



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

A summary of Burma-related issues in the British Parliament

NOV
2015

Answers to Written Parliamentary Questions

Elections

10 November 2015 Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of reported irregularities in the run-up to the Burmese election.

Mr Philip Hammond: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

11 November 2015 Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Burmese government about (a) human rights and (b) conduct of the election in November 2015 in that country.

Mr Hugo Swire: I have consistently raised both human rights and elections in bilateral meetings I have held with the Burmese government in 2015. I raised both issues with the Burmese authorities during my most recent visit to the country in July, and reiterated these points when I met the Burmese Foreign Minister, Wunna Maung Lwin, in September in New York. I also regularly raise these issues in public, as I did during the adjournment debate on Burma on 22 October, and in multilateral fora, such as at the UN Secretary General's Burma Partnership Group on 29 September.

12 November 2015 Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of reported irregularities in the run-up to the Burmese election.

Mr Philip Hammond: There were a number of reported flaws and irregularities in Burma's elections, such as in the voter list arrangements for observing advance voting and the use of religion in the campaign. We are deeply disappointed that holders of Temporary Residence Cards (of which the Rohingya form the largest single bloc) were disenfranchised from the elections by having their identity documents revoked. Nevertheless, the main opposition parties chose to take part in the elections despite these flaws and irregularities. The UK provided practical assistance to mitigate against the risks we have identified, including £2.6m to provide specialist technical advice to the Union Election Commission. British nationals have also been taking part in the EU Election Observation Mission and we funded the training of 5,000 local observers to deter fraud on the day. It is too early to make a definitive assessment of the technical conduct of the elections, but the initial finding of the EU Election Observation Mission was that they were "well-run and competitive", though with "legal reforms and procedural improvements" remaining. Overall, we continue to judge that the election represents the best chance of democracy the people of Burma have had for over 50 years.

18 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much funding the UK has allocated to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems over the last five years; and how much such funding was allocated to that body for the purpose of overseeing elections in Burma.

Mr Desmond Swayne: Over the last five years DFID has allocated around £9 million to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). DFID has provided £2.7 million for IFES to provide technical

support to the Union Election Commission in Burma. It has supported the UEC to train polling station staff and to develop procedures for the accreditation of nationwide international and domestic observation for the first time in Burma's history.

18 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what effect the outcome of the elections in Burma in November 2015 will have on her Department's funding to projects in that country.

Mr Desmond Swayne: I congratulate the people of Burma on their historic elections which are an important step towards greater democracy. DFID is currently reviewing our approach for all country programmes for the next five years as part of the government's overall spending review.

18 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what projects her Department (a) has and (b) is planning to facilitate transition in Burma from dictatorship to democracy.

Mr Desmond Swayne: DFID's bilateral commitment to Burma between 2011/12 and 2015/16 is around £285 million. DFID has allocated £25 million over five years to strengthen democratic governance in Burma, including support to the elections, through our Programme for Democratic Change. DFID is currently reviewing our approach for all country programmes for the next five years as part of the government's overall spending review and any decisions about future support will be made in due course.

26 November 2015 Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to improve diplomatic and economic ties with the new government in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: Burma's constitution establishes a long delay between the election and the formation of a new government, which is due to take place in March 2016. The Prime Minister, my Rt. Hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron), called Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on 10 November to offer continued political and economic support for the people of Burma. We will of course keep in close contact on a range of topics and look forward to working with whatever new administration emerges in March.

24 November 2015 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the conduct of the recent elections in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: I refer the hon. Member to my Written Ministerial Statement titled, Update on Elections in Burma, of 20 November.

24 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, with reference to the contribution of the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for East Devon, of 22 October 2015, Official Report, column 1264, what training was provided to the election observers supported by Government funding referred to in that contribution.

Mr Hugo Swire: The United Kingdom funded the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in training and deploying some 5000 Burmese civil society observers throughout the country. These national observers were trained to evaluate the quality of the electoral process at polling stations and to rapidly report incidents on the day. The presence of national and international observers was a key part of the United Kingdom's strategy for deterring fraud in Burma's elections on 8 November.

20 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the freedom of elections in Burma in November 2015 and the fairness of the outcome of that election as reflected in the distribution of seats in that country's parliament.

Mr Hugo Swire: It is for the people of Burma, and their political representatives, to decide whether they are satisfied with the outcome of the elections. Preliminary reports from international observers, including the EU, note that while there were shortcomings, the elections in Burma on 8 November were largely peaceful, orderly and well-run. Although the final results have not yet been officially announced, the National League for Democracy has already achieved enough votes to have won a mandate to form the next government, and the government has said it will accept the result. The UK stands ready to support the people of Burma,

including those who were unable to vote, as the country moves to the next stage of its transition.

Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what reports he has received of (a) disqualifications of parliamentary candidates, (b) disenfranchisement of ethnic groups and (c) inaccuracy and omissions from the voter lists in elections in Burma in November 2015.

Mr Hugo Swire: The British Government was concerned by the disqualification of parliamentary candidates, which disproportionately affected Muslim nominees. Of the 6,074 candidates who registered, 99 nominations were rejected, of which 22 were Muslim. Of these, 67 appealed, and 24 decisions were overturned of which 11 were Muslim. The EU Election Observation Mission's (EOM) preliminary statement of 10 November stated that since the rejections predominantly focused on the strict application of the citizenship requirement, this impacted particularly heavily on Muslim candidates. The EU EOM estimated that only 28 Muslim candidates stood in total. The UK has regularly expressed its deep disappointment with the decision to revoke Temporary Residence Cards ('White Cards') which effectively disenfranchised the Rohingya community from the vote, as well as some other minorities. The EU EOM noted that, as a result, universal suffrage was not properly provided for, and the elections were not fully inclusive. Improving the conditions for the Rohingya remains a top priority for the UK. As the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond) said in his statement of 10 November: 'The UK stands ready to support the people of Burma as they continue to work towards a more democratic and accountable government, including those unable to vote in this election.' Ahead of polling day there were widespread concerns about the accuracy of the voter lists. However, on the day, the EU EOM noted that: 'Most voters, in polling stations visited, found their names on the voter list, but in 7% of polling stations visited some absences on the list were observed.'

20 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assistance his Department has provided to the EU election observation mission overseeing elections in Burma in November 2015.

Mr Hugo Swire: The United Kingdom lobbied the EU to deploy an Election Observation Mission to Burma and we welcomed their deployment of a 136-person mission. The presence of international observers, including from the EU, was a key part of the United Kingdom's strategy for deterring fraud in Burma's elections on 8 November.

20 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department plans to take to facilitate a transition in Burma from dictatorship to democracy.

Mr Hugo Swire: The United Kingdom has supported Burma's reform process which started in 2011 and led to the parliamentary elections on 8 November. We have allocated around £25m over five years to strengthen democratic governance in Burma. This included support to the elections through the provision of technical advice to the Burmese election commission, voter education and monitoring and observation of the electoral process. While the elections were not perfect, they were largely peaceful, orderly and well-run on the day. We are monitoring closely the tabulation of the voting and the formation of the next government which will follow. We hope to continue our policy of engagement with the next Burmese government to continue to encourage Burma along its journey of democratic reform.

20 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what plans he has to meet the new President of Burma; and if he will raise the issue of human rights abuses of ethnic groups in that country with the President.

