



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

NOV
2010

HOUSE OF COMMONS

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Burma: Overseas Trade

1 November 2010 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to discourage British companies from trading and investing in Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The Government's position on this issue is well known. We do not encourage trade and investment in Burma and, in compliance with EU sanctions, we do not offer commercial services to any companies who may want to trade or invest there.

Burma: Politics and Government

1 November 2010 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on forcible relocations of indigenous farmers in the Huugawng valley, Northern Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The Government are aware of reports that people living in the Hukawng reserve, in Kachin state, Northern Burma, have had their homes destroyed, land confiscated and been forcibly relocated as a result of the regime's plans to transform the area into a centre for bio-fuel production. Our embassy in Rangoon is part of an in-country group that is monitoring developments and providing assistance to local communities to help document and highlight the situation.

Burma: Railways

1 November 2010 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the construction of a railway link across the Salween River to eastern Shan State in Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The Government are aware of reports alleging that thousands of acres of farmland have been confiscated in this area and that farmers who complain to the regime have been threatened with imprisonment. Ethnic groups in Shan State are also reportedly concerned that the railway could be used by the regime to deploy military forces and equipment to the area.

Treasury

1 November 2010 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent reports he has received of compliance by Barclays Bank with the provisions of EU financial sanctions on Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Mark Hoban : The Treasury has received no such reports.

Burma: Nuclear Fuels

2 November 2010 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of (a) uranium production in and (b) uranium exports from Burma.

Jeremy Browne : The Government have not received any reports on uranium production or exportation from Burma. We are aware however of media reports earlier this year alleging that Burma is developing a covert military nuclear programme. We take such allegations seriously and have expressed our concerns to the Burmese regime. Burma must act in accordance with its obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and all relevant UN Security Council resolutions and we urge Burma to amend its small quantities protocol as soon as possible. We will continue to monitor developments.

Human Rights: Burma

8 November 2010 Jeremy Corbyn : To ask the Prime Minister whether he has discussed the human rights situation in Burma with the US President.

David Cameron : The British Government are deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Burma. We regularly urge the military regime to respect the human rights of all Burma's people and discuss these issues with a full range of international partners. I look forward to discussing Burma with President Obama. I know that he shares my concern about the situation there. US and UK officials are in regular and close contact in Washington, including with the White House, and on the ground in Burma. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alistair Burt) and Assistant Secretary of State, Kurt Campbell, exchanged views on the subject at a meeting of the UN Secretary General's Group of Friends in September. We will continue to work closely with the US in our efforts to bring positive change to Burma.

9 November 2010 Valerie Vaz : To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the outcome was of his discussions at the Asia-Europe Meeting on 4 and 5 October 2010.

Nicholas Clegg : The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) provides an excellent opportunity for substantive discussions with key Asian and European partners representing 58% of the world's population and 50% of global gross domestic product.

In discussion at the summit, I set out the argument for global co-operation on fiscal reduction, international institutional reform and business-led growth in open markets during the discussion on global economic governance.

I also discussed North Korea, Iran, the middle east and Burma and called for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. These issues were reflected in the communiqué. The communiqué also sets out a high degree of agreement among the leaders on developing more effective global economic governance and sustainable development, as well as fighting terrorism and the co-ordination of disaster relief efforts.

In the margins of the summit I held bilateral meetings with leaders from Indonesia, Pakistan, Australia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Vietnam. I discussed a broad range of issues including the steps being taken by the UK Government to address the deficit and create growth, the Government's determination to boost trade in general and in particular relations with emerging markets. I also outlined UK expectations ahead of the G20 summit in November.

I also had meetings with European leaders, including those from the European Council and Commission, France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands. Issues discussed included security, EU budgets and economic stability in the eurozone.

19 November 2010 Lady Hermon : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had discussions with Aung San Suu Kyi since her release from house arrest.

