



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

OCT
2013

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Rohingya

28 October 2013 Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of reports of ethnic cleansing and human rights abuses against the Rohingya people in Burma; and what reports he has received on their continued imprisonment in Thai immigration detention facilities.

Mr Swire: The British Government has been among the most vocal members of the international community in raising our concerns about the plight of the Rohingya community. In Burma we continue to make clear to the Burmese Government that where serious crimes have been committed, those who have perpetrated them must be held accountable for their actions. This should be done through a clear and transparent investigative and prosecutorial process that meets international standards. Further independent investigative work to fully establish the facts would be required for an informed assessment as to whether ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity have been committed. We also continue to raise our concerns about the condition of Rohingya refugees, particularly those who flee through Thailand, with the Thai Government.

28 October 2013 Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 12 July 2013, Official Report, column 427W, on Burma, what the outcome was of meetings in July 2013 between his Department and President Thein Sein of Burma on the treatment of the Rohingya people and the release of political prisoners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Swire: As I set out during the Adjournment debate in the House on 8 October 2013, Official Report, columns 138-40, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised a number of our concerns during the visit of President Thein Sein. These concerns included the continuing plight of the Rohingya community in Rakhine State and specifically their citizenship status of the Rohingya.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State also repeated our calls for the release of all remaining political prisoners. To that effect, we welcomed the commitment made by President Thein Sein during his visit to release all political prisoners by the end of 2013. As I stated to the House on 8 October, while we welcome recent releases, we also call on the Burmese Government to repeal repressive laws that have led to a number of fresh arrests of political activists over the past year.

29 October 2013 Baroness Nye: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they are aware of any restrictions being placed on British-funded international aid agencies and United Nations aid agencies and their workers operating in Arakan State, Burma.

Baroness Northover (LD): UK humanitarian aid provided through the UN and international non-governmental organisations is reaching its targeted populations in Rakhine (Arakan) State, Burma. Some other agencies have reported sporadic restrictions on access. In response, the UK consistently calls for open and independent access for humanitarian agencies to reach those in need, and we provide support to the UN to improve communications with the affected communities to help improve acceptance of international assistance to all those in need.

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Kachin State

14 October 2013 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his Burmese counterparts to end the ongoing clashes between the Burmese military and the Kachin Independence Army in northern Shan State following the agreement signed by the Government of Burma and the Kachin Independence Organization following the peace talks held in late May 2013.

Mr Swire: While we have not specifically raised the issue of recent fighting in northern Shan State with the Burmese Government, we regularly raise our concerns about Burma's ongoing ethnic conflict, particularly in Kachin State—as Ministers did with President Thein Sein during his visit to London in July 2013. As I said to the House during the End of Day Adjournment Debate on 8 October 2013, Official Report, columns 138-40, we are concerned about recent outbreaks of fighting between the Kachin Independence Army and the Burmese military in Kachin and Shan States. We have consistently emphasised the importance of ending fighting across Burma and moving to political dialogue. We welcome the commitment of the Kachin Independence Organisation and the Burmese Government to the process of dialogue. British embassy officials remain in close contact with both sides, most recently having visited Kachin State in late September.

British experts with experience of the Northern Ireland peace process have been sharing expertise with the Burmese Government and the ethnic groups, including the Kachin Independence Organisation. We continue to offer our support to both sides, if requested to provide it.

14 October 2013 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consider sending an observer to the next round of Kachin peace talks.

Mr Swire: We welcomed the agreement between the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the Burmese Government in late May which included a commitment to further political dialogue; we are keen to see talks progress.

We have always said that we stand ready to assist the peace talks between the KIO and the Burmese Government in any way we can, but that we would only consider sending officials to talks if requested to by all sides. British experts have shared lessons from our experiences in Northern Ireland and we will continue to offer our support to all parties.

14 October 2013 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to her Burmese counterparts to make education and healthcare a priority in Kachin State.

Mr Duncan: The UK provides substantial support to health and education programmes in Burma, which has helped form significant links with influential stakeholders in these sectors, including with government. Through our representations to the Burmese Government we have helped secure agreement to include Kachin State in these programmes. The UK has also lobbied, with other donors, for the Government to grant permission for the UN and non-governmental organisations to carry out missions to areas of Kachin which are not under government control. These were able to provide relief assistance, including health and education materials, to 22,000 displaced people.

Anti-Muslim Violence

23 October 2013 Mr Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding is allocated to multi-faith initiatives and for preventing communal violence in Burma.

