



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

NOV
2009

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

EU Sanctions

4 Nov 2009 Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his French counterpart on EU sanctions on Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed this issue with his French counterpart at a meeting on 6 July 2009 during the Anglo-French Summit.

France has consistently given its support to calls for the immediate, unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi, together with all other political prisoners in Burma, and agreed that the EU should respond with additional, targeted financial and other measures when the guilty verdict was delivered in the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi on 11 August 2009.

Most recently, the Foreign Secretary and the French Foreign Minister were present at the UN meeting on Burma chaired by the Secretary-General on 23 September 2009.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid

12 Nov 2009 Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much cross-border humanitarian assistance his Department plans to provide for eastern Burma in 2010; and how much was provided in 2009. [298465]

Mr. Michael Foster: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 29 October 2009, Official Report; column 572W, to the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell).

ANSWERS TO ORAL QUESTIONS IN HOUSE OF LORDS

9 Nov 2009 Baroness Cox: To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their response to recent developments in Burma.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead): My Lords, we remain deeply concerned at the appalling human rights abuses and the lack of a credible transition to democracy in Burma. Over 2,100 political prisoners remain behind bars, and the country's ethnic nationalities suffer oppression and discrimination. Aung San Suu Kyi's meetings with our ambassador on 9 October, and with the United States Assistant Secretary of State last week, are a small but welcome development. We will continue to press for real progress and genuine dialogue between the Government, the Opposition and ethnic nationalities in Burma.

9 Nov 2009 Baroness Cox: My Lords, in thanking the noble Baroness for that sympathetic reply, I ask

whether she is aware that, on a recent visit to the Shan, Karen and Karreni peoples of eastern Burma, we found that they still continue to suffer from sustained military offences by government troops? Their shoot-to-kill policy has driven tens of thousands more civilians into hiding in the jungle where they have to live in harrowing conditions of danger and deprivation. Might Her Majesty's Government consider increasing some cross-border aid to help these people to survive in those conditions, especially with the imminent onset of the rainy season?

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: I thank the noble Baroness, and of course am aware that offences against the Karen, the Shan, the Kareni and the Kokang in recent months are of grave concern. DfID is increasing its support for groups channelling cross-border humanitarian aid into Burma. This year about £360,000 of DfID funding is being used by NGOs for cross-border aid delivered to eastern Burma from Thailand, so it is happening. About £500,000 is being provided for healthcare in Shan and Kachin states across the border from China. Proposals are under consideration to increase funding on both borders in 2010. We will continue to review the level of support and the targeting of these programmes and I am sure we will rely on the noble Baroness to keep us on our toes.

Baroness Rawlings: My Lords

Lord Archer of Sandwell: My Lords

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: My Lords, self-regulation does rely on noble Lords being prepared to give way. Could we hear the noble Baroness first, and then perhaps my noble and learned friend?

9 Nov 2009 Baroness Rawlings: Thank you very much. With Burma on the External Relations Council agenda on 17 November, what is Her Majesty's Government's position towards continuing sanctions?

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: Her Majesty's Government's position is to ensure that we see progress in Burma. We need to see all political prisoners released and the democratic opposition and ethnic nationalities being able to participate in deliberations and dialogue, otherwise any future movement towards election would lack credibility and validity. Therefore we have no wish to remove sanctions until such time as we see that kind of progress taking place. When and if we do, we will do it.

9 Nov 2009 Lord Archer of Sandwell: My Lords, while commending the work which the Government have done already, given the mass murders, tortures, rapes, human minesweepers and mass evictions in the Karen and Shan provinces, would my noble friend agree that if that did not evoke the responsibility to protect, it would be difficult to imagine a situation which would? If it were happening in the West, there would by now be at least an arms embargo. Will the Government initiate discussions at the UN Security Council with a view to getting some action on this?

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: The noble and learned Lord rightly describes the horrific situation that we see in the ethnic-nationality areas in Burma. The Prime Minister—we should commend him for this—wrote in August to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and his fellow UN Security Council members, calling for that exact global arms embargo against Burma. We believe that no one should be selling arms to a Burmese military regime which continues to have such an appalling human rights record. The EU, the US and others have had a comprehensive arms embargo in place for many years, but the time now has come for all countries to end the sale of arms to Burma.

9 Nov 2009 Lord Dykes: My Lords, I return to the Minister's Answer. Will the Minister now undertake to have direct talks between the British Government and the American Secretary of State, not just the Assistant Secretary of State, about the US's disappointing and timid policy and very hesitant tactics towards this quite odious and obnoxious regime? Is it not time now that real dialogue with the opposition party took place, not just a pretence?

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: The noble Lord raises an important point. There is a misconception that the position of the United States has weakened. We agree with the US that, in the absence of progress, sanctions need to be kept in place. Our shared objectives remain the release of political prisoners and dialogue between the Government, opposition and ethnic groups. We need to see a genuine transition to democracy and if the NLD, the opposition party which Aung San Suu Kyi leads, is calling for dialogue—which it is—we would welcome that, but on its terms, not those of the military junta that is in control.

9 Nov 2009 Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: My Lords, I pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, for her extraordinary work on this issue, which she has carried out in this House for as long as I can remember. I regret to say that when I first answered questions on this issue 13 years ago, I had to give appallingly similar answers to those that my noble friend is giving. Can she shed light on this? Is there any realistic sign of a change in policy among the Burmese Government?

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: I fear that I see very little signal or likelihood of a change of policy to the extent that would satisfy those of us who believe in supporting and working towards the democratic standards, values and principles which we would adhere to in this Chamber. It is extremely important that we make that case clear, that we maintain sanctions against this regime, and that we maintain our strong and forceful dialogue with it. Our Prime Minister continuously raises the issue of the freedom of Aung San Suu Kyi. If she could obtain her freedom and the opportunity to work with her NLD party colleagues, that would be real progress. I, too, very much respect the work of the noble Baroness, Lady Cox.

Early Day Motion

EDM 238 REPORTS OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY IN BURMA

25.11.2009

Carmichael, Alistair

Signed by 123 MPs

That this House expresses severe concern at the escalating systematic human rights abuses being perpetrated against the people of Burma by the Junta military dictatorship; notes that there is well documented evidence over many years of widespread torture, forced displacement, sexual violence, extra-judicial killings and forced labour with civilians being deliberately targeted; further notes that these actions constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes; and calls on the Government to urge the United Nations to establish a Commission of Inquiry into these crimes in addition to supporting the International Labour Organisation's calls to refer the use of forced labour to the International Court of Justice.

**Published by The Burma Campaign UK, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT
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**for Human Rights, Democracy
& Development in Burma**