Jeremy Browne : My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke to Aung San Suu Kyi on 15 November to congratulate her on her release and convey the UK's solidarity and support for her stand on democracy and

human rights in Burma. Our ambassador in Rangoon has met Aung San Suu Kyi twice since her release, on 14 and 17 November. The UK will continue to listen to her views and discuss with her how we can best support her efforts to promote democracy and respect for human rights in Burma.

19 November 2010 Mark Pritchard : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the Burmese government the date of the release of the political prisoners held in Burmese prisons.

Jeremy Browne : We remain deeply concerned about the continued imprisonment of over 2,200 political prisoners in Burma. Their immediate release remains one of the international community's long standing demands. The Government have helped to secure tough statements in the UN and from the Group of Eight (G8) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience. We will continue to press the Burmese regime on this issue, to lobby regional countries with influence and to raise the matter in the UN's human rights bodies.

Burma: Thailand

19 November 2010 Fiona O'Donnell : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the (a) Thai and (b) Burmese government on migrant workers who have crossed the border into Thailand since the Burmese elections.

Jeremy Browne : We have not received any specific reports of migrant workers crossing the Thai-Burma border since elections on 7 November 2010. Recent reports have concerned refugee flows into Thailand as a result of a resumption of conflict between the Burmese army and ethnic militia in border areas. We understand that the majority of refugees have now returned home.

Burma: Politics and Government

23 November 2010 David Burrowes : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications of the new constitution in Burma for (a) democracy, (b) human rights and (c) equal rights for the ethnic nationalities in that country.

David Lidington : The new Constitution was approved in a rigged referendum in May 2008. We believe it entrenches military rule, as demonstrated by the sham elections held on 7 November; permits the regime's continuing human rights abuses against the Burmese people, including the political, social and economic discrimination suffered by ethnic groups; and provides the military leadership with immunity from prosecution for past crimes and human rights abuses. In addition, the President can grant sweeping powers to the military if a state of emergency is declared, reinstating military control of the country and suspending the rights of its citizens.

The UK has worked to secure a UN General Assembly Resolution which calls on the Burmese authorities to undertake a transparent, inclusive and comprehensive review of the Constitution. This was adopted with a vote on 18 November.

23 November 2010 David Burrowes : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking in response to the recent increased conflict on the Thailand-Burma border and the creation of a border guard force under the control of the Burma army.

David Lidington : The Government are concerned about the refugee situation on the Thai-Burma border and is monitoring developments closely. We are in touch with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and our ambassador to Thailand raised the issue with the Thai authorities on 18 November.

We understand that many of the ethnic ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups have refused to join the Border Guard Force proposed by the military regime and that this is a source of ongoing tension. We are clear that the regime's pursuit of military solutions rather than a political settlement with ethnic groups will not bring stability. Elections held on 7 November represent a missed opportunity to unite armed and non-armed ethnic groups in a just peace settlement. There is little prospect of national reconciliation without their involvement.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid

Refugees: Thai-Burma Border

17 November 2010 Kerry McCarthy : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether his Department is providing aid to refugees in encampments on the Thai-Burma border.

Alan Duncan : In 2010-11 the UK Government are providing £1.6 million to non-governmental organisations for food, housing and improved access to legal assistance for Burmese refugees in Thailand.

18 November 2010 Malcolm Wicks : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation on the Thailand-Burma border, and if he will make a statement.

Alan Duncan : The situation on the Thailand-Burma border remains unstable following the recent outbreaks of fighting in eastern Burma. Most of the people who fled to Thailand this month have now returned to Burma. We are keeping the situation under review, in close touch with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, non-governmental organisations and the Thai authorities.

The Department for International Development (DFID) is providing £7.5 million between 2009 and 2012 for people affected by conflict in eastern Burma. This assistance is being delivered through a number of non-governmental organisations. It includes the provision of food, shelter and improved access to legal assistance for Burmese refugees in Thailand, as well as aid for health care, water, sanitation and food security for displaced people in eastern Burma. DFID has not been asked for additional funding in response to the most recent fighting.

23 November 2010 David Burrowes : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans his Department has for humanitarian aid programmes in response to take account of the recent increase in the number of refugees on the Thailand-Burma border.

