to decide.

Political Prisoners

23 March 2015 Mr David Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, when the Government first became aware that Philip Blackwood, who is in custody in Burma, is a British citizen.

Mr Hugo Swire: The New Zealand Embassy in Burma made our Embassy in Rangoon aware of Mr Philip Blackwood’s case in 2014. They confirmed that Mr Blackwood travelled to the country on a New Zealand passport and they were providing consular assistance.

We have not been given any information indicating that Mr Blackwood is a British national and Mr Blackwood has not approached our Embassy for assistance.

Elections

23 March 2015 Mr David Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of whether elections due in Burma will be credible, free and fair.

Mr Hugo Swire: The 2015 parliamentary elections will be a watershed for Burma’s transition to democracy. They have the prospect to be the first legitimate elections since 1960. We have made clear to the Burmese government that we want to see inclusive and credible elections, underpinned by freedom of expression and a respect for human rights. The UK is taking steps to support the integrity of the electoral process. The Department for International Development has allocated around £25m over five years to strengthen democratic governance, including support to the elections. UK funding will support the provision of technical advice to the Burmese election commission, voter education and monitoring and observation of the electoral process. Dialogue between the key political actors will be critical to ensuring a successful outcome to the election. We encourage all of the main parties to maintain regular discussions in advance of the vote, to ensure a smooth process and a smooth succession to whatever government emerges in the next Parliament.

Refugees

24 March 2015 Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what proportion of funding to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium was provided by her Department in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr Desmond Swayne: The Department for International Development has provided the following proportions of funding to the Border Consortium (formerly called the Thailand Burma Border Consortium) over the last five years: 2010, 5%; 2011, 5%; 2012, 10%; 2013, 10%; 2014, 11%.

24 March 2015 Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what funding her Department provided to support refugees from Burma living in refugee camps in Thailand in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr Desmond Swayne: Through The Border Consortium, the Department for International Development has provided the following support to refugees from Burma living in refugee camps in Thailand over the last five years: 2010, £1,085,000; 2011, £1,085,000; 2012, £2,071,250; 2013, £1,800,000; 2014, £1,800,000.

Koh Tao murders

10 March 2015 Lord Beecham: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they sought assurances from the government of Thailand that a death sentence would not be imposed upon the men accused of the murder of Hannah Witheridge and David Miller prior to the provision of evidence by United Kingdom police forces; and why the Foreign and Commonwealth Office declined to comment to The Guardian on that issue.

Lord Bates: The Home Office provided a specific authorisation to UK police officers for assistance to be provided overseas to the Royal Thai Police should it be requested and conditional upon assurances regarding the death penalty being received where required. No such assistance was requested or given under or by virtue of that authorisation. Police to police co-operation in accordance with published guidance, on any other basis, is an operational matter for the relevant police forces. It is inappropriate for Her Majesty's Government to publicly comment upon ongoing criminal investigations or prosecutions.

Human Rights Council

5 March 2015 Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will raise the issue of human rights in Mexico at the current session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Mr Hugo Swire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend, the Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington) to the House on 3 March, Official Report, column 803, in which he said "We have a strong relationship with Mexico. We use that to seek improvements to Mexico's human rights record and to give Mexico practical help in trying to improve its judicial and police systems in particular".

UK priorities at the current session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva are: the renewal of UN mandates on Syria, Burma and Iran; increasing international attention on Libya, Ukraine and DPRK; responding to UN reports on Gaza and ISIL activity in Iraq; and thematic resolutions on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Combating Religious Intolerance and Privacy.

Assistance to Burma on tax

4 March 2015 Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much her Department has spent on helping each developing country increase its tax base since 2010.

Justine Greening: DFID is already engaged in or is developing tax capacity building in the following partner countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, DRC, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Rwanda,

Sierra Leone, Somaliland, South Africa, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This includes indirect support through multilateral organisations.

In accordance with OECD DAC reporting guidelines, we do not currently record tax programmes under a separate spend code but we have been expanding our tax work over the Parliament. This includes the establishment of a specialist Developing Country Capacity Building Unit in HMRC, to deploy HMRC staff to provide technical expertise in support of these efforts.