Mr Hugo Swire: Burma's next president will not be chosen when the new parliament convenes in February 2016.

Rohingya

12 November 2015 Mr David Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will support the establishment of a full, international, independent investigation by the UN into claims of genocide against the Rohingya in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: The UK deplores the treatment of the Rohingya community in Rakhine State, who are subject to persecution and denied the most basic rights. We welcome the work of the highly effective UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, who has shone a spotlight on violations against the Rohingya in Rakhine. She has not characterised the treatment of the Rohingya as genocide, and neither did the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in his 4 November statement on Burma's elections. However, any judgement on whether genocide has occurred is a matter for international judicial decision, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies. A UN investigation would require high level international support for which, we assess, there is little prospect of agreement at this stage.

Our approach is to seek an end to all violations, irrespective of whether or not they fit the definition of specific international crimes. I and other British Government Ministers take every appropriate opportunity, both publicly and in private, to press the Burmese authorities to take urgent steps to address the situation of the Rohingya. I did this with senior Burmese Ministers during my visit to Burma in July, when I travelled to Rakhine State for the second time. Most recently, I raised the issue with the Burmese Foreign Minister, Wunna Maung Lwin, in September in New York. After the 8 November elections, the UK will continue our efforts to address the serious ongoing human rights violations against the Rohingya in Rakhine State.

12 November 2015 Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if the Government will support a UN Inquiry into human violations against the Rohingya.

Mr Hugo Swire: The UK deplores the treatment of the Rohingya community in Rakhine State, who are subject to persecution and denied the most basic rights. We welcome the work of the highly effective UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, who has shone a spotlight on violations against the Rohingya in Rakhine. She has not characterised the treatment of the Rohingya as genocide, and neither did the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in his 4 November statement on Burma's elections. However, any judgement on whether genocide has occurred is a matter for international judicial decision, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies. A UN investigation would require high level international support for which, we assess, there is little prospect of agreement at this stage.

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3 November 2015 Graham Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether the Government considers that Burma's Rohingya minority are subject to genocide.

Mr Hugo Swire: It is clear that the Rohingya are being persecuted and denied the most basic rights in Rakhine. Any judgment on whether genocide has occurred is a matter for international judicial decision, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies.

Our approach is to seek an end to all violations, irrespective of whether they fit the definition of specific international crimes. I and other Government Ministers take every appropriate opportunity, both publicly and in private, to press the Burmese authorities to take urgent steps to address the situation of the Rohingya.

3 November 2015 Graham Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the Burmese Rohingya people.

Mr Hugo Swire: I visited Rakhine State for the second time in July, during my visit to Burma. While there, I met representatives of both Rakhine and Rohingya communities, visited camps for the internally displaced, viewed projects we are supporting, and raised our serious concerns about the treatment of the Rohingya at senior level, with both local and central Burmese government.

4 November 2015 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussion they have had with the government of Burma to ensure that Rohingya are given full humanitarian access to

camps, and the protection which enables them to return home or be given safe voluntary resettlement.

Baroness Verma: British Government Ministers take every appropriate opportunity to raise the plight of the Rohingya community with their Burmese counterparts. Most recently, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), did so with the Burmese Foreign Minister in New York on 29 September. During his visit to Burma in July, Mr Swire travelled to Rakhine State to see the situation there at first hand, and raised the situation of the Rohingya at a senior level both in Rakhine and with Burmese central government ministers. The UK's Deputy Head of Mission, accompanied by DFID officials, visited northern Rakhine State on 5-8 October and discussed freedom of movement for those in internally displaced person camps with Rakhine State Chief Minister, U Mya Aung.

DFID is one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors in Rakhine, and has provided over £18 million since 2012.

16 November 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their assessment of the findings in reports by Yale Law School and Queen Mary University of London, and an investigation by Al-Jazeera, as well as research by Fortify Rights, that claim to provide evidence that genocide is being committed against the Rohingya people in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: These and other disturbing reports from Rakhine State make clear that the Rohingya are being persecuted and denied the most basic rights. We welcome the work of a highly effective UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, who has shone a spotlight on violations against the Rohingya in Rakhine. She has not characterised the treatment of the Rohingya as genocide, and neither did the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in his 4 November Statement on Burma's elections.

However, any judgement on whether genocide has occurred is a matter for international judicial decision, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies. A UN investigation would require high level international support for which we assess there is little prospect of agreement at this stage. Our approach is to seek an end to all violations, irrespective of whether or not they fit the definition of specific international crimes. British Government Ministers take every appropriate opportunity, both publicly and in private, to press the Burmese authorities to take urgent steps to address the situation of the Rohingya. Most recently, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), did so with the Burmese Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin in September in New York.

16 November 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will support calls for the establishment of a full, international, independent investigation by the UN into claims of genocide against the Rohingya in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: These and other disturbing reports from Rakhine State make clear that the Rohingya are being persecuted and denied the most basic rights. We welcome the work of a highly effective UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, who has shone a spotlight on violations against the Rohingya in Rakhine. She has not characterised the treatment of the Rohingya as genocide, and neither did the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in his 4 November Statement on Burma's elections.

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20 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to raise the security, humanitarian access, freedom of movement and citizenship rights of ethnic groups with the Burmese government.

Mr Hugo Swire: The Government consistently raises concerns about the human rights situation in Burma, including for all ethnic groups, with the Burmese government. However, these are issues that particularly affect the Muslim Rohingya community in Rakhine State, who are subject to persecution and denied the most basic rights. I and other Ministers take every appropriate opportunity, both publicly and in private, to press the Burmese authorities to take urgent steps to address the desperate situation of the Rohingya. I did this with senior Burmese ministers during my visit to Burma in July, when I travelled to Rakhine State for the second time. Most recently, I raised the issue with the Burmese Foreign Minister, Wunna Maung Lwin, in September in New York. We will continue our efforts to address the serious, ongoing human rights violations against the Rohingya community, including with whoever forms the next Government of Burma.

24 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what his policy is on the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights violations against Rohingya people in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 12 November 2015 (PQ14884), which can be located at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>.

Which was:

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Mr Hugo Swire: The UK deplores the treatment of the Rohingya community in Rakhine State, who are subject to persecution and denied the most basic rights. We welcome the work of the highly effective UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, who has shone a spotlight on violations against the Rohingya in Rakhine. She has not characterised the treatment of the Rohingya as genocide, and neither did the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in his 4 November statement on Burma's elections. However, any judgement on whether genocide has occurred is a matter for international judicial decision, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies. A UN investigation would require high level international support for which, we assess, there is little prospect of agreement at this stage. Our approach is to seek an end to all violations, irrespective of whether or not they fit the definition of specific international crimes. I and other British Government Ministers take every appropriate opportunity, both publicly and in private, to press the Burmese authorities to take urgent steps to address the situation of the Rohingya. I did this with senior Burmese Ministers during my visit to Burma in July, when I travelled to Rakhine State for the second time. Most recently, I raised the issue with the Burmese Foreign Minister, Wunna Maung Lwin, in September in New York. After the 8 November elections, the UK will continue our efforts to address the serious ongoing human rights violations against the Rohingya in Rakhine State.

Rape and Sexual Violence in Conflict

12 November 2015 Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has received on incidents of sexual violence committed by the Burmese army; and what representations he has made to the Burmese government on that matter.