Alan Duncan : The Department for International Development (DFID) is providing £7.5 million between 2009 and 2012 for people affected by conflict in eastern Burma. This assistance is being delivered through a number of non-governmental organisations. It includes the provision of food, shelter and improved access to legal assistance for Burmese refugees in Thailand, as well as aid for health care, water, sanitation and food security for displaced people in eastern Burma. DFID has not been asked for additional funding in response to the most recent fighting.

HOUSE OF LORDS

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Burma

2 November 2010 Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale : To ask Her Majesty's Government how they plan to develop relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations; and what will be their priorities for that relationship.

Lord Howell of Guildford : The UK enjoys good relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations-ASEAN-and its members on a broad range of issues, including trade and investment, education, and defence.

The UK considers the ASEAN region to be strategically important, not least due to the number of emerging economies within it. UK priorities for the relationship are to strengthen existing economic ties and to promote democracy and good governance. Security issues, including counterterrorism and piracy, are also important issues. To this end the UK supports and encourages ASEAN in its aim to be a social, economic

and political-security community by 2015.

It is to be noted that three of ASEAN's members-Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore-are members of the Commonwealth, giving us an additional interest in and access to the region.

The UK consistently raises the issue of Burma in its contacts with ASEAN and all its members, particularly as the association has created a commission on human rights.

Ministerial engagement with ASEAN has been increased since the election. My right honourable friend the Prime Minister has met a number of ASEAN heads of government where he has urged the early conclusion of bilateral trade agreements with the EU and lobbied on behalf of British business. My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary plans to visit the region in the new year. My honourable friend the Minister for Asia, Jeremy Browne, and I have both visited the region, and my right honourable friend the Deputy Prime Minister met a number of ASEAN heads of government at the Asia-Europe meeting summit in October. My honourable friend the Minister for Asia also took part in the EU-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting, and has met the London-based ambassadors for ASEAN members.

25 November 2010 Lord Lester of Herne Hill : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have plans to encourage the Secretary-General of the United Nations to visit Burma in the near future to promote reconciliation between the military junta, and Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy party, and the restoration of democracy and freedom to the people of Burma.

Lord Howell of Guildford : We look to the UN, the Secretary-General's Good Offices Mission, and the Group of Friends to help reinvigorate the stalled political process in Burma, bring about dialogue and national reconciliation in Burma and press for the release of over 2,200 political prisoners. We will continue to discuss Burma with the UN Secretary-General and encourage him in this work.

The UN Security Council, under the UK presidency, considered the situation in Burma on 18 November, including a briefing from the Secretary-General's special adviser.

30 November 2010 Lord Lester of Herne Hill : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have plans to take measures to promote reconciliation in Burma between the military junta, and Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy party, and the restoration of democracy and freedom to the people of Burma.

Lord Howell of Guildford : The Government fully support Aung San Suu Kyi's call for reconciliation and a fully inclusive dialogue. We urge the military regime to respond positively to her request for talks and to co-operate with the UN.

It is clear that the 7 November elections were a sham and reflect a regime intent on entrenching its grip on power. There can be no prospect of national reconciliation until the regime complies with the international community's long-standing demands for the unconditional release of all political prisoners, greater respect for human rights and a genuine dialogue with all opposition groups, including Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party and all ethnic groups. We will maintain pressure on the regime until these conditions are met.

We will support the UN Secretary-General and his Good Offices Mission in their efforts to facilitate a transition to democracy in Burma.

ANSWERS TO ORAL PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

HOUSE OF COMMONS

9 November 2010 John Pugh : What recent reports he has received on the political situation in Burma; and if he will make a statement.

9 November 2010 Tim Farron : What recent reports he has received on the political situation in Burma;

and if he will make a statement.

Jeremy Browne : Elections on 7 November were neither free nor fair. The military regime is clearly using them to entrench its grip on power. No political prisoners have been freed, including Aung San Suu Kyi. An opportunity for national reconciliation has been missed. The Government will maintain pressure on the regime until there is progress on both democracy and human rights.