A wide range of staff across the Department are engaged in work on tax, including policy, financial and corporate advisers and staff in country offices. In addition, HMRC staff provide tax capacity technical assistance in DFID partner countries.

4 March 2015 Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the Answer of 12 February 2015 to Question 223693, which the 26 countries are in which her Department is undertaking tax capacity work; how much funding is allocated to each such country; and how many people are employed to undertake that work.

Justine Greening: DFID is already engaged in or is developing tax capacity building in the following partner countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, DRC, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, South Africa, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This includes indirect support through multilateral organisations.

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Asylum

19 March 2015 Lord Roberts of Llandudno: To ask Her Majesty's Government how many people received support under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 in the last year for which they have records, broken down by nationality.

Lord Bates: At the end of 2014, there were 4,994 failed asylum seekers and their dependants receiving support under Section 4.

The figures provided in the table are a subset of latest statistics published in the Immigration Statistics Release by the Home Office, in Table as_18_q "Asylum seekers in receipt of Section 4 or Section 98 support, and decisions to grant Section 4 support as at the end of the quarter", available from the link below.

The Home Office publishes quarterly and annual statistics on people receiving support within the Immigration Statistics release. A copy of the latest release, Immigration Statistics October – December 2014 is available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office/series/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release> and will be placed in the Library of the House

Failed asylum seekers and their dependants in receipt of Section 4 support, by nationality as at the end of 2014

Country of nationality Total supported under Section 4
(...)

Burma

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Answers to Oral Parliamentary Questions

Human Rights Council

3 March 2015 Bridget Phillipson: What his priorities are for the 28th session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2015.

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): Our priorities include the renewal of UN mandates on Syria, Burma and Iran, increasing international attention on Libya, Ukraine and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, responding to UN reports on Gaza and ISIL activity in Iraq, and thematic resolutions on freedom of religion or belief, combating religious intolerance, and privacy. My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Anelay is representing us at the session.

Rohingya

3 March 2015 Yasmin Qureshi: The persecution of the Rohingya by the Burmese Government still continues, and the appalling humanitarian situation they, and especially the refugees, face continues, too.

Will the Foreign Secretary speak to Ban Ki-moon and ask him to go to Burma and personally to negotiate unrestricted humanitarian access for the Rohingya in the Rakhine state?

Mr Swire: Ban Ki-moon chairs a Friends of Myanmar meeting in New York, which I have attended. He is fully aware of what is going on in Burma. We remain extremely concerned about the plight of Rohingya, not least the white card issue that has just emerged, and we continue to lobby the Government in Burma on that basis.

Debates

House of Lords Debate on Burma: Policing of Demonstrations

19 March 2015 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the recent actions by police in Burma in response to student demonstrations in Letpadan.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Anelay of St Johns) (Con): My Lords, we are deeply concerned by the use of force by police in Letpadan on 10 March, and by the use of irregular security groups in Rangoon on 5 March. These incidents undermined an otherwise disciplined approach to policing student protests and demonstrate the need for further policing reform. We support the EU's call for a full investigation and call on the Government of Burma to release all the remaining demonstrators.

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead (Lab): I thank the Minister for her reply and ask her whether, in the light of the violent attacks and arrests of students in Burma last week—and, I have to say, other abuses of human rights in that country—we can now anticipate that the British Government will thoroughly review the support and assistance they currently provide to the Government in Burma. Otherwise, how can we be sure that the UK financial and technical assistance is not now actually supporting the institutions of an authoritarian regime that has made no real progress towards the civilised objectives that the people of Burma and the international community were promised?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, we continue, of course, to review how our work is undertaken with the Government of Burma. The noble Baroness will be aware that our contribution with regard to police training was via the EU instrument of a stability-funded project in support of police reform, following a request from not only the Burmese Government but Aung San Suu Kyi. That contribution remains under review. However, it is important to mark the fact that the Government of Burma have made progress, although they have a long way to go. We are always happy to discuss these matters with noble Lords and MPs. We have offered such meetings across both Houses to individuals with an interest in these matters

and have had quite a lot of uptake. I understand that at the moment the noble Baroness, Lady Kinnock, has not accepted the invitation to meet our most senior official on this matter. I warmly offer that invitation again, and hope that she may accept it.