Mr Philip Hammond: We recognise that sexual violence in Burma remains a significant problem and are focused on practical action to tackle it. This includes pressing the Burmese government to live up to the commitments it made when it endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict at the London Global Summit in June 2014

During his visit to Burma in July, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right Hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), pressed the Burmese government at Senior Ministerial level on the issue and launched the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence. We continue to press the agenda in international fora, including through UN resolutions on Burma at the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, which we co-sponsor. At Friday's Universal Periodic Review of Burma at the UN in Geneva, we focused our recommendations on ending sexual violence and the rights of women and girls, as well as on tackling the desperate situation in Rakhine State for the Rohingya community.

12 November 2015 Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what support the Government is providing to the Women's League of Burma.

Mr Philip Hammond: Officials at the British Embassy in Rangoon regularly meet representatives of the Women's League of Burma and its member groups of civil society organisations. The UK has also provided occasional funding support to the Women's League of Burma, including towards the publication of some of their research. Representatives from the Women's League of Burma attended the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in June 2014 at our invitation, and the UK assisted with the cost of that visit.

10 November 2015 Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has received on incidents of sexual violence committed by the Burmese army; and what representations he has made to the Burmese government on that matter.

Mr Philip Hammond: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

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Mr Philip Hammond: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

20 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of steps taken by (a) his Department and (b) the Burmese government to prevent sexual violence in conflict in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: Sexual violence in conflict remains a significant problem in Burma and we are focused on practical action to tackle it. There have been some signs of improvement since the Burmese government endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, at the London Global Summit in June 2014, but we continue to press for more.

During my visit to Burma in July 2015, I pressed the Burmese government at senior ministerial level on the issue and launched the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence.

The UK was also instrumental in facilitating the visit to Burma this summer of the Special Envoy of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Angelina Jolie Pitt. We continue to push the agenda in international fora, including through UN resolutions on Burma at the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, which we co-sponsor. At Burma's 6 November Universal Periodic Review at the UN in Geneva, ending sexual violence and improving the rights of women and girls was a focus of our recommendations.

Political Prisoners

19 November 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of Amnesty International's report highlighting an increase in the number of political prisoners in Burma, what steps they are taking to raise the cases of those prisoners, and to promote the rule of law and the need for reform to meet proper standards of justice in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We have welcomed the release of hundreds of political prisoners under the current Burmese government. But we have also spoken out vociferously about the worrying tempo of arrests, detentions and sentencing of political activists in the lead up to the elections on 8 November. We have regularly raised our concerns with the government of Burma at the highest levels. Most recently, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), raised this issue directly with the Minister for the President's Office, U Aung Min, during his visit to Burma in July. Officials from our Embassy in Rangoon meet regularly with civil society on this issue and we lobby on individual cases. We also raise our concerns publicly in our Annual Report on Human Rights and in multilateral fora such as the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, where the UK has co-sponsored Resolutions calling for the unconditional release of all political prisoners. We will continue to work with the incoming Burmese government to make progress on this important issue.

19 November 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure the welfare of the two Burmese students who were arrested shortly after visiting the UK on a programme designed to build representative student unions in that country.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We remain in contact with the four Burmese students who visited the UK in May and are monitoring the case of Zayar Lwin who was arrested on 7 July after participating in a protest rally at the end of June. Two others have been charged in absentia, but not arrested. More widely, we have called for all remaining student protestors to be released from prison and for repressive legislation still on the statute books to be amended. Our Embassy in Rangoon closely monitors the cases of political prisoners and student protestors who have been charged and remain in detention. Representatives from our Embassy in Rangoon attended the most recent trial hearing in Thuyawaddy on 13 October of the students arrested following the Letpadan protests in March.

4 November 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made on behalf of Phyoe Phyoe Aung who is currently detained in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We have raised with the Burmese authorities our concerns at the violence which occurred during the student protests at Letpadan Monastery in March, when Phyoe Phyoe Aung and others were arrested. We have called for the Government of Burma to investigate the incident and for all remaining student demonstrators to be released from prison and charges to be dropped. Our Embassy in Rangoon is closely monitoring the cases of the 56 who have been charged, 48 of whom remain in detention, and have attended the most recent trial hearing in Thuyawaddy on 13 October.

Freedom of expression and assembly

4 November 2015 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what has been their response to the report by Amnesty International in June that the government of Burma has created a climate of fear by pursuing policies of surveillance, harassment and intimidation.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We are increasingly concerned by limits to freedom of expression and assembly in Burma, and a tightening of the democratic space as the November elections approach. These issues have been well documented by Amnesty International and others. We have expressed our concerns to the Burmese authorities a number of times, including during the visit to Burma in July by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), and most recently, when Mr Swire met the Burmese Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin in New York in September.

Religious extremism

4 November 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what support they offer to youth-led civil society initiatives countering hate speech and promoting religious tolerance in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We remain deeply concerned about the rise in Burma of hate speech and religious intolerance. We have raised this with the Burmese authorities and will continue to do so, both publicly and in private. We have supported inter-faith dialogue in Burma in recent years through a number of projects to help build relationships and understanding. These have included projects to develop relationships between Burmese youth and different religious communities, and to forge exchanges between activists on religious freedom in Burma and Indonesia.

19 November 2015 Lord Alton of Liverpool: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Burma about the enactment of four race and religion laws; what discussions they are having with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy about those laws; and what they are doing to monitor and counter the role of religious extremism in Burma's political life.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We have been concerned by the increase in religious intolerance in Burma. This has been evidenced starkly in the four discriminatory race and religion laws, but also by restrictions on the Rohingya community, their disenfranchisement from the 8 November elections, the rise

of Buddhist nationalism, hate speech and anti-Muslim violence. We have raised our concerns about the four laws in detail with the Burmese authorities both bilaterally and in company with our partners in the EU, and will continue to do so with any incoming government. Our representations on the four laws in Burma have focussed on the government and parliament who proposed, introduced and approved these bills, rather than with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy party which opposed the laws. We will continue to monitor this concerning trend and raise our ongoing concerns with any incoming administration following the election.

16 November 2015 Baroness Helic: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of public threats made in Burma against the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: The Government supports the Special Rapporteur, Professor Yanghee Lee, and deplores the hateful and threatening language that has been used against her by MaBaTha monk Wirathu. We have also called for Burma's Ministry of Religious Affairs to take action on the matter. I was able to convey my sympathy and concern to Professor Lee in person during her visit to London in March. Last week, we publicly reiterated our support for Professor Lee and her mandate at the UN General Assembly in New York, at a dedicated session discussing her most recent report on the Human rights situation in Burma.

Unfortunately, statements like those of Wirathu are symptomatic of a troubling rise in intolerance, discrimination and hate speech in Burma. We have repeatedly raised our concerns over this trend, both bilaterally and in company with our international partners. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), did so with senior Burmese government ministers during his visit to Burma in July and, most recently, with Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin in September in New York.

16 November 2015 Baroness Helic: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has made through the Permanent Mission to the United Nations regarding the incitement of violence in Burma against the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: The Government supports the Special Rapporteur, Professor Yanghee Lee, and deplores the hateful and threatening language that has been used against her by MaBaTha monk Wirathu. We have also called for Burma's Ministry of Religious Affairs to take action on the matter. I was able to convey my sympathy and concern to Professor Lee in person during her visit to London in March. Last week, we publicly reiterated our support for Professor Lee and her mandate at the UN General Assembly in New York, at a dedicated session discussing her most recent report on the Human rights situation in Burma.