9 November 2010 John Pugh : I congratulate the Government on a very public and scathing criticism of this bogus democracy, but I suggest that they keep calling the generals' bluff and press the new Government to act like genuine democrats and release political prisoners who are committed to non-violence.

Jeremy Browne : I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I congratulate him on his consistent work with the all-party group on Burma. He is right to point out that there are more than 2,000 political prisoners in Burma. In those circumstances, it is impossible to see how the election can have been described as either free or fair by any observers. Although I very much hope that Aung San Suu Kyi is released, her release will not in itself wipe the slate clean.

9 November 2010 Tim Farron : Given the absence of free and fair elections in Burma, how will our Government demonstrate leadership through Europe to maintain the arms embargo and ensure that the EU sends the strongest possible signals that the regime must release all its political prisoners?

Jeremy Browne : There is an agreed EU position on Burma set out in the European Council conclusions and decision of 26 April this year. The position of the British Government is entirely consistent with EU policy. EU sanctions on Burma are among the EU's toughest autonomous measures against any country, and they make plain our determination to see change. Sanctions are designed to target regime members and their associates, not to harm the ordinary people of Burma. The regime's complaints about sanctions suggest to us that they are biting.

9 November 2010 Mike Gapes : The key country with influence in Burma is China. Can the Minister tell us what representations the Prime Minister is making to the Chinese authorities about the human rights abuses in Burma and the need for it to move to democracy?

Jeremy Browne : We regularly raise our concerns with the Chinese Government, and indeed with other countries in the region, and they can be under no illusions about the strength of our views on Burma. In addition, the Deputy Prime Minister and myself raised the issue of Burma with Asian counterparts at the October Asia-Europe meeting in Brussels, and I have raised the matter during recent visits to the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan and China.

9 November 2010 Stephen Twigg : Both sides of the House are united in condemnation of the Burmese regime for stealing this week's election. I welcome what the Minister has said about China, but I wish to press him. Will the Prime Minister raise the question of Burma during his visit to China? Burma's regional neighbours have a special responsibility to put pressure on the Burmese regime. Did the Prime Minister also raise the issue during his July visit to India, and if so, what was the Indian Government's response?

Jeremy Browne : This is my first opportunity to welcome the hon. Gentleman to his Front-Bench duties. We have something in common, of which not everybody in the House may be aware. We both contested Enfield, Southgate at the 1997 general election, although that contest is remembered primarily for somebody who is not present.

We raise Burma with the Chinese on a regular basis, as I have already said, and yes, the Prime Minister did raise the matter during his recent visit to India.

10 November 2010 Duncan Hames: In the international dialogue about democracy that we are witnessing, what would my right hon. Friend say to those who welcomed the elections in Burma, which were nothing more than an utter sham?

Nicholas Clegg : I strongly agree that those elections were a complete and utter sham. Their conclusion

was already decided well before they took place, with reserved seats for the military, and reserved seats for parties that were put up by the military. They are simply swapping their military uniforms for civilian clothing, but keeping their iron dictatorial grip on the people of Burma. Aung San Suu Kyi should be released when her house arrest comes up for review in the coming days, and real democracy should finally be introduced in Burma.

25 November 2010 Mark Pritchard : May we have an urgent debate on Burma? I am sure the whole House would welcome the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, but the fact remains that 7,000 political prisoners remain incarcerated. May we have a debate to put pressure on the Burmese Government to be more serious about political dialogue?

George Young : My hon. Friend is right that there are still a substantial number of political prisoners in Burma. I hope that the release of Aung San Suu Kyi will enable her to have a dialogue with the military regime to see whether a way forward can be found that introduces some sensible human rights measures in that regime which are absent at the moment.