Baroness Cox (CB): My Lords, is the Minister aware that I recently visited remote hill tribe areas in Chin state, where I am pleased to report that local people appreciate some significant reforms, including improvements in relationships with the army and police, cessation of forced labour, and investment in infrastructure? However, we of course remain deeply concerned by the Burmese Government's violations of human rights and military offensives against the Rohingya, Shan and Kachin peoples. How are Her Majesty's Government achieving an effective balance in encouraging genuine reforms by the Burmese Government, while applying appropriate pressure to end gross violations of human rights in other areas?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, I pay tribute to the work of the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, and her courage over so many years in the work that she has done in Burma. It is a balance, whereby one needs, as she said in her report, to recognise progress but to be ever cautious about the huge amount of work yet to be done. I read her report with interest. The stories of the community health workers were very touching indeed.

The Burmese Government have released political prisoners, discharged child soldiers—not all of them—ratified the Biological Weapons Convention and endorsed the declaration to end sexual violence in conflict, but we have seen an increase in the number of political prisoners, conflict in Kachin and in Shan, arrests of journalists and continued discrimination in Rakhine state. I shall be discussing these immediately after Questions with the United Nations special rapporteur, Yanghee Lee.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (LD): My Lords, as recently as November when I met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, her main point for the West was that we must not become complacent that the constitutional reform process is sufficient. With elections coming up in November, she is extremely concerned that there is a regression on the part of the military. That is what we have seen, in terms of the Question asked by the noble Baroness, Lady Kinnock. Could the Minister tell the House what meetings the Government are having with the military Government to press them to bring about constitutional reform—it was meant to be announced but has not been yet—so that they can embed that before the election period begins?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, my right honourable friend Hugo Swire visited Burma last year. He has met representatives of the Burmese Government and discussed the range of progress that the Burmese Government need to make. As my noble friend said, the elections this year are critical for Burma. It is the first time that Burma has had the opportunity to have democratic elections and make real progress. It must not let that slip.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, the long-term solutions to the conflicts between the central authorities in Myanmar and the ethnic armed groups active in many parts of the country will undoubtedly be assisted if the work of ASEAN—the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—to become more involved in peace and security across the region is supported by the international community. Will that work by ASEAN and those sorts of regional initiatives be a priority for the new stabilisation fund that comes into place in April?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: The noble Lord makes an important point. I will look very carefully to see what kind of stress has been put on that. I would like to consider that and see whether it has been properly reflected.

Baroness Berridge (Con): My Lords, although the Rohingya Muslims remain one of the most persecuted people on the face of the planet—I declare an interest as chair of the All-Party Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief—they had a vote in the first national elections. At that point in time, temporary ID cards were sufficient to give you a vote. In fact, they elected Mr Shwe Maung, who I think is the only Rohingya Muslim member of the Parliament there. Could my noble friend the Minister outline what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the President of Burma following his executive order on 11 February this year, which basically invalidates those temporary ID cards and will deprive the Rohingya Muslims of their vote in November's elections?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, representations have been made with regard not only to that but to the method by which information is collected in that state about one's ethnicity. As I understand it, one is forced to put down that one is Bengali, rather than one's real ethnicity. These are matters that must continue to be discussed.

Burma mentioned in House of Lords Debate on Women: Economic Empowerment

5 March 2015 Baroness Nye: (...) In doing that, we must never of course forget our sisters who are not properly enfranchised still. In Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah declared that women will be able to vote and run in this year's local elections for the very first time—although, sadly, they will not be able to drive to the polling stations. In Burma, where elections are expected later this year, it is unlikely that Aung San Suu Kyi will be able to stand for President, because the constitutional clause banning anyone with foreign partners or children will not be amended by the quasi-civilian Government. It is hard to see how the elections can be seen as credible and fair without reform of the eligibility clause.