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Unfortunately, statements like those of Wirathu are symptomatic of a troubling rise in intolerance,

discrimination and hate speech in Burma. We have repeatedly raised our concerns over this trend, both bilaterally and in company with our international partners. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), did so with senior Burmese government ministers during his visit to Burma in July and, most recently, with Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin in September in New York.

16 November 2015 Baroness Helic: To ask Her Majesty's Government what support they give to the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: The Government supports the Special Rapporteur, Professor Yanghee Lee, and deplores the hateful and threatening language that has been used against her by MaBaTha monk Wirathu. We have also called for Burma's Ministry of Religious Affairs to take action on the matter. I was able to convey my sympathy and concern to Professor Lee in person during her visit to London in March. Last week, we publicly reiterated our support for Professor Lee and her mandate at the UN General Assembly in New York, at a dedicated session discussing her most recent report on the Human rights situation in Burma.

Unfortunately, statements like those of Wirathu are symptomatic of a troubling rise in intolerance, discrimination and hate speech in Burma. We have repeatedly raised our concerns over this trend, both bilaterally and in company with our international partners. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), did so with senior Burmese government ministers during his visit to Burma in July and, most recently, with Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin in September in New York.

16 November 2015 John Mc Nally: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation for religious minorities in Burma.

Mr Hugo Swire: Burma remains a country of concern in our annual Human Rights report. We, therefore, produce biannual updates on the human rights situation, the latest can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/burma-in-year-update-july-2015/burma-in-year-update-july-2015>.

We have been concerned by the increase in religious intolerance in Burma and the treatment of minority groups, particularly religious minorities. This has been evidenced starkly in the four discriminatory race and religion laws as well as in the appalling treatment of the Rohingya community in Rakhine State, their disenfranchisement from the 8 November elections, and the rise of Buddhist nationalism, hate speech and anti-Muslim violence. We have raised our concerns about this in detail with the Burmese authorities, both bilaterally, in company with our partners in the EU and in international fora like the UN. We will continue to raise this important issue facing Burma with any incoming government.

Aid

18 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much funding the UK has allocated to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems over the last five years; and how much such funding was allocated to that body for the purpose of overseeing elections in Burma.

Mr Desmond Swayne: Over the last five years DFID has allocated around £9 million to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). DFID has provided £2.7 million for IFES to provide technical support to the Union Election Commission in Burma. It has supported the UEC to train polling station staff and to develop procedures for the accreditation of nationwide international and domestic observation for the first time in Burma's history.

18 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what effect the outcome of the elections in Burma in November 2015 will have on her Department's funding to projects in that country.

Mr Desmond Swayne: I congratulate the people of Burma on their historic elections which are an important step towards greater democracy. DFID is currently reviewing our approach for all country

programmes for the next five years as part of the government's overall spending review.

18 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what projects her Department (a) has and (b) is planning to facilitate transition in Burma from dictatorship to democracy.

Mr Desmond Swayne: DFID's bilateral commitment to Burma between 2011/12 and 2015/16 is around £285 million. DFID has allocated £25 million over five years to strengthen democratic governance in Burma, including support to the elections, through our Programme for Democratic Change. DFID is currently reviewing our approach for all country programmes for the next five years as part of the government's overall spending review and any decisions about future support will be made in due course.

Child soldiers

20 November 2015 Imran Hussain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of steps taken by (a) his Department and (b) the Burmese government to stop the use of child soldiers in that country.

Mr Hugo Swire: We welcomed the commitment the Burmese government made to ending the recruitment of child soldiers in signing the UN's Action Plan in 2012. Since then Burma has made some progress, including the release of over 600 child soldiers and, in September, signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention on Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

However, we are clear that more still needs to be done. Access to military units and non-state armed groups continues to be restricted, release of child soldiers has been limited, and while recruitment of children has slowed, it has not ceased entirely. We are also aware of reports that children continue to be arrested for "desertion". I raised this issue with Minister of the President's Office, U Aung Min, when I visited Burma in July and we will continue to do so with the Burmese authorities, including to press for swift implementation of the Optional Protocol.

Immigration

25 November 2015 Baroness Hamwee: To ask Her Majesty's Government how many (1) parents of a minor, (2) siblings of a minor, and (3) other persons, were granted, on the basis of exceptional compelling, compassionate circumstances outside the Immigration Rules, a family reunion visa for reunion with a family member in the UK with refugee leave or humanitarian protection, in each year from 2011 to date; and from which countries those persons have come.

Lord Bates: Family reunion applications are considered within the scope of the Immigration Rules. Under these Rules, only pre-existing families are eligible for family reunion i.e. spouse, civil partner, unmarried/same sex partner and minor children who formed part of the family unit at the time the sponsor (the person granted protection in the UK) fled to seek asylum.

Family reunion visas are available to help families that become fragmented. Family reunion is intended to allow family members who formed part of the family unit before the refugee fled their country of origin, to reunite in the UK.

The number of Family reunion visas issued and the country of application from 2011 to date can be found in the table below. It is not possible to break down the data to the applicant's relationship with the individual that has already gained asylum in the UK.

The number of applications from Burma were:

Country of application	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
(Jan-Jun)					
Burma	20	25	5	5	5

Trade

11 November 2015 Adam Afriyie: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, what steps he has taken to boost exports to (a) Indonesia, (b) Vietnam, (c) Thailand, (d) Malaysia, (e) the Philippines and (f) other countries in South East Asia.

Anna Soubry: UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) has established a regional network to support UK trade and investment across South East Asia. This helps provide UK companies with access to the fast-growing markets of the region. The network is on target to assist nearly 10,000 businesses this year. UKTI has directly assisted in export deals with the region worth £2bn in the first six months of this financial year, putting us on track to deliver the UK's best ever trade figures for the region. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister urged the European Union to accelerate negotiations on the EU-ASEAN FTA, a deal that is worth an additional £3 billion a year to the UK economy.

Closer collaboration across the region, supported by continued investment from government, has enabled UKTI to operate ever more efficiently, working with more British businesses and securing a higher value of business wins. Six regional priority sectors have been identified- reflecting UK strengths as well as the scale of opportunities in the region – enabling a more strategic approach to trade delivery in Infrastructure, Education, Energy, Financial & Professional Services, Consumer Retail and Healthcare.

Significant investment is also being made in the development of additional trade service capacity, being delivered by industry partners in the region, principally through Chambers of Commerce. This represents the government's growing focus on the region as a global growth engine, and is indicative of the continuing importance that this government places in seeking out global opportunities to boost the UK economy.

In July of this year my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister led a trade mission to Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia. The mission was made up of 30 British businesses, and included the signing of trade deals worth over £750 million. Concurrently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary for State for Business, Innovation and Skills led the inaugural Northern Powerhouse delegation, comprising over 50 UK companies, to Singapore and Malaysia.

During his visit to Indonesia, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that the Government will make available up to £1 billion to finance infrastructure projects involving UK business, in Indonesia through its export guarantee scheme. The UK welcomes the recent commitments made by President Joko Widodo's government on deregulation and improving the business and investment environment in Indonesia, as well as the talks between Indonesia and the EU on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, which will benefit both Indonesia and the UK. Richard Graham MP, the Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Indonesia and the Asian Economic Community (AEC) has paid two visits this year to Indonesia, pushing forward trade priorities and promoting work on second-tier cities within Indonesia.