Burma: Elections — Question

11 November 2010 Baroness Cox : To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the recent elections in Burma.

Lord Howell of Guildford : My Lords, the elections on 7 November were a sham. They were neither free, fair nor inclusive and they do not represent progress. We have heard reports of voter intimidation and irregularities in the results. Over 2,100 political prisoners remain in detention, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Many ethnic groups were excluded from the process. It is clear that the military is determined to maintain its grip on the country. An opportunity for national reconciliation has been missed.

11 November 2010 Baroness Cox : My Lords, I thank the Minister for that reply, with which I entirely agree. Is he aware that, while the sham nature of these elections has been widely and appropriately reported, less widely reported are some of the abuses in remote areas, such as the intimidation and arrest of Chin and Rohingya people and military offences against the Karen, which have led tens of thousands to flee into Thailand? Will Her Majesty's Government consider some humanitarian assistance for the newly displaced and ensure that all the ethnic nationals, comprising 40 per cent of the population of Burma, are fully involved in all future discussions and dialogue?

Lord Howell of Guildford : I am grateful to the noble Baroness, who is second to none in her grasp of these developments; I believe that shortly she will once again be travelling to the Chin state area to see for herself some of these very bad conditions.

The broad answer is that we are monitoring the situation and looking carefully all the time at whether additional aid and support can be mobilised for these ethnic groups. Among the refugees on the Thai border there are now reports of unpleasant developments in Chin state, northern Rakhine and other areas. We are looking at these things closely. It is a little early to say whether additional international aid is required, but we stand ready to examine in close detail the points that the noble Baroness has rightly made.

11 November 2010 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead : My Lords, after the rigged and fraudulent election in Burma, is it not now time that we sent a clear signal to the military junta that it can no longer enjoy impunity for its war crimes and crimes against humanity over many years? In that respect, the United Nations special rapporteur has recommended a commission of inquiry into these crimes. The UK has supported that view. Will we therefore, in the United Nations Security Council, in the United Nations General Assembly and at the European Union next week when the election is discussed, support that view and press for a commission of inquiry?

Lord Howell of Guildford : The noble Baroness is quite right. This is our policy, as she well knows, having administered it herself. As she also probably realises, the problem is that of gathering the appropriate international consensus. If we rush in too soon and fail to get the consensus, that will merely send a signal to the generals in Burma that the international community cannot do anything. We want to get the timing right, but the policy is exactly as the noble Baroness says. We support the idea of a commission of inquiry

and the rapporteur's proposal, but it may take quite a time to build the broad consensus that is needed to make this a success.

11 November 2010 Lord Avebury : Should we not make it crystal clear to the Government of Myanmar that, if Aung San Suu Kyi is released on Saturday, that will be grossly insufficient to meet the many criticisms in the special rapporteur's report, which is now before the General Assembly? Have the Government pressed for a UN-led dialogue on all the recommendations in that report, including for a commission of inquiry, which was mentioned by the noble Baroness? Is it in the EU recommendations to the General Assembly for discussion in December?

Lord Howell of Guildford : My noble friend is right: merely releasing Aung San Suu Kyi from her detention is only part of the story and certainly not a full response. There is a need for far greater pressure on Burma to begin to return itself to democracy. The EU has a tough sanctions policy, as my noble friend knows. We all have an agreed EU position on Burma, which the British Government are entirely consistent with and support. As to the policy at the UN, the position is as I described to the noble Baroness. It is a question of building the consensus and getting the timing right so that we and our EU colleagues can press ahead successfully and get full support for a commission of inquiry. It is no good if we rush in and find that we cannot get adequate support for it.

11 November 2010 Lord Alton of Liverpool : My Lords, on this day will the Minister recall that, in the Second World War, principal among the quarter of a million Burmese who fought alongside us or supported us as civilians were the Karen people, whom Lord Mountbatten of Burma described as our bravest allies? Will he also recall that, following what he has called sham elections, 30,000 Karen people have fled from the new upsurge of violence described by my noble friend in her question to the refugee camps along the border, where there are also 150,000 refugees? What aid and support can we give to these, our forgotten allies?

