



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

MAY
2011

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Guided Weapons

5 May 2011 Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on possession by the military authorities in Burma of SCUD or similar missiles; and if he will make a statement.

Alistair Burt : We are aware of reports alleging that the Government of Burma is attempting to build medium-range missiles under its memorandum of understanding with North Korea. The Government take all such allegations seriously and remind all states to adhere to their obligations under relevant UN sanctions. We will continue to monitor the situation very closely.

Ceasefire Agreements

23 May 2011 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of whether the Government of Burma has broken ceasefire agreements; and what assessment they have made of any resulting humanitarian implications.

Baroness Verma : From 1989 the Burmese military regime concluded 17 ceasefire agreements with major ethnic groups. However, tensions began to heighten from 2009 as the Burmese authorities sought to subsume armed groups into a national border guard force as part of their pre-election preparations. Major armed groups resisted the border guard force proposal in order to protect their local autonomy.

The Government have received reports that the Burmese military subsequently responded by closing all communication channels to the armed groups and claiming that the ceasefire agreements no longer existed. Tensions in these areas have recently escalated leading to renewed conflict. We have also heard reports of increased military movements against the Wa and Mon-two of the largest groups. We are very concerned about the likely humanitarian consequences of any escalations in fighting.

The British ambassador raised concerns with the Burmese Government about the situation when he met Burmese Ministers on 10 May. At a UN Security Council debate the same day, we called for all armed groups to protect civilian populations and to bring to account those responsible for human right abuses. We are monitoring the situation closely and will consider providing assistance where we can effectively meet urgent humanitarian needs.

Shan State Crisis

23 May 2011 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of whether the targeting of civilians by the Burmese Army in conflict in Shan State, Burma, is a war crime.

Lord Howell of Guildford: The Government are concerned that the reported breakdown of a ceasefire agreement with the Shan State Army North has led to renewed conflict in Shan State. We have received reports which allege that the Burmese army has attacked local communities whom they suspect of assisting the armed groups. The fighting is taking place in remote areas of Burma which are difficult to access

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and in this respect, the information is difficult to verify. In a Security Council debate on 10 May, we called upon all armed actors including the Burmese army and ethnic militia to protect the civilian population. The Government secured a strongly worded human rights resolution at the March UN Human Rights Council which called on the Burmese Government to end continuing grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including the targeting of civilians in conflict areas, and to immediately end impunity for such actions.

24 May 2011 Lord Steel of Aikwood : To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the implications for neighbouring countries of increased conflict in Shan State, Burma.

Lord Howell of Guildford : The Government are deeply concerned by the reported breakdown of a ceasefire agreement between the Burmese army and the Shan State Army North which has led to renewed conflict in Shan State. Reports indicate that the fighting is taking place in the north-central area of Shan State, about 110 miles from the nearest Chinese border town and around 200 miles from the border with Thailand. Access to this area is tightly controlled by the Burmese Government and an assessment of the situation is therefore difficult. At this time, we have received no reports of associated refugee flows in border areas. However, reports suggest that fighting has resulted in around 3,000 people being internally displaced. Renewed conflict with ethnic groups again demonstrates that only a genuine process of national reconciliation leading to a just political settlement can bring peace and stability to the country and its neighbours.

24 May 2011 Lord Steel of Aikwood : To ask Her Majesty's Government what assistance they are providing to civilians in Shan State, Burma, who have been displaced by the Government of Burma allegedly breaking a ceasefire and attacking civilians.

Lord Howell of Guildford : We are concerned by reports that 3,000 people may have been internally displaced due to renewed conflict in Shan State. We understand that the fighting is taking place in the north-central area of Shan State. The area is remote and the Burmese Government control access tightly. It is therefore difficult to verify the situation and at present no non-governmental organisations are able to access the area. The Department for International Development is already providing valued support to victims of conflict in Shan State and will consider providing further assistance to recent cases of internally displaced people if they judge that they can effectively meet the humanitarian needs.

Rohingya

23 May 2011 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the Government of Bangladesh regarding the halting of the United Nations resettlement programme for Rohingya refugees from Burma.