Two-way trade with Vietnam more than doubled between 2009 and 2014, reaching £2.81 billion, with the UK being amongst Vietnam's largest trading partners within the EU. During my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visit in July, the first by a serving British Prime Minister, Rolls Royce and Vietnam Airlines signed an agreement totalling £340 million, Prudential announced a £100 million investment and ZincOx agreed a £75 million investment for hazardous waste recycling.

In the past year, over 1000 UK businesses have been helped to trade with Thailand. Notable improvements to the business environment include: British beef and lamb now being allowed to be imported into the Thai market after a 20-year hiatus, which will bring business of some £9m over the next five years; the British Embassy Bangkok, with other embassies and Chambers, encouraged the Thai authorities not to proceed with new regulations which would have directly impacted foreign ownership of over 5000 companies, many British, as well as deter further UK investment opportunities; finally the Government has encouraged the Thai authorities, with strong support from the Thai Prime Minister, to sign up to the Construction Transparency Initiative, which should improve public procurement practice for major infrastructure projects. Exports to Malaysia (the UK's second largest export market in ASEAN) have risen by almost 25% between 2010 and 2014. Over the past four years, there have been more UK Ministerial and VIP visits to Malaysia promoting trade and investment than ever before, including two visits by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Recent successes include a £4.2bn supply and maintenance deal between Rolls Royce and Air

Asia. Posts have successfully worked to tackle market access barriers, for example, helping to open up engineering and legal services in Malaysia.

In the first half of this year UK exports to the Philippines grew by 44%, the third highest growth in exports to any country worldwide. Major deals include a £90m contract for the supply of electronic voting machines, a £70m deal for a British solar company and the appointment of Arup as the lead designer on the country's second largest airport.

Lord Puttnam, UK Trade and Cultural Envoy to Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam has also made two visits to the region this year, strengthening important business and governmental links and working on campaigns ranging from infrastructure to education.

Answers to Oral Parliamentary Questions

Elections

5 November 2015 Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab) (Urgent Question): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the release of political activists and human rights ahead of the elections in Burma on 8 November.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge): I thank the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) for raising this matter at this important moment for Burma. Burma goes to the polls this very Sunday, which is possibly the most important democratic opportunity for the country in over 50 years. Credible, inclusive and transparent elections would represent a huge step in consolidating Burma's transition towards democracy, but we are under no illusions that the elections will be perfect. More widely, the human rights picture remains extremely troubling.

As the hon. Lady's question suggests, political prisoners remain a great concern in Burma. We have welcomed the release of more than 2,000 political prisoners under the Burmese Government's scheme, following President Thein Sein's commitment in 2012 here in London to release all political prisoners. However, that commitment remains unfulfilled. We are concerned about the continued arrest, detention and sentencing of political activists in the lead-up to the elections on Sunday.

We are concerned about the estimated figure that a minimum of 96 political activists remained behind bars at the end of September 2015, according to the most recent statistics we have, and that 460 more people have been detained under repressive laws and are awaiting trial following their arrests throughout 2014 and 2015. As the hon. Lady will be aware, they can campaign politically while undergoing a trial procedure. The arrests of activists and candidates for engaging in peaceful protests and social media posts—people such as Patrick Kum Jaa Lee and Chaw Sandy Tun—raise particular concerns over the freedom of expression in the lead-up to the elections.

More widely, we continue to have many serious concerns about the human rights situation in Burma, particularly the appalling situation of the Rohingya in Rakhine state. Thousands of people remain housed in supposedly temporary camps following the violence in 2012, when they were forced from their homes. The situation in the camps is desperate and worsening. We will continue to hold the Burmese Government to account. Most recently, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), raised these concerns with the Minister of the President's Office when he visited Burma in July.

There has been an incredible amount of engagement on this issue, including the hon. Lady's recent debate. I am happy to be in the House to add more flesh to that debate, particularly given that the elections are happening on Sunday.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Minister for coming to the House and welcome him back. I appreciate that he is stepping in for the Minister of State, who told me that he would be in Luxembourg.

The Minister mentioned that there are political prisoners. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a Thailand-based advocacy group, believes that there are many political prisoners and that more than 450

other people are awaiting trial. It says that the Burmese Government's actions have intensified ahead of the polls, with the authorities continuing to lock up activists in the months leading up to the election. It stated: "It is a great opportunity for the government to release all remaining political prisoners ahead of the election so that these people can participate in the historic polls... If the government really wants to move forward to democracy, no political prisoner should be behind bars."

Father Thomas Htang Shan Mong, the director of the bishops conference's justice and peace commission, has said that locking up activists contravenes basic social justice principles. He stated:

"Scores of political prisoners remain behind bars".

He went on to say that

"the country has yet to move forward to democracy"

and that "civil society groups...need to push for amending the draconian laws that attempt to silence activists."

The Minister helpfully mentioned the case of Patrick Kum Jaa Lee who was arrested because he shared a photograph of a man wearing a Kachin-style longyi and stepping on a portrait of Commander-in-Chief Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing. A woman was detained after she shared a satirical picture on social media, comparing Burmese army uniforms to a feminine longyi used by opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Will the Minister say whether, ahead of these apparent free and fair elections, all activists awaiting trial and political prisoners are still in prison? He mentioned 96 prisoners, but perhaps he could update the House with another figure.

Large parts of Christian-majority Kachin state effectively remain in a state of civil war. More than 100,000 people have been displaced as a result of clashes, and they remain in temporary camps in Kachin and Shan states. The conflict shows that the Government have failed to deliver on their promise to end armed clashes in Myanmar before the vote on 8 November. In fact, only eight of 15 groups who participated in the national peace process were involved in the 15 October agreement. A Yangon-based political analyst said the fact that only some of the country's armed ethnic groups have signed the agreement shows that it is more of a "cosmetic political show" than a historic benchmark, and stated:

"The peace process must be inclusive of all ethnic armed groups and the Government has not allowed some ethnic groups to be involved in the cease-fire agreement."

Will the Minister update the House on whether the ceasefire agreement included all the ethnic groups, and will he say whether it is still in place ahead of the supposed free and fair elections on 8 November?

The United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in Burma said that the restrictions on rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association—including arrests and excessive force against protesters—put genuine elections at risk. Yanghee Lee said that there were worrying trends of undermining the democratic space, and a clear need for continued legislative and constitutional reform to bring the country's legal framework in line with international human rights laws and standards.

Given this country's incredible investment in Burma, that is a matter of public policy. On Tuesday, Ben Rogers and Mark Farmaner updated us with their concerns about what is happening during the election, ahead of your historic round-table discussion in Speaker's House, Mr Speaker.

Will the Minister ensure that he supports the United Nation's call for all actors to work together to support further reforms in Burma? Given that a third of the population are from an ethnic minority background, internally displaced people and disenfranchised Rohingya people must all be part of that peace process to build a new nation that will encompass everyone after 8 November. Finally, will the Minister report back on this issue to the House?

James Duddridge: I thank the hon. Lady for those questions. It is totally unacceptable to imprison people in the run-up to the election, even if they are then freed, and particularly given that they cannot campaign under Burmese law. It is concerning that such things have happened, given that in 2012 the President asserted that political prisoners would be freed. Much progress had been made since that visit to London, but things have gone backwards recently. Getting precise numbers out of Burma is difficult. The figures that I gave in my opening remarks were the most recent, but they are on the low side and cover the people we know about. Anecdotally, we are receiving reports that more people are being arrested, and the trend is getting worse.