While it was a step forward that President Thein Sein endorsed the Preventing Sexual Violence initiative last year, the military Government continue to stand by while the violence perpetrated by the Burmese army continues with impunity. The Women's League of Burma and the UN special rapporteur have been documenting rape and sexual violence by the Burmese army for decades. There was one such case in January this year, when two young Kachin female teachers—Maran Lu Ra and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin—were brutally raped and murdered in Shan State. They had been working in the village for about eight months as volunteer teachers for the Kachin Baptist Convention. The Burmese army arrived in the village two days before the murders, posted guards around it but then left shortly before the bodies were discovered. Burma Campaign UK, in which I declare an interest as a trustee, has called upon the British Government to implement provisions in their Preventing Sexual Violence initiative and dispatch a team of experts to Burma to investigate the case. I would be grateful for the Minister's comments on why this has not happened. What are the criteria for making such a decision? The international community, including the UN, has repeatedly called on the Burmese Government to investigate such cases fully. They have repeatedly failed to do so. Those 20 year-old women had left the relative safety of their homes to teach children in an area of ethnic conflict.

In Burma, as elsewhere, there is an urgent need for education, not only for children but adults, if the demand for teachers, health workers and better living standards is to be met. As the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, mentioned, Kofi Annan has said that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women, and that empowerment must include access to education. Educating girls has enormous benefits for their families, communities and countries. The millennium development goal to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education has been nearly achieved in primary education but progress has stalled. The higher the level of education there is, the higher the prevalence of gender disparity, even for girls living in higher-income households. There are ways to make things better, such as making the school environment more conducive to girls by improving the sanitation facilities, making roads and transport safer, and having more female teachers as role models. It has been estimated that an extra year of primary schooling for girls increases their wages by up to 20%. Mothers with even a few years of education are more likely to send their children to school and have healthier babies with lower levels of child mortality. (...)

For full debate, see: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/150305-0001.htm#15030536000284>

Burma mentioned in House of Lords Debate on Soft Power and the UK's influence (Select Committee Report)

10 March 2015 Lord Crisp (CB): (...) Finally, the medical royal colleges in the UK are hugely valued in terms of their qualifications. I believe that membership of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is still the most valued qualification in India and I know that the Royal College of General Practitioners accredits all family practitioner courses in south-east Asia, with the exception of Burma. There is extraordinary influence and these are extraordinary networks. (...)

Lord Soley (Lab): (...) I give an example of my experience on that from Burma—Myanmar, as it is now known. I have been in touch with the ambassador here and, through him, to the Attorney-General in Burma. I talked to them about the possibility of links with the Training Gateway to build capacity on the rule of law there. I received several letters from the Attorney-General, Dr Tun Shin. One stated, “if I may say so, I feel that at this primary stage it will be beneficial to give preference to high level officials to attend”, courses in the UK, to “gain knowledge which they can disseminate”, to the people who work for them. In a later letter, he stated that they were very interested in having training from the Training Gateway in courses delivered overseas or there in Myanmar.

At the end of the day, it did not happen. One reason is that however much help we were getting—I am in no way critical of DfID or the Foreign Office—there was not enough in Burma itself to build that structure. We need to think about how we can place a person in countries such as Burma to ensure that they can deliver on the ground what their leaders say that they need. That interlinkage is so difficult. (...)

Baroness Hooper (Con): (...) I should like to refer to a recent visit that I made to Burma/Myanmar, which was part of a capacity-building programme arranged by the IPU to help and support women parliamentarians. We had meetings with that redoubtable lady, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and I think that our sessions and our attempts at explaining the meaning of oversight and accountability, along with the value of Question Time, were greatly appreciated by a full complement of women Members of Parliament and officials. I noted in the report that there was reference to the fact that one-quarter of a million people in Burma use the British Council’s libraries there for uncensored access to the internet. We were able to visit a library close to Naypyidaw, the new capital of Myanmar. While the internet access was greatly welcomed, I have to say that the shelves of the library could do with more books. Anybody who can come up with a scheme to help to use some of the books, magazines and pamphlets that are thrown away—squandered perhaps—in this Parliament would find a great welcome over there.

In this context, and in the context of Parliament’s work, I should also refer to the fact that one of the Commons Library clerks has been seconded to Naypyidaw to work in the Myanmar Parliament and to help to build up the library and other support services. He is doing very valuable work in difficult circumstances. He has been there for a year already—and that is likely to be extended. He is universally known and greeted wherever he goes as “Oliver”. I had no idea that our Parliament provided this type of capacity building, and I am afraid that I could not find a reference to it in the report, although no doubt it was there somewhere. (...)