Mr Duncan: DFID does not have any specific programmes which promote inter-faith and religious tolerance in Burma, however the Department is working with a range of partners, including faith-based organisations, to support peace and reconciliation. Through the British embassy's small grants programme, the UK is funding an initiative in Northern Shan state to promote a better understanding of different religions and respect for human rights. The UK Government encourages the Burmese Government to do all that it can to reduce inter-communal tensions.

Sexual Violence

14 October 2013 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department has taken to prevent (a) sexual violence, (b) human trafficking and (c) further victimisation and abuse of women and girls in Kachin State, particularly along the Burma-China border.

Mr Duncan: In June we announced £13.5 million of humanitarian funding for Kachin for the next two and a half years. This includes funding for a Gender-Based Violence Coordinator who will work to improve the coordination and response of the international community to sexual violence.

DFID is also supporting the Secretary of State's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. Two proposals have been approved and are due to begin implementation this calendar year (these include activities along the Burma-China border). Through an international NGO, the UK also gives support to trauma care camps in Kachin State which deals with rape cases.

31 October 2013 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will include Burma in the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative.

Mr Swire: At its outset, the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) identified countries, in consultation with the UN and other partners, for initial deployments by experts including to Bosnia, Libya, the DRC, and the Syrian border. Over recent months the initiative has extended to a number of other countries—including Burma. During his visit to the UK, President Thein Sein met with me and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), and welcomed the initiative.

We continue to call for an end to the use of sexual violence in Burma. At a minimum there must be strengthened accountability and better access to justice for victims of sexual violence. More widely, tackling sexual violence will be central to reducing tensions and the peace process.

On the ground, our embassy in Rangoon is looking to incorporate PSVI activities into new and existing work. Funding has been recently approved for a project that will help to improve access to justice for victims, develop community-based preventive mechanisms and promote wider legal and policy reforms.

Political Prisoners

10 October 2013 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has raised the case of Daw Bawk Ja with his Burmese counterpart.

Mr Swire: Officials from the embassy in Rangoon raised Daw Bawk Ja's case with senior members of the Burmese Government in August. We continue to follow her case closely and remain in touch with local Burmese organisations that support her and the many other political prisoners that remain detained.

As I set out to the House, we welcome the release of over 50 political prisoners announced on 8 October. This is a further step towards fulfilling the commitment, made by Burmese President Thein Sein during his visit to London in July, to release all remaining political prisoners by the end of this year.

We continue to call on the Government to ensure that democratic activists are able to voice their opinions freely and without fear of arrest. We have also urged both the Government and the Parliament to repeal all existing laws which are not in line with democratic standards. Repealing these repressive laws will be vital for Burma as it continues on its path to greater democracy.

22 October 2013 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his Burmese counterpart on the unconditional release of (a) Naw Ohn Hla and (b) other political prisoners.

Mr Swire: British officials in Rangoon are in close contact with those offering support to political prisoners detained in Burma. There have not been specific discussions with the authorities concerning Naw Ohn Hla's case although officials at the British embassy are in touch with her lawyer. We continue to call for and

actively monitor the Burmese Government's progress against the President's commitment made in London in July 2013 to free all political prisoners by the end of the year.

We will also continue to call, as I did during a debate with the House on 8 October 2013, Official Report, columns 138-40, for the repeal of repressive laws which lead to the arrest of political activists.

22 October 2013 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of changes in incidences of the practice of torture and ill treatment towards political prisoners in Burma following the report of the UN Special Rapporteur in March 2013.

Mr Swire: We continue to monitor reports of torture in Burma. The UK believes that torture is abhorrent; we call on the Burma authorities to introduce preventive and monitoring mechanisms to end such practices. We also continue to raise our concerns more generally. Last week in Naypyitaw, officials discussed Burma signing up to the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits explicitly the use of torture. The Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr Duncan), raised concerns over reports of torture in prisons in Rakhine during his visit there in June.

We also note the remarks of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, following his visit at the end of August. We echo his concerns about the continued arrest, detention and sentencing of political activists in Burma. Such actions are not in line with Burma's wider positive reforms.

30 October 2013 Baroness Nye: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether funding has been provided by the Department for International Development to assist with rehabilitation through counselling and other services for former political prisoners in Burma.

Baroness Northover (LD): DFID has not provided funding for rehabilitation and counselling services for former political prisoners in Burma. The UK, however, continues to provide assistance through the British Council to help former political prisoners to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence, including language skills, to take an active and effective role in the political process, perform more effectively within their organisations and communities, and engage with the diplomatic and international business community.