Lord Howell of Guildford : Our staff recently made representations to the Government of Bangladesh about their decision to suspend resettlement activities, pending a policy review on Rohingya issues, during a field visit to UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refugee camps on 6 and 7 April 2011. Our High Commission in Dhaka has frequent close liaison with other diplomatic missions and with UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration, UN International Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other UN agencies to ensure that a range of concerns relating to the situation of Rohingya in Bangladesh are addressed effectively with the Government of Bangladesh.

23 May 2011 Lord Alton of Liverpool : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have made representations to the Government of Bangladesh regarding their refusal to register Rohingya refugees from Burma.

Lord Howell of Guildford : Our High Commission in Dhaka has frequent close liaison with other diplomatic missions and with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organisation for Migration, UN International Children's Fund and other UN agencies to ensure that a range of concerns relating to the situation of Rohingya in Bangladesh are addressed effectively with the Government of Bangladesh. This includes the difficulties that lack of registration causes for undocumented Rohingyas in Bangladesh. Most recently, staff at our high commission in Dhaka participated in a visit to Cox's Bazar in April 2011 to see the situation on the ground.

Human Rights

9 May 2011 David Winnick : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the 20 states his Department records as having the worst record on human rights.

Jeremy Browne : The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) Command Paper on Human Rights and Democracy published in March covers 26 countries of concern. These are among the countries where we have the most serious, wide-ranging human rights concerns and where the UK Government are engaged in promoting and protecting human rights. They are (in alphabetical order): Afghanistan, Belarus, Burma, Chad, China, Colombia, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Libya, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

However, the FCO does not maintain a human rights league table. We have concerns about many countries not included in the Command Paper list. All our embassies and high commissions monitor and raise human rights issues in their host countries. It is important to focus FCO resources where we can make a difference, while continuing to speak out about human rights violations wherever they occur.

5 May 2011 Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps with his international counterparts to ensure that the alleged actions of Than Naing Lwin of the Burma Army in respect of the extrajudicial execution of Saw Par Ta are investigated and that those responsible are held accountable; and if he will make a statement.

Alistair Burt : The Government are concerned by reports of an alleged attack on a Karen ethnic minority villager by the Burmese army. On the renewal of EU sanctions at the Foreign Affairs Council on 12 April 2011, EU Foreign Ministers called on the Burmese Government to end impunity for violations of human rights and to co-operate fully with the UN. The Government secured strongly worded human rights resolutions at the UN General Assembly in October 2010 and at the Human Rights Council in March 2011 which called for the Burmese authorities to end abuses against ethnic groups and to honour their commitment to undertake a full, impartial and independent investigation into all human rights violations.

Political Prisoners

23 May 2011 Gregory Campbell : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise at the United Nations the recent announcement by the Burmese authorities of an amnesty in order to establish the nature of the amnesty and any differentiation made by the government of Burma between criminals and those held for their political beliefs.

Jeremy Browne : The Burmese Government announced on 16 May that it had reduced the sentences of all prisoners by one year and commuted all death sentences to life imprisonment. Reports indicate that over 14,000 prisoners have been released but we think that only 47 were political prisoners, who were anyway nearing the end of their sentences. We also understand that over 300 death sentences were commuted and note that no death sentences have been carried out in Burma for over 20 years.

The UK made clear in a closed session of the UN Security Council on 19 May that the amnesty falls far short of the demands and expectations of the international community, which has repeatedly called for the release of all of Burma's over 2,000 political prisoners. Burmese law criminalises basic civil and political rights and the Burmese authorities have frequently denied the existence of prisoners of conscience claiming that all have been guilty of criminal offences.

Refugee in Thailand

5 May 2011 Bob Russell : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of repatriation of Burmese refugees in camps on the border with Thailand; and if he will make a statement.