For full debate, see:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/150310-0001.htm>

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/150310-0002.htm>

Burma mentioned in House of Lords Debate on EU: Balance of Competences Review

11 March 2015 Baroness Falkner of Margravine: I turn to the substance of some of the reports—although, in the limited time, I shall have to be very brief. The report on foreign affairs was one of the early reports and is therefore somewhat dated. However, its evidence suggests that the creation of the External Action Service has understandably been challenging—as has been particularly experienced in the division of the responsibilities assigned to the high representative, who is as well the VP of the Commission. Some years on, the notable success of the high representative’s role in the E3+3 talks in Iran and the transition in Burma show that, when the EU has a clear focus, the sum can be greater than its parts. I should pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Ashton, in that role. However, the real test will come here in Europe itself, where any divisions over Russia could have a disastrous impact on not only EU security but EU cohesion overall. A further point of potential disunity will be China, where we have seen selective attempts by the Chinese to play on bilateral relations to the cost of common EU rules, particularly in the area of competition policy.

For full debate, see: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/150311-0002.htm#150311101000219>

Reports

Burma mentioned in International Development Committee: the Legacy-Parliament 2010-15 - International Development

24 March 2015

(...)

INSPECTING DFID COUNTRY PROGRAMMES

5. Each year the Committee has been able to make two or three visits abroad each year, which usually involve an examination of key DFID programmes. In 2010, we went to Washington and New York to meet the World Bank and UN organisations, which we considered an ideal way for a new Committee to assess the multilateral system which is so important part of DFID's work. In 2011 we visited: India; DRC and Burundi and South Sudan; in 2012, Afghanistan; Malawi and Zambia; and Pakistan; in 2013, Ethiopia, to examine DFID's programmes to address violence against women and food insecurity; Washington and Brazil (in connection with our Future of UK Development Co-operation Phase 1 inquiry); and Burma (to look at DFID's programme, with a particular focus on governance and health). During our Ethiopia visit, we recorded a short film about harmful practices for women and girls (early marriage and FGM), which we subsequently screened in Parliament in front of an audience including the Secretary of State. In 2014 we visited: Lebanon, Jordan and Israel in connection with DFID's development work in the Middle East; Sierra Leone and Liberia; and Tanzania. In 2015 we visited Nepal, focusing on climate change and corruption.

(...)

12. ICAI has enabled the IDC to extend its reach and effectiveness. The full Committee took oral evidence on ICAI's 2013, and 2014, Annual Reports from the ICAI Commissioners, and from DFID's Permanent Secretary. Following a critical ICAI report on TradeMark Southern Africa (TMSA),[16] we held an evidence session with the Secretary of State and the Permanent Secretary in December 2013.[17] They announced they would close down the TMSA programme with immediate effect, and have since launched a review of DFID's approach to trade in the region. Following ICAI's report on 'DFID's Use of Contractors',[18] we questioned the Permanent Secretary about improvements to programme management. DFID has since introduced a new Head of Profession to strengthen the work done by the Department's programme management cadre. Following ICAI's report on Anti-Corruption,[19] we followed up their work on Nepal during our visit there. On several occasions we have encouraged ICAI to undertake detailed investigations in anticipation of our broader inquiries, for example into education in Pakistan and health in Burma. We have also asked ICAI to follow up our own work, for example on Afghanistan.

(...)

SUPPORT FOR THE HOUSE

27. We have held debates in Westminster Hall on a large number of our reports. We have tagged our reports to other debates, for example debates on: Afghanistan; Violence Against Women and Girls; and the Post-2015 Development Goals. We welcome the new system of enabling select committee Chairs to make Statements about reports in the House. We have used this procedure to announce our reports on Afghanistan and Burma; we were pleased that interventions on the Burma statement were made by members who were not on the Committee.

(...)

For full report, see: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmintdev/1138/113803.htm>

Burma mentioned in Parliamentary Strengthening: Government Response to the International Development Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2014-15

18 March 2015

(...)