Child Soldiers

28 October 2013 Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 18 July 2013, Official Report, column 877, on human rights: Burma, what recent representations he has made to his Burmese counterpart on (a) allowing the UN access to military sites and (b) ending the recruitment of children as soldiers in Burma.

Mr Swire: Engaging the military will be vital if Burma's reform process is to succeed. The British Government appointed a defence attaché to Burma in February this year at the request of the Burmese Government and Aung San Suu Kyi; our defence attaché will be the primary mechanism for such engagement.

We will focus on efforts to ensure that the Burmese military is democratically accountable and operates within the context of international standards, including human rights. We set out these objectives clearly to President Thein Sein during his visit to the UK in July 2013. Part of our engagement will focus on the issue of ending the recruitment of child soldiers.

In August 2013 the UK, as part of the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict agreed a resolution on the issue of child soldiers in Burma. The resolution specifically calls on the Burmese Government to ensure the UN country team is granted access to all military sites, and that steps are taken to remove the incentives for recruiting child soldiers and to strengthen age verification mechanisms. Officials are in regular contact with UN staff and we will continue to engage with the Burmese Government and Burmese military on this issue.

UN Human Rights Council

29 October 2013 Graeme Morrice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to support human rights in Burma, in accordance with recent resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council.

Mr Swire: The UK is active in support of UN Human Rights Council resolutions on Burma and human rights remain at the heart of our policy towards the country. We lobby for the release of all political prisoners, provide expertise on ethnic reconciliation and support to the Rohingya. My hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for International Development and I discussed a broad range of human rights and democracy issues with Aung San Suu Kyi in London last week and with President Thein Sein in July.

Aid

14 October 2013 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in Burma.

Mr Duncan: Conflict in Kachin and Northern Shan States has displaced an estimated 100,000 people. Over half of these are in non-Government controlled areas which are particularly hard to reach with humanitarian assistance. In June this year DFID announced £13.5 million for new humanitarian funding in Kachin State which includes non-government controlled areas. A needs assessment was conducted within camps in these areas in September. The findings showed that food, education, health, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, and security are the key priorities.

In Rakhine State there has been some progress in the humanitarian situation. A significant increase in addressing the needs of those displaced for shelter was noted in advance of the current rainy season. Challenges remain, including freedom of movement and access to jobs and services. DFID has allocated £4.4 million to address humanitarian needs in this financial year.

21 October 2012 Craig Whittaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to make the contribution of UK Aid more visible in Burma.

Mr Duncan: We ensure that all implementing partners are aware of our requirements to use the UK aid logo on programme communications, including letters, documents, websites, project signs, and at workshops. We will continue to issue press releases on high level visits and when launching major programmes, and to use the British embassy's internet communications channels to highlight our work.

Health Care

16 October 2013 Meg Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support she is providing to Burma to develop its health system.

Mr Duncan: The UK supports the Three Millennium Development Goal Fund—the major health trust fund in Burma. So far the UK has allocated £80 million over four financial years (2012 to 2016) in support of the fund. One of its objectives is to help the Burmese Ministry of Health provide more equitable, affordable and quality health services to the most vulnerable populations within Burma.

18 October 2013 Craig Whittaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how her Department measures the effectiveness of UK Official Development Assistance for health in Burma.

Mr Duncan: All DFID projects are formally reviewed each year and on completion. Our funding for 3MDG, the main multi-donor trust fund for health in Burma, includes an independent evaluation of effectiveness. UK development programmes are also independently scrutinised by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI). ICAI recently gave DFID's health programmes in Burma an overall green (positive) rating.

16 October 2013 John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will promote the rational use of antibiotics in obstetrics in Burma's health system.

Mr Duncan: DFID programmes, including in Burma, follow international guidelines for antibiotic use. Guidelines for antibiotic use in maternal health services follow international best practice.

16 October 2013 Meg Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support she is providing to Burma to ensure that family planning and reproductive health services are being offered to all communities.

Mr Duncan: The UK supports the Three Millennium Development Goal Trust Fund in Burma and has allocated £80 million over four financial years (2012 to 2016) in support of the fund. 70% of this is allocated to support access to essential health services for maternal and child health as well as sexual and reproductive health rights and family planning. The fund operates across the whole country, with a particular focus on seven vulnerable states and divisions.

21 October 2013 Heather Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what proportion of her Department's Burma budget will be allocated to (a) sexual and reproductive health and rights and (b) family planning services; (2) how she plans to support the Burmese Government in its future provision of (a) family planning, (b) sexual and reproductive health and rights, (c) maternal health and (d) other health services in that country.