Lord Howell of Guildford : The noble Lord is right. I have a slightly smaller figure of 20,000 but, really, who cares? Thousands upon thousands of desperate people have fled across the Thai-Burma border to escape clashes between troops and the ethnic Karen rebels. We are deeply concerned about the reports of this fighting, which serves only to underline the fact that flawed elections will not create the national reconciliation that noble Lords have rightly urged and called for. As to assistance for refugees, I will have to write in detail to the noble Lord. We are looking at it and thinking about the possible focusing of additional assistance, but I will supply the precise details in a letter.

Burma - Question

18 November 2010 Lord Faulkner of Worcester : To ask Her Majesty's Government how they plan to promote democracy and human rights in Burma, following the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Lord Howell of Guildford : The Prime Minister spoke to Aung San Suu Kyi on 15 November, making clear our determination to support her efforts to promote democracy and national reconciliation. We will continue to work with our international partners and in UN bodies to press for progress. We will maintain pressure on the regime following Burma's recent sham elections and continue to highlight its appalling human rights abuses, including the continued incarceration of more than 2,200 political prisoners.

18 November 2010 Lord Faulkner of Worcester : My Lords, I thank the Minister for that positive and welcome reply. I am sure that the whole House will wish to pay tribute to this brave and remarkable woman whom I had the good fortune to know as an undergraduate studying PPE at Oxford 45 years ago. Can I ask the Minister a little more about setting aside the results of the elections and pressing the Burmese authorities to hold fresh elections to ensure that that the National League for Democracy can play a full part and that Aung San Suu Kyi can be leader of that party in those elections? What pressure can our Government and others place on governments in the region who have been somewhat supportive of the Burmese junta until now?

Lord Howell of Guildford : We all share the noble Lord's absolutely correct assessment of our sentiments. We salute this very brave woman and want the world that he described to come about, with her at the centre of it. The situation is delicate in that how investigations into these sham elections can be made are

still obviously in the minds of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party. I believe that she has authorised her party to look at irregularities, but we must be guided by her approach as she is in the midst of it while we are on the sidelines.

As to the other countries that have somewhat ambiguous relations with Burma and who have not been as strongly critical as we would like against this unpleasant regime-India is the obvious example-we are in discussions with them. I am not sure that we will make much progress with Beijing which seemed to welcome the elections and thought they were okay, so there is not much progress there. Other countries are united in recognising that this was not a serious election. It was rigged and there was all sorts of evidence of irregularities. The day will come, if we can keep up this pressure, when Burma can again join the comity of nations and be a prosperous, free and open place.

18 November 2010 Lord Steel of Aikwood : My Lords, in the days before her telephone was cut off I used to be able to speak to Aung San Suu Kyi on the phone but that has not been possible for the past 10 years. Does the Minister agree that we should couple tributes to her with tributes to her late husband, Michael Aris, because when he was dying of cancer they refused him a visa to visit her, in the hope that she would leave and not come back? They were a remarkable couple, dedicating their lives to the furtherance of democracy. Will he press on regarding the question of the release of the other 2,000 political prisoners?

Lord Howell of Guildford : Most definitely yes to all those observations. We salute not only this remarkable lady and her husband, but the way in which she now comments on what must have been the appalling experience of her imprisonment over the years. As she rightly says in a remarkable interview in the Times today, revolution takes place in the mind, and her mind is a wonderful mind to be playing on this situation.

18 November 2010 Lord Alton of Liverpool : My Lords, if, after 15 years and 20 days, Aung San Suu Kyi's release is to be a Mandela moment for Burma, will it not require the ethnic minorities and the National League for Democracy to enter into real dialogue and reconciliation with the military junta? Will it not require their reciprocity, and must we not do all we can, through the United Nations, engaging the Secretary-General directly in these negotiations, to bring that about? Can the Minister say something more about the ethnic minorities and their plight, given the information I gave him last week and the subsequent letter about the fighting in the Karen state and now the repatriation of those refugees across the border into an area where fighting is still under way?