Recommendation 11. That DFID has more than one specialist working full-time on parliamentary strengthening and that DFID ensures that all its governance advisers improve their knowledge of

parliaments and improve their links with the UK Parliament and other Westminster-based institutions. (page 22)

and
Recommendation 24. DFID improves its ability to act as an intelligent commissioner of parliamentary strengthening both in country and centrally; it should increase the number of specialist experts at the centre and ensure its governance advisers are aware of the importance of parliaments and develop closer links with the UK Parliament. (page 56)

Partially agree. DFID agrees that we can enhance the knowledge and awareness of our network of governance advisers regarding the importance of parliaments and the potential for closer links with the UK Parliament. DFID works continually to expand knowledge on parliamentary strengthening, convening international expertise (the How to Note is a good example) and upgrading advisers' knowledge on parliaments and other aspects of political governance. The 2014 Governance Advisers' Professional Development Conference included a well-attended session on parliamentary support (a direct response to the IDC inquiry on Democracy and Development in Burma).

(...)

Recommendation 13. DFID has few Committee strengthening programmes and we welcome the Minister's support for work in this area. We recommend that DFID include a parliamentary dimension in all major development programmes (e.g. support for the health committee in a health programme) for any programme above a certain threshold (e.g. £10 million). It should be one of DFID's key goals to help to create effective parliamentary scrutiny of the Executive, especially in the policy areas in which UK aid is spent; this could strengthen the in-country checks on how effectively British taxpayers money contributes to the achievement of the country's development plans. (page 39)

Partially agree. DFID recognises the importance of parliamentary committees and DFID has an extensive set of programmes which support them. Of DFID's parliamentary strengthening programmes listed in evidence to the IDC, more than half (21) have involved support to committees. These include three programmes supporting public accounts committees in Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Tajikistan, one programme supporting the health committee in South Africa, two programmes strengthening security committees in DRC and South Sudan and two programmes supporting legislative committees in Burma and Somalia. There are a further thirteen programmes supporting cross-parliament committees (including public accounts, women's, petroleum, legislative committees and more) in more than 11 countries (for example, Bangladesh, Jamaica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tanzania).

(...)

Recommendation 17. While there can be excellent co-ordination between the FCO, DFID and others locally, as we saw in Burma, this is not always the case centrally. We welcome the Minister's recognition of the need for discussions between the FCO, DFID and others, clarifying how HMG sees its role in parliamentary strengthening and its priorities, geographically and thematically, but we recommend that the Government go further establishing a strategy for promoting democracy and parliaments to help coordinate the wide variety of UK bodies and set priorities for those working on parliamentary strengthening. We endorse Alistair Burt's proposal that there should be more discussions between Government and practitioners about these issues. (page 40)

Agree. There is good coordination between DFID and FCO centrally as well as at country level. Notable examples include our joint work with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, support to the Arab Partnership and joint How to Notes on elections, party and parliamentary support.

(...)

For full report, see: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmintdev/1125/112504.htm>

Written Statement

Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict

12 March 2015 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge): I wish to inform the House of progress the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has

made on preventing sexual violence in conflict since the June 2014 global summit to end sexual violence in conflict.

The summit resulted in a number of important and ambitious commitments to end sexual violence in conflict. Since the summit we have worked to implement these commitments and to deliver practical and far reaching change in those countries worst affected by conflict-related sexual violence. This has been focused on six priority areas:

- implementing the international protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict launched at the summit;
- promoting legislative reform;
- providing more support to survivors of sexual violence and the organisations and individuals who work with them;
- incorporating sexual violence issues into military training and doctrine;
- working with international organisations to encourage their greater work and support on the issue; and
- supporting those Governments who announced new plans or strategies at the summit.

We have translated the international protocol into French, Spanish, Arabic, Nepalese and Bosnian. We are developing training materials to support its use, regional training events on its implementation in different local contexts and training courses. This includes developing long-term training and mentoring programmes on documentation and investigation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); providing financial support to NGOs to implement the protocol in Colombia; a year-long training project for local human rights NGOs and lawyers in Nepal; and launch events in Bosnia to raise the profile of the protocol with the Government, judges and NGOs. This work aims to help these Governments and civil society organisations to prevent and prosecute sexual violence crimes. The results of the training will inform future versions of the protocol to ensure that it meets the needs of those using it on the ground and our ambition that the protocol becomes widely used and recognised as international best practice.