Mr Duncan: On current projections, we estimate that nearly a quarter of the bilateral allocation for DFID's work in Burma between 2011 and 2015 will support access to essential health services for maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and family planning. This is based on our work through the 3 millennium development goal (3MDG) fund, to which the UK has allocated up to £80 million. The 3MDG fund also supports the national response to TB and malaria in Burma and works to strengthen important systems for the delivery of health services. The UK also supports a regional project to help prevent maternal death from unwanted pregnancy, which is active in 14 countries, including Burma.

Burmese Civil Society

30 October 2013 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government how much consultation the Department for International Development is currently undertaking with Burmese civil society.

Baroness Northover: DFID consults widely with civil society across our portfolio of work, including on health, education and other sectors. We also have a specific Civil Society Strengthening Programme to help promote social and political change through engagement with civil society organisations.

Burmese Parliament

29 October 2013 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they consider that Burma's current rulers, and military leaders, will agree to removing the military's quota of Members in the Burmese Parliament.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi) (Con): We continue to encourage Burma's government, its military leaders and members of its parliament to listen to the demands of the Burmese people and ensure that international democratic standards are adhered to.

Our objective, as the former Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, explained to his Burmese counterpart during his visit to Burma in June, is to support the reform process by helping to facilitate the democratisation of the Burmese military. We believe it is important for the integrity of Burma's democracy that the Burmese people are free to choose their political leaders and parliamentary representatives.

Burma's Census

17 October 2013 Craig Whittaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what policy objectives her Department aims to achieve by supporting Myanmar's forthcoming census.

Mr Duncan: A census is an essential tool that enables effective government. DFID judges it sensible to support Burma's census including to advise on the content of the questions. This will help ensure it provides the most accurate and useful data possible to inform development policy.

21 October 2013 Craig Whittaker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the principal anticipated health implications are of the findings of Burma's new census.

Mr Duncan: Improved census data and its analysis can help support more effective financing, planning, human resourcing, and infrastructure for social sectors, such as the health sector. It will enable accurate calculation of important indicators, such as maternal mortality. This information can help more effective planning of aid programmes.

Answers to Spoken Parliamentary Questions

Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative

23 October 2013 Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): What contribution her Department is making to the implementation of the Government's preventing sexual violence initiative. [900646]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): The UK will co-host a call-to-action event in November with Sweden, which will focus on protecting women and girls from all forms of violence in emergencies. That work builds directly on the G8 Foreign Ministers' declaration on preventing sexual violence in conflict, which was led so ably by the Foreign Secretary.

Valerie Vaz: I am grateful for that response. In Burma, reports of rape and sexual violence against women by the army have increased. Given the level of aid that we send to Burma, will the Secretary of State encourage the Burmese Government to sign our declaration and ask her colleagues to raise the matter in Europe and at the United Nations?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady makes a powerful point about what is happening in Burma. Aung San Suu Kyi is in the country and I will be meeting her today. I will be sure to raise those issues with her. I am sure that she takes them as seriously as this House.

Ethnic Conflict in Burma

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): What steps is the Department taking to ensure that ethnic conflict in Burma is brought to an end? Otherwise, it threatens both the stability and the development prospects of that country.

Justine Greening: The Department is working hand in hand with the Foreign Office to play its role in improving governance and accountability, not only at regional and governmental level, but at community level, where, clearly, so many of the root causes of that situation lie.

Constitutional reform in Burma

28 October 2013 Mr Douglas Alexander (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Last week, I had the great privilege of meeting Aung San Suu Kyi, following her discussions with Government Ministers. She impressed upon me the urgency of the international community seeking to put pressure on the Burmese Government to reform the constitution in Burma. I would be grateful if the Foreign Secretary would set out what steps the Government anticipate taking to achieve that goal.

Mr Hague: Aung San Suu Kyi was very clear about these things in all the meetings she had, including the one with EU Foreign Ministers in Luxembourg last Monday. These are issues that we have taken up for some time with the Government in Burma, including directly with President Thein Sein on his visit to the UK earlier this year. Of course, we are continuing to raise them, as there is an urgency about constitutional change ahead of elections in Burma in 2015. So we will continue to raise them over the coming weeks directly with Burmese Ministers.