Alistair Burt : The Government have not received any recent reports that suggest Burmese refugees in camps along the Thai-Burma border have been repatriated. Our ambassador to Thailand raised concerns

over allegations of forced repatriation with the governor of Tak province and the Royal Thai Army on 17 January 2011. Our ambassador reinforced our concerns when he saw the Thai Foreign Minister on 19 January 2011. He raised the issue again with Thai officials on 31 March 2011. On each occasion the Thai authorities assured us that no refugees will be repatriated to Burma until it is safe for them to return. We remain in close contact with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), international donors and the Thai authorities, and continue to monitor the situation closely.

23 May 2011 Lord Steel of Aikwood : To ask Her Majesty's Government what additional funding for refugees from Burma they will provide in the current financial year.

Baroness Verma : Funding allocations have not yet been finalised. The UK Government will continue providing food, housing, other supplies and improved access to legal assistance for the 146,000 Burmese refugees living in camps in Thailand. The case for any additional funding will be considered in consultation with our partners and other donors, and on the basis of detailed assessments of effectiveness and value for money in achieving results.

Refugee in Malaysia

8 May 2011 Valerie Vaz : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his Malaysian counterpart on (a) the right of refugees from Burma to live and work in Malaysia, (b) attendance by children of such refugees in government schools and (c) conditions in immigration centres.

Jeremy Browne : Malaysia is not a state party to the convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees. Malaysia therefore classifies all undocumented migrants as illegal immigrants under their Immigration Act.

Officials at our high commission in Kuala Lumpur maintain contact with Malaysian officials at the Ministry of Home Affairs, raising issues of refugees and migration. Our high commission staff are also in regular contact with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Kuala Lumpur, and other domestic and international non-governmental organisations.

In October 2010 the EU delegation discussed the rights of refugees from Burma to live and work in Malaysia with the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs during the visit of a UNHCR team. The issue of refugees will be discussed at the negotiations of an EU-Malaysia Partnership and Co-operation Agreement.

Earthquake

9 May 2011 Bob Russell : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information his Department holds on the level of financial support provided by the Government of Burma for emergency relief for those affected by the earthquake in Shan State, Burma.

Alan Duncan : The Burmese Government have not provided information on the cost of the emergency relief that they are providing in Shan State. We understand from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that the Burmese Government have provided cash assistance, food and medicines for the affected communities. Other donors, including UN agencies, international and local NGOs, neighbouring countries and the private sector, are also providing assistance.

Malaria

9 May 2011 Bob Russell : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate he has made of the number of deaths in Burma from malaria in 2009; if he will assess the accuracy of estimates of the number of deaths made by the Burmese Government; and if he will make a statement.

Alan Duncan : The Department for International Development (DFID) has not made an independent estimate of the number of deaths in Burma from malaria in 2009. The officially reported figure for malaria-related deaths in Burma in 2009 is 972, based on health system data which may be limited.

According to the World Health Organisation, malaria is endemic in 284 of the 325 townships in Burma. An estimated 68% of Burma's population is at a risk of contracting the disease. Combating malaria is a high priority for UK aid for Burma, working through UN agencies and non-governmental organisations rather than the Burmese central Government.

Aid

16 May 2011 Valerie Vaz : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid his Department provided to Burma in 2009-10; and how much it plans to provide to that country for (a) cross-border humanitarian aid, (b) education and (c) health care in each of the next four years.

Alan Duncan : The Department for International Development (DFID) provided a total of £28 million in bilateral aid to Burma in 2009-10.

Over the next four years, we plan to focus our aid for Burma on health care, education, livelihoods, civil society and humanitarian assistance. A detailed breakdown by sector and year will appear in DFID's Operational Plan for Burma which will be published on our website at the end of this month.