I believe that eight out of 15 or 16 groups have signed up to the ceasefire, and that the ceasefire is broadly still in place. If I have any more information, I will return to that issue. We will continue to work closely with the UN and the special rapporteur on Burma, both in country and in New York. On parliamentary engagement, over the past few months oral questions have been raised and the hon. Lady secured a debate in Westminster Hall. More than 60 questions have been tabled in this House and the other place, and we must maintain that communication and highlight the issue. Her Majesty's Government will continue to report on this issue, in particular following the elections on Sunday.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): You very kindly hosted a round-table meeting on Burma earlier this week, Mr Speaker, to which the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) has already referred. In that meeting, I was shocked to hear of the wholesale disenfranchisement of the Rohingya people from the elections. Will the Minister update us on what representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government on this specific issue?

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for his long-standing advocacy on this issue. When the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon, visited Burma, he went first to Rakhine to look at the situation of the Rohingya people. They are oppressed and, in relation to the election, are being denied a democratic voice. The UK Government are deeply concerned about this issue. We have raised it on a consistent basis with the current Burmese Government and will continue to do so with any future Government.

The position of the Rohingya people is unacceptable in the modern democracy Burma aspires to be and which we want to see.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) for her urgent question, which follows on closely from her excellent debate on progress in securing better human rights and better elections in Burma. There is an enormous amount of interest across the Chamber and in the other place on this important question.

The people of Burma have faced decades of brutal oppression. In a few days' time, they will have their first openly contested election in 50 years. This progress should be widely welcomed. The release of thousands of people, as part of a presidential prisoner amnesty in July, was an important step, too. In the previous prisoner amnesty that took place in October 2014, when thousands were released a few weeks ahead of Burma's hosting two major international summits, there were reports of an upsurge in arrests and harassment of peaceful activists. Amnesty International states:

"Myanmar's authorities have a track record of announcing prisoner amnesties...at politically opportune times. The government must prove that this is more than an empty gesture to curry favour ahead of the November elections".

Will the Minister set out what steps have been taken by the UK and the international community to ensure that this will be a lasting amnesty?

Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has criticised the electoral process, saying it has been less than totally free and fair and that the electoral commission has failed to deal with certain irregularities. Does the Minister share her concerns and has he raised them with the Burmese Government?

The Minister will be aware—it was raised in the urgent question—that the Rohingya and some Christian minorities are experiencing harassment and persecution. The Muslim minority are not classified as citizens and will not have a vote. Does the Minister agree that it is wrong that their voice will not be heard in this election? What efforts are being made to encourage the Burmese authorities not to follow this election, whatever the outcome, with arrests and harassment of peaceful activists who have been campaigning? On Sunday, it will be for the Burmese people to decide their election. The whole House will be watching, looking on with hope that the election will be fair and free and that there will be a peaceful outcome that works towards greater human rights.

James Duddridge: The eyes of the world and this Chamber are certainly on the elections to try to ensure they are free and fair. The hon. Lady's comments were very balanced, reflecting not only the fears that

things might go wrong and the fact that we should flag up any issues with the election, but the optimism that this is arguably the biggest opportunity for free and fair elections in more than 50 years. It has been a brutal, brutal decade. I congratulate all Members, some of whom are in the Chamber today, and organisations such as Amnesty International, which she mentioned in her question, that have worked so tirelessly.

The Rohingya have no voice and cannot be heard. They do not have the vote that we take for granted. I suspect it troubles all hon. Members that so many of our constituents do not vote in elections, but they do have a voice indirectly. The Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon, visited and spoke to the Rohingya, and we will continue to press, in the strongest possible terms, for their democratic participation. Sadly, it is too late for Sunday, but we can, I hope, build on a strong election this weekend and move towards future elections that include the minority Muslim Rohingya population, so that Burma can proudly say that its election results represent the whole population, not just the vocal majority.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a real pleasure to see the Minister at the Dispatch Box. Burma has been of considerable interest to the whole House, including you, Mr Speaker, for many years. I think that hon. Members can be congratulated on what they have done. Will the Minister say how we actually influence what happens in Burma? How do the Government go about influencing change?

James Duddridge: Diplomacy is incredibly complicated. One thing I have learned in my short time at the Foreign Office is that sometimes softer diplomacy—the sort that you have exercised in relation to Burma, Mr Speaker—is among the most effective. When change does happen, as with the promise to release political prisoners in 2012, it is sometimes difficult to pinpoint exactly what was done and by whom. It is rather a menu of activity, including by campaign groups outside this place and individuals within this place. From a ministerial viewpoint, it is important to raise the subject consistently and not to let short-term interests, be they regional or British, get in the way of our firmly raising an unacceptable situation. At the same time, however, other things carry on. The approach is about getting the right balance, focus and message, and it is having some success. It is encouraging to see the elections on Sunday, but we have concerns, and clearly we all need to do more.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) for raising this important question at such a timely moment.

SNP Members, too, believe that this weekend's national elections in Burma must be free and fair, but we have concerns about human rights and all citizens having a vote. Human Rights Watch yesterday identified concerns about the electoral process being "undermined by systematic and structural problems including the lack of an independent election commission, ruling party dominance of state media, the reservation of 25 percent of seats for the military, discriminatory voter registration laws, and mass disenfranchisement of voters in some parts of the country."

It also noted:

"Election observers planning to monitor polls are challenged by limits on resources and training. Civil society monitors have been active only one year and will cover less than one-third of all townships." Given these serious concerns, we urge the Government to press the Burmese Government to engage in progressive electoral reform and to take every opportunity to raise these important issues in their communications with them.

James Duddridge: I very much support the hon. Lady's comments about encouraging greater progressive electoral reform. It would be anathema to us in this House to think that 25% of the seats in this Chamber might be filled by military generals. This is not something recognised as part of a modern democracy. While we have issues with our media in the UK, it would be fair to say that Burma needs to do a lot more in that regard.

On the structure of the elections and the election commission, again more work could be done on future elections, but the EU did deploy an extensive election observer mission—more than 100 people went there, some on a short-term basis and some, crucially, on a long-term basis, to witness the preparations and understand exactly what was happening in the run-up to the elections. The deputy chief observer is a British national, which is something we should be proud of.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) took this opportune moment to raise this important question. I also welcome the Minister back to this House; it is fantastic to see him here.

We have talked about the influence that Britain can bring to bear. A Facebook message I posted on the Burma Campaign UK has been seen by 147,000 residents of that country. It encouraged the people of Burma to go out and use their votes, despite their concerns about whether the election would be free and fair. Does the Minister agree that whatever the human rights situation in Burma, the only way to effect change in that country is to go out and vote as the people see fit? That is how to effect change and how Burma can move to becoming a more democratic country.

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming me back to the House; I do not think I had the courtesy to welcome him to the Commons, but it is a pleasure to do so now. After hearing about his social media experience in relation to Burma, when I leave the Chamber I am immediately going to tweet a copy of my speech. It is clear that social media are picked up differently: people are not poring over their copy of Hansard, which might have been sent to them several days later, as some hon. Members might recall from their youth; social media allow people to access information speedily. I look forward to my hon. Friend re-tweeting me.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I wish the Minister well in getting 147,000 views for his speech! More seriously, he may want to respond now or perhaps in writing. In relation to the UN Human Rights Council universal periodic review recommendations, will he advise us what progress, if any, has been made on ensuring the independence of the judiciary; prohibiting the use of torture; ensuring that clear information is provided about the arrest and charging of political detainees; and ensuring that they have access to legal representation?