Adjournment Debate: Government policy on Burma

8 October 2013 Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Mr Speaker, may I start by thanking you, on behalf of my colleagues the right hon. Member for Gordon (Sir Malcolm Bruce) and the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), for granting us this debate, which seeks to place on the record details of our recent Speaker's delegation visit to Burma? I want to set out the background to the visit, what we saw on the visit and points of action to influence Government policy on Burma. I am sure that we can, between us, cover the events of what was a remarkable experience.

Mr Speaker, you have been most gracious in inviting me to accompany you. Of course, I also have to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock), because her not being available to make the visit enabled me to take her place. Following your invitation to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to speak to both Houses, you made it clear that, on behalf of Parliament, you wanted to leave a lasting legacy of help and support to Burma, particularly as you have had a long-standing interest in Burma. You said that you did not just want to have a visit and leave, but you wanted to fulfil your promise to Daw Suu to help in a practical way. At this stage, I want to thank the embassy in Burma and all its staff, your office and others in the House service who were involved in setting up the visit, organising and accompanying us to the meetings.

Mr Speaker, you said on many occasions at our meetings that we were not in Burma to tell the Burmese how to run their country, but that we were there to show them how we do our work here and how they can perhaps learn from us and adapt it for their use. So what did we see? May I pay tribute to you, again, Mr Speaker, for holding together and being the focus of the 24 meetings we had over eight days, and acknowledge your courageous speech at Yangon university, which may be a topic for a Speaker's lecture? We all appeared on our trip with the book by Benedict Rogers "Burma: a Nation at the Crossroads", which was launched at the Speaker's House. We note from the book that progress has been made. Despite the elections in 1990, the results of which have not been recognized, Daw Suu now sits in the Burmese Parliament, along with many other MPs and also the generals. At the Parliament in Nay Pyi Taw, we met both Speakers of the upper and lower Houses, the President, Ministers from the presidential office and committee chairs. The delegation managed to raise the issue of the release of political prisoners and I know that you, Mr Speaker, have already sent a list to the President's office. The President had already agreed that the United Nations could set up an office for the human rights commissioner, but he was no clearer about when that would take place. I am pleased that the embassy now has a human rights post.

It seems to me that we can have influence on two levels: the political level and service level. Daw Suu said that she wants active parliamentarians and to give all MPs the tools to be effective MPs. We can help and are helping to set up a library. I explained that our Library provides research facilities for all Members on an independent and confidential basis. The right hon. Member for Gordon led the session on how Select Committees work, and as all the delegation had served on Select Committees we could show MPs that we can work together for the good of the country.

The non-governmental organisations we met told us that arbitrary arrests and detention had worsened over the past few months, which was something we also heard from members of the "88 Generation" who are still being arrested, having to pay fines and having their cases regularly adjourned. Getting permits to allow humanitarian aid is difficult, particularly in Kachin state. We also heard that the rice federation regulates itself and is headed by someone close to the Government. A major census was under way that would provide useful information in 2014, such as how many girls were getting equal education, or an education at all. An MP from Kachin state told me that displaced people could not return to their villages as there were landmines; we have the technology to help them move out of those camps.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving the House a chance to recognise the contribution that has been made. At the release of the Nobel prize laureate, there was a perception that democracy had returned. The House, Mr Speaker, the hon. Lady and her colleagues and many other Members have contributed to trying to help that move forward. Unfortunately, in Kachin province we have seen the persecution of the Christian minority and other groups. Human rights deprivations are rampant. Burma is now in the top 10 countries in records of human rights abuse. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Minister and our Government need to play a more effective role in stopping that happening and giving freedom to the people of Kachin province?

Valerie Vaz: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and absolutely agree with him. That is a still a big issue, which forms part of my 10-point plan. It is also a key point, as I was about to move on to the ethnic and religious differences.

Such differences are enshrined in everyday use: ethnic regions are states and Burmese areas are divisions. I am sure you will agree, Mr Speaker, that one of the many highlights were our meetings with Rakhine and Rohingya representatives and representatives of the different faiths.

What of aid? When we give aid we give the gift of life, and Britain should be proud of its aid-giving programme. We saw the malaria clinic from which within 15 minutes they can find and treat a person who might have malaria. That is important for migrant workers because they tap rubber between 10 pm and 2 am when the mosquito is active. There was the HIV clinic, and the school we visited where we saw lively children singing and learning. There was a legal advice centre staffed with mainly women lawyers. We need to provide them with some of our legislation and books on administrative law.

What are my points of action? Many other countries are offering help. We know that the Foreign Minister from Poland has already hosted people from Burma to work on the United States Institute of Peace's strategic economic needs and security exercise—SENSE—programme, which simulates government; and so has the Indian Parliament.