In November, a joint UK/Canada scoping mission to Iraq looked at what support we can provide in response to the crimes being committed by ISIL. Our subsequent work includes strengthening local women's organisations, including their capacity to investigate sexual violence crimes. This supports the Department for International Development's wider humanitarian programming in the region. In January, we organised an event with local and international NGOs which brought together women from Syria and Iraq to be trained on the protocol as well as to develop wider ideas on how they can work in the most challenging of circumstances. We are hosting a follow-up meeting at the Commission on the Status of Women to encourage donor support for the work of women's human rights defenders in Iraq and Syria.

We continue to lobby more countries to accede to the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court and to implement it fully in domestic legislation. We are encouraging recognition and support for the policy paper on sexual and gender-based crimes released by the Office of the ICC Prosecutor, which will help ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of these crimes from preliminary examination through to appeal.

We have supported a number of projects with human rights defenders and NGOs working to end sexual violence in DRC, South Sudan, Somalia, Guatemala, Nigeria, Kosovo, Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Burma. These projects have helped survivors rebuild their lives by accessing justice, legal advice and psychosocial support and challenging the cultural or social stigma associated with being a victim of these crimes. We will support similar projects over the course of 2015-16. We recently co-hosted a meeting of international faith leaders as a follow-up to the summit discussions on their role and responsibility in supporting survivors and their communities and challenging traditional attitudes to gender and sexual violence. The recommendations from this meeting developed by the participants provide an important basis for future action.

We have deployed members of the UK team of PSVI experts to Kosovo, the Syrian borders, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the DRC to provide support to survivors, improve investigations and increase prosecutions of sexual violence in conflict. We have also deployed members of the team to the EU training mission in Mali, training the Malian army on how to protect civilians from human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. Improving military standards to prevent and respond to sexual violence

is critical to achieving change. The action plan on sexual violence for the army announced by the DRC Government after the global summit is a welcome example of this commitment. My right hon. and noble Friend, Baroness Anelay of St Johns, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, discussed its implementation with President Kabila's personal representative in the fight against sexual violence and child recruitment in the DRC, during her recent visit to London. The UK also has some valuable expertise to share in this area, including the work of the Peace Support Operations Training Centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the recent training provided by the British Peace Support Team in eastern Africa to African Union peacekeeping personnel troops. We are using this expertise to inform the forthcoming UN Secretary-General's peace operations review.

In September 2014, I co-hosted an event at the UN General Assembly with the Under-Secretary-General and special representative of the UN Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict to encourage implementation by the 155 UN member states who have endorsed the declaration of commitment to end sexual violence in conflict and to reiterate the critical role of the special representative on this issue. Her work has been fundamental to achieving progress over the last year, such as her agreement with the Government of South Sudan in October of a joint communiqué on preventing conflict-related sexual violence and the work of her team to support implementation of the Federal Government of Somalia's national action plan for addressing sexual violence, presented at the summit.

We have encouraged other multilateral organisations to do more, including at the NATO summit in September and through the work of the European Union. We provided funding to support the deployment of the African Union team of experts to help victims of sexual violence in the Central African Republic that the AU announced at the summit and discussed opportunities for greater future AU leadership on this agenda with the AU special envoy for women, peace and security last month.

In our work since the summit it has become clear that there is a need for a greater academic underpinning on these issues and the most effective ways of tackling them. I am proud of the support that we have given to establishing the UK's first academic centre for women, peace and security at the London School of Economics. Working with experts in the field and universities around the world, the centre will create a critical mass of expertise and knowledge focused on the empowerment of women and the ending of impunity for sexual violence crimes and play a critical role in future efforts to bring an end to sexual violence in conflict once and for all.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150312/wmstext/150312m0001.htm#15031225000010>

Early Day Motions

BURMA (Early Day Motion 182)