Specific sums have not yet been allocated to cross-border aid. We plan to continue to deliver aid cross-border where that is the best way of reaching people in greatest need. Specific project allocations will be decided on the basis of detailed assessments of effectiveness, and value for money in achieving results.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

Early Day Motion 112: Human Rights in Burma

John Pugh

30.05.2010

Signed by 147 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 787: Aung San Suu Kyi and Elections in Burma

Valerie Vaz

11.10.2010

Signed by 41 MPs

That this House acknowledges reports that Burmese political prisoner Aung San Suu Kyi may be released on the completion of her current term of arrest on 13 November 2010; is concerned that, as this date falls six days after scheduled elections in Burma on 7 November, Ms Suu Kyi may not be permitted to utilise her vote; is further concerned that her National League for Democracy party will play no part in the election, having boycotted it on the grounds of Ms Suu Kyi's and others' continued political imprisonment, her exclusion from political office and party membership and the Burmese junta's new election laws, which ban groups including civil servants and Buddhist monks from joining a political party; firmly believes that Aung San Suu Kyi should be released unconditionally as a matter of urgency; and calls on the Government to condemn strongly the Burmese junta's recent election laws as obstacles to the free and fair conduct on democracy.

Early Day Motion 788: BBC World Service and Human Rights

11.10.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 57 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 989: Elections in Burma and Advance Voting

11.11.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 26 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 1014: Release of Aung San Suu Kyi

16.11.2010

Valerie Vaz

Signed by 47 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 1034 : Imprisonment of Zarganar by Burmese Authorities

17.11.2010

Tom Harris

Signed by 58 MPs

That this House condemns the treatment by the Burmese regime of the actor, director and comedian, Zarganar, who in 2006 was banned from any public performance and who in 2008, after speaking out on behalf of millions of Burmese citizens left homeless by a cyclone, was convicted of public order offences and sentenced to 59 years imprisonment, this sentence being reduced on appeal to 35 years; believes that Zarganar has suffered a grievous miscarriage of justice; and calls on the Burmese government to release him at the earliest possible opportunity.

Early Day Motion 1125 : RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI (No. 2)

02.12.2010

Ritchie, Margaret

Signed by 23 MPs

That this House welcomes the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and calls for the release of her fellow

pro-democracy campaigners Htay Kywe, Mie Mie and Zaw Htet Ko Ko, who have all been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment away from their families; and urges the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to keep their plight to the fore of any discussions he has with the Burmese Ambassador and Burmese government officials.

Early Day Motion 1649 : BURMA AND THE EU

23.03.2011

Vaz, Valerie

Signed by 34 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 1659 : BURMA EARTHQUAKE

28.03.2011

Vaz, Valerie

Signed by 29 MPs

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

Early Day Motion 1739 : AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND THE BRIGHTON FESTIVAL

26.04.2011

Vaz, Valerie

Signed by 13 MPs

That this House welcomes Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as guest director of the 2011 Brighton Festival; notes that although Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will not attend the festival she plays a significant role in inspiring the programme through her plea to 'use your liberty to promote ours'; congratulates the Festival organisers for their choice of guest director and planning of a wide-ranging and vibrant programme; looks forward to a dynamic celebration of arts, culture and freedom over the three weeks of the Festival; and urges the Government to maintain pressure on the Burmese regime to free the more than 2,000 political prisoners still in detention and to move towards free and fair democracy in Burma.

Early Day Motion 1800 : HUMAN RIGHTS IN MALAYSIA

12.05.2011

Blomfield, Paul

Signed by 24 MPs

That this House notes with concern that Mr Charles Hector Fernandez, a Malaysian human rights lawyer, faces defamation charges in Malaysia for having detailed labour rights violations of 31 Burmese migrant workers at a Japanese firm based in Malaysia on his blog; further notes that Mr Hector Fernandez had raised his allegations with the firm prior to publishing them to his blog, in order that they might correct

misinformation, without response; further notes that on 11 April 2011 Mr Hector Fernandez was restricted from all further communication through his blog and Twitter; expresses deep concern at the lack of adequate labour protections for migrant workers in Malaysia and condemns discriminatory treatment of Burmese migrants in particular; further notes the critical role of human rights defenders in upholding the labour rights of migrant workers, who often suffer rights violations and deprivations; expresses deep concern at the threat to free speech in Malaysia this trial poses; calls on the Government to ensure its representatives in Malaysia are present during the hearing and trial of Mr Hector Fernandez on 13 May 2011 and 28 and 29 June 2011 respectively; and further calls on the Government to make strong representations in this regard, in particular calling on the Malaysian Government to ensure that the principles enshrined in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders are upheld.

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www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



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