Here are my 10 suggestions. First, one person should co-ordinate or keep track of what work Britain is doing, based in either the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or the Department for International Development. Secondly, the work on setting up the library and research facilities for MPs should have a time limit. Thirdly, there should perhaps be an induction course like the one we had for new Members in 2010. We already have the blueprint, so that could be done now. We could also offer work with the Select Committee structure. I do not know whether you recall, Mr Speaker, but one person asked, "How do we clone these officials?" Fourthly, will the FCO or DFID work with the Burmese Government to ensure that humanitarian aid workers do not have to keep applying for a permit for different areas? The international organisations should be able to negotiate that. We also heard that Médecins sans Frontières doctors cannot work alongside Burmese doctors—why not? Fifthly, there needs to be constitutional reform before the elections in 2015, not least to lower the age of MPs. Although age is quite rightly revered, many young people we met were ready to serve and want to be MPs. Importantly, Daw Suu should not be excluded from taking part in the presidential elections, but she currently is. Sixthly, there should be regular discussions on the release of political prisoners. Can the Minister say what has become of those on Mr Speaker's list? But might we also look to others who, you will recall, Mr Speaker, we heard may have committed serious crimes? Perhaps an international lawyer could review those cases. Seventhly, progress must be made on setting up the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Eighthly, on the ethnic issue, there should be a new Panglong conference—along the lines of the Northern Ireland Good Friday agreement.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I commend the hon. Lady for the visit. It was a shame that I could not make it myself. Particularly on the "to do" list, what about responding to the Prime Minister, who in a letter to me on 4 September, said: "We"—the Government—"will monitor progress on Burma taking a zero tolerance approach to those who fuel ethnic hatred"?

Given that last week, on 29 September, there were significant outbreaks of violence, again against the Muslims in Thandwe, Rakhine state, and although there was control and order, the following day, as I understand, over 60 homes were destroyed and at least five people, including a 94-year-old Muslim woman, were believed to be killed, how can we in this country help to bring about that zero-tolerance approach to those issues of ethnic hatred?

Valerie Vaz: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who was sorely missed on the visit. I know he had another engagement, but perhaps he will visit another time. I agree with him. Part of my 10-point action plan should, I hope, address that issue. We need to keep monitoring because things are not changing as fast as we would like.

Let me return to my point No. 8—the ethnic issue and the Panglong conference. Mr Speaker, you will recall the number of times we said we had sorted things out in Northern Ireland. We know that people who were

involved in Northern Ireland, who can help, are active in Burma. We need to get people into a room and draw up a schedule and heads of agreement. Perhaps someone like Mary Robinson could play the role of a George Mitchell character. She could chair such a conference.

The Rohingya said they want their right to live there to be recognised. They say they have the papers and a judgment from their Supreme Court. Representatives of the different faith groups, some of the great religions of the world, sat with us together in a room. They need to be encouraged to continue their joint work. There are many international inter-faith foundations that can take on this work, to keep putting out joint statements that they will not be divided on religious grounds.

Ninthly, civil society groups, which came together so notably during Cyclone Nargis, should be supported. Currently, they have to register as organisations; otherwise, they are deemed to be illegal. Could the FCO or DFID look at ways of supporting these organisations without going through the Government?

Tenthly, and probably most importantly, the rule of law needs to be firmly established, with an end to arbitrary arrests. People need to know the case against them and to have a fair hearing before an impartial court.

Those would, I hope, be our way of ensuring that the Government look at—

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): I am aware that the hon. Lady is painting a broad-brush picture, covering all the different ethnic groups, but there is a large Rohingya community in my constituency. Can the hon. Lady offer them any hope in terms of the persecution that they are facing?

Valerie Vaz: I thank the hon. Gentleman. The only comfort I can give him and them is that there are people, in this country and in the international community, who are aware and are watching what is happening. We have to monitor any movement that the Government in Burma make; they cannot talk about trade without also looking at human rights. Hopefully, that issue will also be part of the Panglong conference.

In conclusion, Burma knows that it is at a unique place in its history. Having met the Burmese people, I can see why Daw Suu could not leave them to suffer, and although there is progress, people are still being displaced and there are conflicts. However, there needs to be an irreversible move to democracy and the rule of law, so that the Burmese diaspora feel they can return to their country, and those who live there, eager to serve their country, can do so and live together in peace.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) on securing the debate, and on the excellent 10 points that she has put forward, with which I wholly agree. I echo her thanks to you, Mr Speaker, for inviting us to be part of your delegation to Burma. It was a great privilege for us.