Lord Howell of Guildford : On the last point of the noble Lord, who follows these things very closely, we are worried about what has been happening on the border and the signs that the Royal Thai Government may have been returning refugees across the border back into Burma, or Myanmar. Our ambassador spoke to the Foreign Minister of Thailand this morning about the need to look at this situation and prevent undue suffering where these refugee pressures have been building up.

As to the broader question of ethnic groups, we continually condemn the human rights abuses that ethnic groups continue to suffer. Our embassy in Rangoon regularly makes representations; we think that the elections were a missed opportunity to unite armed and non-armed ethnic groups, but I am afraid that we have to strike a pessimistic note in saying that there is little prospect of national reconciliation without their involvement and not much prospect while the generals are in charge. However, we will keep this matter very much to the fore, properly urged on by the noble Lord's remarkably persistent concern.

18 November 2010 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead : My Lords, will the Minister confirm that now is not the time to consider weakening the EU sanctions against Burma, since nothing has fundamentally changed, as the Minister has said? Secondly, as the noble Lord, Lord Alton, said, we need to see clearly a UN-led effort to ensure that Aung San Suu Kyi gets what she wants, which is a dialogue between the genuine ethnic representatives, the military and democracy activists, such as those in the NLD. Thirdly, last week the Minister said that there was insufficient support for a commission of inquiry and therefore it was not something that the UK would press for. Will he give me an assurance that at the meeting on 22 November in the Security Council, when there will be a discussion on the protection of civilians, the UK Government will lead on this and press for a recognition that the UN special rapporteur on Burma has asked for such a commission of inquiry?

Lord Howell of Guildford : As the noble Baroness knows, because she follows these things closely, we support the idea of a commission of inquiry, but we are anxious not to rush into it and have an early failure. We also note the view of Aung San Suu Kyi, who is slightly cautious about the pace of such an inquiry; but that there should be such an inquiry is, in principle, right and is, indeed, government policy. It is the pace and the approach that we have to watch.

As for EU policy on sanctions, the EU has expressed its very serious concern about the elections and has made it clear that sanctions should be eased only in response to tangible progress, which we have not really seen yet. So there is an agreed EU position on Burma: the sanctions are tough and we are totally in support of them. On the noble Baroness's middle point about the role of the UN, I will look further into it, but we are broadly in support of the activities that she mentioned. I shall elaborate on that in a letter to her.

18 November 2010 Lord Hannay of Chiswick : Does not the Minister agree that one thing that we could do is to increase our aid projects in Burma to non-governmental organisations and those who work for humanitarian purposes in medical and educational areas? That would be a good way to show that there is an alternative to the sort of regime that Burma has now.

Lord Howell of Guildford : I agree; indeed, the UK is one of the largest bilateral donors to Burma. We have significantly increased our humanitarian assistance from £9 million in 2007-08 to £28 million in the current year. Our aid focuses on health, basic education, rural livelihood, civil society and helping the refugees. I add as a personal observation that China is deeply involved in Myanmar, getting more involved all the time, pouring in vast sums of money for schools, infrastructure, and so on. We have a real problem considering aid-which is right-against the apparent determination of the People's Republic of China to have a massive involvement in Myanmar in every conceivable way.

18 November 2010 Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean : My Lords, I am very pleased to hear about the Prime Minister's call; that is something to be very well regarded. Can the Minister tell us whether other EU leaders have made similar calls to Aung San Suu Kyi? Can he also tell us whether there is now an EU resolve to re-engage with the ASEAN countries? After all, they value the EU-ASEAN relationship very highly, and were the countries of the European Union really to make a push on that at the moment, there might be a realistic possibility of getting more positive engagement.

Lord Howell of Guildford : I certainly hope that that will be so. It obviously makes complete sense that the EU must be extremely vigorous in such an approach. As to who has been making telephone calls to Aung San Suu Kyi, I have absolutely no idea; but I bet people have.

Early Day Motions

Early Day Motion 112: Human Rights in Burma

John Pugh
30.05.2010

Signed by 148 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 42 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 52 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 46 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 57 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.

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