James Duddridge: I am more than happy to raise these issues with the UN special rapporteur—I understand it is not the only forum through which they can be raised—and will update the right hon. Gentleman on the success of that lobbying. As was pointed out earlier, this is a multi-pronged attack to try to improve the situation in Burma, and engagement with the UN is an important part of that.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My hon. Friend said a little earlier that Burma has regressed from 2012. I am wondering what travel advice the Foreign Office gives to people considering going to Burma from the United Kingdom for holidays and recreation.

James Duddridge: I would advise anyone thinking of travelling to look at the Foreign Office website for travel advice, particularly if they are going to places such as Burma where a significant event is happening on Sunday. Travel advice can change very quickly around the world. I spoke to consular staff yesterday on a number of issues, and I know that our consular support is some of the best in the world. The advice provided on the website is bang up to date and easily accessible; if things change on an hour-by-hour basis, that is the right place to look.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I, too, welcome my very good hon. Friend back to this place. I very much look forward to working with him on Zimbabwe, in which, as he knows, I have a very keen interest. As you may know, Mr Speaker, the Minister's parents-in-law used to live in my constituency and one was a councillor in Plymouth.

On my way to work this morning, I heard on the radio that the military in Burma was suggesting that if Aung San Suu Kyi should end up winning this election, it would not allow her to become President. Will my hon. Friend comment on that? He may not have heard this news.

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend, whose lobbying on Zimbabwe knows no bounds. He has raised the issue with me five times in four days, Mr Speaker, and now he raises it on an urgent question on Burma—and gets away with it! That is great advocacy.

Aung San Suu Kyi stood as a Member of Parliament in 2012 and was elected. She is standing again in the election on Sunday, just as a Member of Parliament would do here before taking a position in government. The Government in Burma will need to be formed by February. There are constitutional bars that will

make it difficult for her to take up the role of President—specifically, the constitution states that anyone with any offspring who maintain non-Burmese passports cannot be President. That provision was inserted specifically to bar Aung San Suu Kyi from taking the presidency if she were democratically elected.

Normally, the United Kingdom Government strongly support the constitutions of sovereign nation states, but in this case the constitution simply does not follow the democratic principles that we should be encouraging the people of Burma to move towards. I do not know whether a balance can be found between 8 November and February, but I noted Aung San Suu Kyi's statement that she intended to govern if she was victorious and if the National League for Democracy had a workable majority. I think that, regardless of the constitution, people should take note of the democratic will of the people in Burma.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Minister for his response to the questions—and, indeed, for his initial statement—and I join colleagues in warmly welcoming him back to the House. I also thank all colleagues for taking part in that series of exchanges.

17 November 2015 Lord Cormack: My Lords, will my noble friend try to ensure that it is made plain to the new Government in Burma—or Myanmar, as it is sometimes called—that they would be most welcome in the Commonwealth?

Baroness Verma: My noble friend is right to raise the issue of the Burma elections, which allow us an opportunity to make some real progress with the reforms process that started in 2011. We look forward to working with Burma.

Rohingya

24 November 2015 Rushanara Ali: What steps his Department is taking to prevent persecution of the Rohingya people in Burma.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I saw for myself in July the desperate plight of the Rohingya community. Alleviating that situation remains a priority for us. We take every opportunity to press the Burmese authorities to tackle the issue, and we will continue to press the incoming Government.

Rushanara Ali: Last week, a key National League for Democracy official said that the plight of the Rohingya people is not a priority. What discussions has the Minister had with the new leadership about the refugee crisis—there are 140,000 people in internally displaced camps, to which humanitarian institutions do not have sufficient access—and about reform of the discriminatory 1982 citizenship law?

Mr Swire: As I said in my written statement to the House on 20 November, the landmark elections on 8 November were “a victory for the people of Burma”,—[Official Report, 20 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 25WS.] notwithstanding the fact that the Rohingya were disfranchised from those elections. That is something that the incoming Government will have to deal with. I concur with what President Obama has said about the Rohingya in the past few days. Like him, we hope they will be “treated fairly and justly in their own country”, and we believe, as he does, that they are “deserving of the world’s protection and the world’s support.”

The incoming Government in Burma are going to have an awful lot on their plate and will have to manage expectations. We stand ready to help them to do so, and addressing the grievances of the Rohingya people must be pretty near the top of that list.

Mr Speaker: I should tell the House that I have written to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, I hope with the concurrence of the House, to congratulate her and the National League for Democracy on their magnificent victory on 8 November. I am very grateful to the Minister for what he has just said.

Burma mentioned in House of Lords Question for Short Debate: Development Policies

19 November 2015 Baroness Cox (CB): My Lords, I, too, congratulate my noble friend on initiating this

important debate. My NGO, Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust—HART—provides aid for valiant partners in challenging conflict or post-conflict situations who demonstrate high standards of narrative and financial accountability. But given DfID’s current policy, they are unable even to apply for DfID funding.

I give two examples, from Burma and South Sudan. In Burma, HART supports Shan Women’s Action Network—SWAN—which provides aid to people in great need inside Shan State and in Thailand. SWAN previously received funding from DfID, but when we visited recently it was very distressed by DfID’s change of policy, which now makes it impossible for it to obtain funding. It says:

“DfID funding is being redirected via the IRC as their single fund manager for all programmes operating out of Thailand. This is unacceptable to SWAN and we are having to look for alternative funders”.

DfID explained its changing funding strategy:

“There will be a change in the fund management arrangement where DfID Burma is consolidating various Thailand programmes under a single Fund manager agent. We took this action in response to the Mid-Term review recommendation to improve on DfID’s accountability and efficiency in running this border programme”.

But SWAN has deep concerns about working with IRC:

“SWAN has accepted funds through IRC in the past but found the reporting requirements extremely demanding—very large amounts of paperwork that was often repetitive and unnecessary, meaning SWAN staff members had to spend a large portion of their time fulfilling reporting requirements, rather than on project management and evaluation. IRC also took a large amount of admin costs, much higher than other organisations. SWAN felt that the large amounts of money allocated to admin costs would be better spent on project activities that directly benefit needy people in the community”.

Therefore, SWAN will not take the funding if the project has to go through IRC. It will need to find new funding sources, as the DfID project ends this November. This is very serious. SWAN’s work is immensely important and DFID’s change of policy will have drastic effects on its ability to continue key programmes. (...) I appreciate that the Minister will not be able to respond to specific cases today, but I passionately hope that these examples demonstrate serious problems requiring urgent consideration if DfID’s massive funding programmes are to reach people in such need of aid, through personnel who have the integrity and competence to justify the funds they deserve to receive.

For full debate, see: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/151119-0003.htm#15111946000219>

Written Statements

Elections in Burma

20 November 2015 Hugo Swire: I would like to take the opportunity to update the House on the outcome of the recent elections in Burma.