Our visit highlighted to us that while a great deal of progress has been made in Burma—or Myanmar, as we were told we should now consider calling it—over the past two years, there is still a long way to go before there will be full democratic involvement of Myanmar's ethnic and religious minorities. Fundamentally, that requires nationwide and meaningful dialogue with them.

I was tremendously encouraged by the meetings that we had with members of civil society, young people and minority ethnic and religious groups, and their determination to be a part of building a wholly peaceful Burma and to ensure that their country progresses from a fledgling to a more mature democratic state. The young people we met included 20 or so youth peace activists, some from a committee for working peace progress formed only six weeks earlier. Others were representatives from the Mon youth progressive organisation, journalists, a teacher, students, the Mon human rights organisation and the Mon youth education group.

I was most impressed by these young people's perceptive and articulate response when asked what they wanted for their country. They had quite a list—ethnic equality, a genuine democracy, clarity of the rule of law to promote peace, a clear framework and timetable for a working plan towards peace across the nation, respect for human rights, self-determination, equality across the genders, strong federal Governments, meaningful engagement with civil society, that MPs should be more available to meet and be accountable

to their constituents, and a Government who truly represent all the people, including all ethnic and religious groups. All this was from young people who have lived virtually all their lives under military rule. It gave me enormous encouragement that with such actively engaged minds and hearts, there is real hope for democratic progress in Myanmar.

I was also tremendously impressed by the meeting we had with young former prisoners of conscience, the "88 Generation". What struck me was their lack of bitterness and their dedication to a country where so many of them have suffered so much, some imprisoned for years simply for speaking out politically under the former regime, yet they are still determined to use all their energy and limited resources to help bring about a freer society.

Mr Burrowes: Can my hon. Friend give me encouragement that the entrenched attitudes in relation to ethnic division have not been passed on to the younger generation? For example, even in some non-governmental organisations, sadly, there is an entrenched view of Rohingya people. The double discrimination of not being Muslim and not being Rohingya has, sadly, had an effect on some children, making them afraid even to attend school. Has there been a reaction to that among young people who represent hope in the future?

Fiona Bruce: I can indeed encourage my hon. Friend. The young people whom we met wanted to engage. They wanted to have a dialogue with other ethnic and religious groups and they were looking to the Government to take forward such a dialogue.

The former prisoners of conscience requested, among other things, that the Government address human rights violations in prisons, which are still continuing. I was pleased that during our meeting, when we raised concerns about recent mistreatment of prisoners at Myitkyina prison, the Minister in the President's office, U Soe Thane, agreed to look into that. I hope it is now being urgently addressed.

Further requests from the former prisoners were for the urgent review of cases of those who are still in prison and whose only offence appears to have been to criticise the previous regime. If Burma is to demonstrate to the rest of the world that it is genuinely moving forward in its respect for freedom of speech, conscience and belief, this is essential. The former prisoners expressed concerns that the media are not wholly independent or free. A recent press law, they told us, limits rather than extends press freedom and was not preceded by promised dialogue between press industry representatives before being implemented. Another former prisoner spoke of unfair legal procedures, often involving those accused having to go to court many times, and the overall impression that I had was that although there is change, a fundamental review of the legal sector, its practices and procedures is needed. We were told, too, of the need for the constitution to be amended so that it clearly bans the use of torture. Other issues raised with us included the fact that although new laws are passed, there is a lack of capacity to monitor their implementation, so that in some areas old laws are still being used. Individuals whom we met had been sentenced or told us about friends who had been sentenced within the past year for organising protests or allegedly inspiring people to riot, such as one young student who distributed CDs near a mosque.

Having said that, I was enormously encouraged by the visit to the free legal advice centre, which has been referred to, in the fourth largest city in Burma in Mon state. The 10 or so young trainee lawyers had three impressive objectives: to establish a steering group for a legal aid system; to provide legal advice and assistance to the poorest, including court representation; and to raise awareness that every citizen in the country should have legal rights under the law. Those aspiring young professionals were smart, visionary and personable, and at the same time they were realistic about the journey that they and their fellow countrymen have to make towards a new Burma. Meeting them and the other young people I have quoted gave me real hope that they could achieve that.

