



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

OCT
2009

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Foreign and Commonwealth

North Korea: Nuclear Power

14 Oct 2009 Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to place on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council the matter of the sale of nuclear technology by North Korea to the government of Burma. [291973]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are aware of unconfirmed reports of nuclear cooperation between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (North Korea) and Burma and continue to monitor the situation. We are already working actively with international partners to ensure effective implementation of the robust package of sanctions imposed in the new UN Security Council Resolution 1874 on DPRK. This was agreed unanimously in June following the North Korean underground nuclear test of May 2009.

Military Offensive in Karen State

16 Oct 2009 Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Burmese authorities over the recent attack by Burmese forces on the Ler Per Her refugee camp. [293757]

Mr. Chris Bryant: We continue to be deeply concerned about the situation in Karen State, and closely followed reports of fighting in June 2009, including reports of an attack on the Ler Per Her refugee camp. We raised our concerns in a UN Security Council discussion on the protection of civilians in armed conflict on 26 June 2009. The EU, with strong UK support, issued a statement on 11 June 2009 calling for an end to hostilities. It expressed particular concern about the humanitarian impact of the ongoing conflict.

We have repeatedly urged both the military regime in Burma and the Karen National Union to intensify their efforts to find a peaceful settlement that will bring about a permanent end to the conflict. Direct representations on this issue were made most recently at meetings between our ambassador and Burmese Ministers on 18 and 19 June 2009. Our embassy in Rangoon continues to monitor the situation closely.

EU Sanctions on Burma

22 Oct 2009 Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness against objectives of EU sanctions on Burma. [294540]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Following the sentence imposed on Aung San Suu Kyi on 11 August 2009, the

EU put in place further sanctions intended to specifically target the Burmese regime's economic interests, as well as imposing a travel ban on those members of the judiciary responsible for the verdict. These measures came into force on 14 August 2009. The fact that new EU trade and investment is negligible is an indication of the success of this policy. Moreover, these sanctions leave the regime in no doubt about our determination to see real democracy established and human rights respected in Burma. Their objective is to target those individuals and entities that are most closely linked to the regime's misrule, rather than punishing the Burmese population as a whole.

Arms Trade

22 Oct 2009 Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what UK policy is on proposals for a UN arms embargo on Burma; and if he will make a statement. [294673]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Following the verdict in the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and Security Council members calling for a voluntary, global arms embargo against Burma. The EU and the US have had an arms embargo in place for many years. A UK attempt to secure a non-binding Security Council resolution in 2007 was blocked. We will however continue to work through the UN, the EU and bilaterally to put maximum pressure on the Burmese regime.

Crimes Against Humanity

22 Oct 2009 Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of recent proposals for a UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights violations in Burma; and if he will make a statement. [294674]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are aware of several calls for the establishment of a commission of inquiry to investigate human rights in Burma. While there are a number of ways by which such a commission could be established, all would require a level of international consensus on Burma that is not presently achievable.

In the past two years, our efforts have helped to secure unprecedented UN Security Council action on Burma, in the form of two strongly worded Presidential Statements. We are also active in pursuing strong resolutions in both the Human Rights Council and at the General Assembly. We fully support the efforts of UN Special Rapporteur, Tomas Quintana. His work on human rights abuses in Burma is crucial to holding the regime to account and we have urged the Burmese authorities to grant him the necessary access.

Politics and Government

22 Oct 2009 Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of human rights violations in eastern Burma in the last 12 months; and what representations he has made to the Burmese government on this matter. [294539]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UK is deeply concerned about the human rights situation in eastern Burma and reports earlier in the year of renewed fighting between the Karen National Union and the Democratic Karen Buddhist army, who are supported by the Burmese army. Attacks carried out by the Burmese army and their Karen client organisations on civilians in Karen State have been particularly intense in the last two years. We have repeatedly called for a halt to such offensives and have urged both the military regime and the Karen National Union to intensify

their efforts to find a peaceful settlement that will bring about a permanent end to the conflict.

India: Chin Refugees in Mizoram

22 Oct 2009 Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of India on the situation of the Chin refugees in Mizoram state; and if he will make a statement. [294670]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are in regular contact with their Indian counterparts on the subject of Burma.

The UK believes that the status quo in Burma is inherently unstable and that the case of the Chin refugees is just one example of the Burmese regime's repressive policies towards the country's ethnic groups.

Human Rights

27 Oct 2009 Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports his Department has received on the human rights situation in Burma; and whether he plans to impose sanctions against the Burmese authorities. [295185]

Mr. Ivan Lewis [holding answer 26 October 2009]: The UK remains deeply concerned at the human rights situation in Burma. It is evident from the latest Report to the General Assembly by the UN Rapporteur, Mr. Tomas Ojea Quintana, that systematic and appalling abuses remain unchecked and that arbitrary arrests and the sentencing of opposition figures to long prison terms continues.

The most prominent example is that of Aung San Suu Kyi, but his report also draws attention to the plight of the more than 2,100 other political prisoners who remain in detention. EU sanctions have been in place against Burma since 1996, but following the sentence imposed on Aung San Suu Kyi on 11 August this year, the EU agreed to a further set of sanctions intended specifically to target the Burmese regime's economic interests, including a travel ban on those members of the judiciary responsible for the verdict.