Date tabled: 25.06.2014

That this House supports the call for action for peace in Kachin State signed by 55 organisations worldwide; further supports calls from 80 organisations for Burma to scrap proposed legislation that would unlawfully restrict the right to freely choose a religion; notes that it has been over three years since the Burma Army broke a 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army; calls on the government of Burma to cease its attacks in Kachin State; further notes since June 2011 over 120,000 Kachin people have been displaced and over 200 villages have been destroyed; condemns the human rights abuses and breaches of the Geneva Conventions in Kachin State, especially the use of sexual violence; acknowledges the need for further peace talks between the Burmese government, the Burma Army, Kachin Independence Organisation and the Kachin Independence Army; welcomes Charles Bo, the Archbishop of Yangon's call for the rights of all ethnicities and religious faiths to be protected and his message of peace; call on the Government to provide humanitarian assistance to the internally displaced people in Kachin and Northern Shan States; and further calls on the Government to establish an independent investigation into the use of rape and sexual violence.

Signatures: 21

70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BURMA CAMPAIGN (Early Day Motion 285)

Date tabled: 22.07.2014

That this House recognises with respect and gratitude all who fought in the war in Burma 70 years ago; notes that this was the longest land campaign of the Second World War; salutes the memory of nearly 40,000 British and Commonwealth Service personnel who died in the fighting, as well as the thousands more killed in captivity; and commends the work of The Not Forgotten Association, a tri-service charity for the wounded in keeping alive the memory of such sacrifices.

Signatures: 65

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT IN BURMA (Early Day Motion 587)

Date tabled: 02.12.2014

That this House condemns the continuing use of rape as a weapon of war and the recent escalation in military attacks in Kachin, Northern Shan and Karen States; notes the recent report by the Women's League for Burma detailing evidence of the continuing use of rape and sexual violence; calls for a nationwide ceasefire and an end to the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war by the Burmese army; further calls on the Government to urge the government of Burma to engage in genuine political dialogue with ethnic nationalities without preconditions; further calls on the Government to urge the government of Burma to uphold its obligations under international law to end impunity and ensure accountability; further calls on the Government to urge the government of Burma to amend the constitution of that country to remove the current disqualification of Burmese citizens with foreign children becoming President; further calls on the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict to address the issues in Burma highlighted by the Women's League for Burma's Report; and further calls on the Government to support an independent international investigation into rape and sexual violence in Burma and to provide funding to women's organisations from Burma which document sexual violence by the Burmese army and assist survivors.

Signatures: 36

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN BURMA (EARLY DAY MOTION 748)

Date tabled: 29.01.2015

That this House condemns the rape and murder of Maran Lu Ra, aged 20 and Tangbau Hkawn Nan Tsin, 21, by members of the Burma Army; notes that these two women were Kachin teachers working with the Kachin Baptist Convention; further notes that local police have taken no action; further notes that the Kachin Women's Association Thailand has documented over 70 cases of gang-rape, rape and attempted sexual violence by Burma Army troops in Kachin and northern Shan states since the Burma Army broke a 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army in June 2011; also notes that the government of Burma signed the Declaration to End Sexual Violence in Conflict last year but has failed to implement its provisions; calls on the Government to urge the government of Burma to stop immediately the military offensives in these ethnic areas and bring the perpetrators of sexual violence to justice; and further calls on the Prime Minister to enact provisions in the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative to send a team of experts to Burma to hold an inquiry and investigate this case.

Signatures: 26

All Party Parliamentary Group for Democracy in Burma

16 March 2015

On March 16th, Meghna Abraham from Amnesty International addressed the Burma APPG and talked about the recent report *Open for Business? Corporate crime and abuses at Myanmar copper mine*.

The report describes how Canadian and Chinese mining interests have profited from, and in some cases colluded with the Myanmar authorities in serious human rights abuses and illegal activity around the Monywa copper mine complex, which includes the notorious Letpadaung mine. Large-scale forced evictions and serious pollution linked to the mine have destroyed livelihoods and exposed thousands of people to health risks. Community protests have been met with excessive force by police.

23 March 2015

May Tha-Hla and Jonathan Wilkinson from the charity Helping the Burmese Delta, addressed the APPG on 23rd March. They talked about challenges in the Irrawaddy delta area, a part of Burma largely ignored by central government and where few charities reach. Setting up the charity shortly after cyclone Nargis, their work evolved from emergency relief to support to education and local health care.

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Thank you.

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