National and regional parliamentary elections took place in Burma on 8 November. Official statements from international observers paint a positive picture and suggest that election day passed in a calm and orderly manner. These landmark elections are an important step towards democracy, and a victory for the people of Burma. This is the first time in over 50 years that they have had the opportunity to choose their parliamentary representatives, and to make their voices heard in support of democratic change.

The general good conduct of the election is also a credit to the current Burmese government and the Union Election Commission. The dignified manner in which the result has been accepted by the governing Union Solidarity and Development Party is also commendable. Of course the process was not perfect - it was inevitable that there will have been flaws and complaints. It is important that these are properly investigated through official mechanisms.

The UK has supported this technical process throughout. This support has included, amongst other things, allocating £2.7m to provide specialist technical advice to the Union Election Commission (through the

International Foundation for Electoral Systems), £1.5m to train 5,000 domestic observers, and £400,000 to provide international best practice on security planning, focusing on communication and community engagement. Embassy staff from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development, Ministry of Defence and UKTI took part in the observation of the preparations for voting and election day itself.

The next stages, including a peaceful and orderly transition to a new government, will not necessarily be easy. There is a lengthy interregnum before, constitutionally, newly elected parliamentarians convene in February to choose a President. The President should, in turn, form a government in March. During this period we call on all sides to engage in a spirit of openness and dialogue to manage a peaceful handover of power. The new government will face high expectations and a demanding workload. Building on the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement to achieve a comprehensive sustainable peace and addressing the dire situation of the Rohingya minority in Rakhine will be pressing early concerns. The UK will continue to support the people of Burma in their aspiration for a democratic and accountable government, including those unable to vote in this election. This will include providing practical and material support as well as raising human rights abuses, which remain a significant challenge.

Early Day Motions

BURMA ELECTIONS 2015 (Early day motion 789)

Date tabled: 30.11.2015

Signatures: 15

That this House welcomes the result of the elections in Burma; congratulates the National League for Democracy party on gaining two-thirds of seats they needed to control both Houses; calls for the release of all political prisoners and journalists; recognises the rights of the Rohingya and that all internally displaced people should be returned home; notes that human rights and equality go hand-in-hand with economic development; believes that freedom of religion or belief should be upheld for people of all faiths; recalls the principles of the historic Panglong Conference of 1947 and to establish a federal system based on these principles of autonomy and equal rights for ethnic states within a federal united Burma; urges leaders of all religious groups in Burma to meet in the same spirit to bring about peace and reconciliation; and calls on the UK Government to continue to support the Burmese parliament and to strengthen Burma's democratic institutions.

RIGHT OF ABODE FOR FORMER BRITISH-HONG KONG SERVICEMEN (Early day motion 722)

Date tabled: 18.11.2015

Signatures: 19

That this House recognises the enormous contribution to Britain of the former Hong Kong Armed Forces from 1857 until 1997; believes that those remaining soldiers of the Hong Kong Military Service Corps and the Hong Kong Royal Naval Service who did not receive a UK passport following the handover of Hong Kong to China should now be offered that choice; notes that not more than some 500 soldiers were given a UK passport in 1997 under the then passport selection scheme; further notes that the remainder of the military Corps and some 100 Royal Naval servicemen were left behind; acknowledges that these men and their ancestors have served British commitments in south-east Asia greatly, stood shoulder to shoulder with Britain through two World Wars as well as alongside Britain in France, Burma, Korea, Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and the United Nations for King, Queen and country; and calls on the Government to recognise that the decision not to have asked each serviceman freely to transfer their nationality from British-Hong Kong to Hong Kong-Chinese was unjust and an error that should now be rectified.

ELECTIONS IN BURMA (Early day motion 682)

Date tabled: 09.11.2015

Signatures: 26

That this House welcomes the democratic elections in Burma; congratulates Ms Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy on its success at the elections; looks forward to the return to a full democracy after years of military rule; and further notes that the Government offers moral and economic support and assistance to other new governments.

Amendment 682A1 - ELECTIONS IN BURMA

Date tabled: 10.11.2015

Signatures: 6

leave out 'and' to end and insert ', but further notes that 25 per cent of seats in the Burmese Parliament are reserved for the military and that ethnic groups such as the Rohingya remain persecuted and disenfranchised; and calls on the Government to immediately raise these concerns with the new Burmese authorities.'

FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN BURMA (Early day motion 510)

Date tabled: 13.10.2015

Signatures: 24

That this House calls on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to request that the Burmese government reviews the recently published series of bills that would restrict freedom of religion or belief for Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and other people; expresses concern on the effect of that legislation on the forthcoming general election on 8 November 2015; and urges the FCO to call on the Burmese government to ensure full participation in the election and equal development in Myanmar and to remove such problematic laws and policies.

ACCESS FOR HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES TO RAKHINE STATE IN BURMA (Early Day Motion 58)

Date tabled: 01.06.2015

Signatures: 55

That this House expresses its concern at the number of Rohingya Muslims from Burma and Bangladesh who have fled their countries since the start of the year, risking their lives in order to reach Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand; calls on the Government to make clear to the Burmese government the need to address the reasons that people feel forced to do so; and further calls on the Government to ask the UN Secretary-General to take a personal lead in negotiating with the Burmese government to allow access for humanitarian agencies to Rakhine State.

TREATMENT OF THE ROHINGYA IN BURMA (Early Day Motion 121)

Date tabled: 15.06.2015

Signatures: 42

That this House notes that the continuing persecution of the Rohingya people in Burma has caused and continues to create a humanitarian disaster in the area; further notes that the Muslim Rohingya minority have been described as the most persecuted people in the world; further notes that they are subject to violence, murder, displacement and as a result many of them are forced to flee; further notes that the Burmese government's refusal to accept the Rohingya as full citizens alongside its failure to stop the toxic anti-Muslim rhetoric and propaganda has led to a situation that can only be described as ethnic cleansing; and further notes that this government along with the regional governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Bangladesh must act decisively to force the Burmese authorities to take action to defend the Rohingya people and restore their basic human rights and freedoms as a matter of the utmost urgency.

RESTRICTIONS ON JOURNALISTS IN BURMA (Early Day Motion 57)

Date tabled: 01.06.2015

Signatures: 51

That this House deplores the restrictions recently imposed on journalists in reporting proceedings in the Burmese parliament, the Assembly of the Union; notes that the restrictions have now been lifted; believes that the reporting of parliamentary proceedings is vital for public information and to hold Members accountable; further notes the importance of the fight by John Wilkes to secure reporting of Parliament in the development of the UK's own democracy; further notes the latest report on Burma in 2015 by Human Rights Watch that highlights increasing intimidation of the media over the past year, including new restrictions on both foreign and domestic journalists; further notes the current imprisonment of 13 journalists and the shooting in October 2014 of the freelance reporter, Ko Par Gyi, by the army whilst held in custody; and calls on the Government to raise concerns about the restrictions on parliamentary reporting in Burma and to express its determination to monitor developments in media freedom in Burma in the future.

Event in the Speaker's House: The Burmese elections and the persecution of the Rohingya

On 3 November the Speaker of the House of Commons, Rt Hon John Bercow MP hosted an event that looked at the situation of the Rohingya ahead of the Burmese elections on 8 November. The event was chaired by Rushanara Ali MP, Co-chair of the Burma APPG, and speakers at the event were Mark Farmaner, Burma Campaign UK, Tun Khin, Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, and Benedict Rogers, Christian Solidarity Worldwide. Around 60 people participated in the meeting.

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Thank you.

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