These measures came into force on 14 August 2009 and can leave the regime in no doubt about our determination to see real democracy established and human rights respected in Burma. Their objective is to target those individuals and entities that are most closely linked to the regime's misrule, rather than punishing the Burmese population as a whole.

Aung San Suu Kyi

29 Oct 2009 Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received of the conditions under which Aung San Suu Kyi is being held; what recent discussions he has had with the government of Burma on the matter; and if he will make a statement. [296494]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Aung San Suu Kyi's latest term of 18 months under house arrest began with the conclusion of her sham trial on 11 August 2009. The terms of her detention were stated by the court to be:

she must remain on her compound;

she would be permitted medical treatment from her own doctor when required;

she could read state and private Burmese newspapers (subject to censorship) and watch the two state TV channels;

she could communicate with others in writing, with prior consent by the authorities;

she would be permitted visitors, subject to approval by the authorities; and she could make requests to the authorities to meet any other needs she might identify. Aung San Suu Kyi has asked the regime for clarification on the terms of her detention and the processes that need to be observed but has not yet had a response. It is not yet clear whether these terms will be honoured in full by the Burmese authorities, but our ambassador to Burma, as local EU presidency, was allowed to meet Aung San Suu Kyi together with diplomats from the US and Australian embassies on 9 October 2009. This was a small, but welcome, development. We urge the authorities to allow her regular and unfettered access to her party and other democratic and ethnic leaders, and to embark on a genuine and inclusive process of dialogue and national reconciliation. We continue to call for Aung San Suu Kyi's immediate and unconditional release as well as the release of the more than 2,000 political prisoners detained alongside her.

Our ambassador raised the conditions of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest with Burmese Ministers most recently on 16 October 2009, and will continue to do so at every opportunity.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Famine in Chin State

22 Oct 2009 Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the of the severity of the famine in Chin state in Burma; and what relief his Department is providing for those affected by the famine. [294537]

Mr. Michael Foster: Over the last two years, rat infestations have exacerbated chronic food shortages suffered by many people in Chin State. In September 2009, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that more than 19,000 households in 303 villages had been severely affected by the infestations. In response to the crisis, the Department for International Development (DFID) has approved funding of £880,000 towards emergency aid delivered through the United Nations Development Programme, WFP and their local partners. WFP estimates that by September, nearly 88,000 people had benefited from this aid. We are keeping the situation under close review. We are also considering, in consultation with the United Nations and other donors, how best to address longer-term food security needs in Chin State and other parts of Burma.

29 Oct 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much his Department has provided to emergency relief initiatives to support those affected by the famine in Chin State, Burma, in 2009; and whether he plans to increase that level of assistance in 2010. [296374]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development (DFID) has committed a total of £880,000 for humanitarian assistance in response to severe food shortages in Chin State. Of this commitment, £600,000 was disbursed towards the end of 2008 and £155,000 has been disbursed so far during 2009. We expect to disburse the remaining £125,000 shortly.

We are keeping the humanitarian situation in Chin State under close review and are considering, in consultation with the United Nations and other donors, how best to address longer-term food security needs in Chin State and other parts of Burma.

29 Oct 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if his Department will provide assistance to cross-border humanitarian aid initiatives across the India-Burma border, for the purpose of supplying aid to remote parts of Chin state which cannot be reached through in-country initiatives. [296375]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department of International Development (DFID) has no plans to provide

funding for cross-border aid from India to Burma.

DFID has committed £880,000 for humanitarian assistance in response to the severe food shortages experienced in Chin State. This assistance is being delivered through the United Nations Development Programme, the World Food Programme and their local partners, which have access to all parts of Chin State from within Burma.

Overseas Aid to Eastern Burma

29 Oct 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much his Department has provided in cross-border humanitarian assistance to eastern Burma in 2009; and whether he plans to increase that level of assistance in 2010. [296376]

Mr. Michael Foster: Approximately £360,000 of funding from the Department for International Development (DFID) is being used by non-governmental organisations to provide cross-border humanitarian assistance from Thailand to eastern Burma in 2009. We anticipate that this figure will increase in 2010.

DFID is also providing approximately £500,000 in 2009 for cross-border aid from China to Shan and Kachin States in north-eastern Burma. Proposals to increase this funding in 2010 are under consideration.

Humanitarian situation

27 Oct 2009 Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation in Burma; and if he will make a statement. [295921]

Mr. Michael Foster: Humanitarian conditions are poor throughout Burma. A third of the population (16.5 million people) lives on less than 16p a day. Malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS are serious health risks. Half of Burma's 20 million children do not complete primary school. About 140,000 Burmese refugees are sheltering in camps in Thailand, and many displaced people inside Burma live in extreme poverty. Conditions remain precarious in parts of the Irrawaddy Delta struck by Cyclone Nargis in May 2008.

In response to these humanitarian needs, the Department for International Development (DFID) is increasing its programme in Burma from £12.5 million in 2008-09 to £25 million this financial year and £28 million in 2010-11. In 2008-09, DFID also provided £45 million in emergency aid following Cyclone Nargis.

UK aid for Burma is channelled through the United Nations and non-governmental organisations, not through the Burmese central government. It is monitored closely by DFID staff based in Burma. We are encouraging other donors to follow our example and expand their aid programmes in Burma.

**Published by The Burma Campaign UK, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT
www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



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