In closing, I have a few questions for the Minister. With regard to the need for a meaningful peace and a process of political dialogue that includes all relevant parties, what steps can our Government take to press for that, and what plans has DFID to increase humanitarian assistance for those who have been internally displaced or subjected to human rights violations? I ask him to consider the necessity of DFID ensuring that international efforts are co-ordinated. Finally, what is his assessment of the number of political prisoners still in jail? What can be done to ensure that they are released by the end of the year and that there are no more prisoners of conscience, political prisoners or unjustly imprisoned people in Burma?

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for inviting me to take part in the delegation and for leading it so ably. I congratulate the hon. Members for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on bringing these matters to the House's attention. The International Development Committee, which I have the honour of chairing, will be producing a report on Burma, and I hope that we will have an opportunity to elaborate on some of these findings and debate them more fully in the House. At this stage, I think that it is important that we hear from the Minister.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Sir Malcolm Bruce) for allowing me time to try to answer some of the questions. I thank the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) for securing the debate following what to all intents and purposes was clearly a very successful trip to Burma—we still call it Burma—along with you, Mr Speaker, and other Members of the House. The situation in Burma is rightly of great interest to many Members, so this is another opportunity for the Government to set out our approach.

We have a strong record of support for the Burmese people. Our bilateral relationship with the Burmese Government is more recent, but we are deepening and strengthening it as a platform for influencing and shaping the reform process. President Thein Sein came here in July, the first official visit to the UK by a Burmese President. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and separately my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I, used the visit to set out our aspirations for the relationship. We will be an open, constructive and critical partner of Burma, realistic about the scale of the transformation and the challenges that that entails and honest where we have concerns.

At the latest meeting of Friends of Burma—it was called Friends of Myanmar, to be fair—chaired by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, at the UN General Assembly in New York just two weeks ago, I made a number of points. I reiterated the United Kingdom's calls for the Burmese Government to honour their commitment to establish an Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. I also stressed the need for the Government to act to address the lack of citizenship for the Rohingya community and the incitement of inter-communal violence affecting Muslim communities in Rakhine, which I have visited, and other parts of Burma. It should be noted that it was the first such meeting attended by a Burmese Minister, which in itself is an encouraging step.

There are signs that the ambitions of the Burmese people for greater democracy are slowly being met. In June the Foreign Office hosted members of the 88 Generation movement, and they were delighted to meet fellow Members of this House, some of whom are among us this evening, to discuss their thoughts for the future. In August I welcomed the fact that the people of Burma were able to commemorate freely the bravery and sacrifices of those who campaigned and marched for democracy during the student uprisings of 1988.

Earlier today President Thein Sein took another small step towards fulfilling the commitment he gave during his visit to London to free all political prisoners by the end of the year. We welcomed the announcement that over 50 political prisoners are to be released. We will continue to press for the release of all political prisoners. As I said in New York, releasing political prisoners is one thing, but we do not expect the jails to be filled up with new political prisoners. Releases of longer-standing political prisoners are welcome, but ongoing detentions of political activists remain a cause of concern. We will continue to lobby on specific cases, and to press for the repeal of repressive legislation.

There are indications that the ethnic conflict that has blighted Burma since independence could end. Recent fighting in Shan and Kachin emphasises the need for continued concern, and the Kachin Independence Organisation remains in constructive dialogue with the Burmese Government. We are providing £13.5 million of humanitarian aid to Kachin this year, the largest bilateral contribution of any donor. We welcome the clear commitment the Government have made towards political dialogue. As the hon. Member for Walsall South said, UK experts have shared lessons from our experiences in Northern Ireland, and we will continue to offer our support to all sides.

Our aid continues to form a vital part of our engagement. By 2015, the Department for International Development will have delivered over £180 million, providing health care, tackling extreme poverty and assisting those affected by conflict. I heard clearly what the hon. Member for Walsall South said about better co-ordinating the efforts of some of these agencies.

We are helping the Government and others improve transparency and create a responsible business environment, we are strengthening the work of Parliament and civil society and we are helping Burma's efforts with ethnic reconciliation and the peace process.

As the right hon. and hon. Members who accompanied you, Mr Speaker, on a visit to Burma in July will have seen, the Government and this Parliament are delivering significant and valued support to Burma's Parliament. This support has been requested by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Lower House Speaker Shwe Mann, reflecting the world renowned reputation and expertise of this Parliament. Through an exchange of visits, which we plan to continue, we are helping Burmese parliamentarians to develop a culture of holding the Executive to account; sharing the extensive knowledge of the Libraries so that the Burmese parliamentary staff can produce high quality research and draft better legislation; and allowing the Burmese Public Accounts Committee to examine the best practices of its British counterpart in monitoring public expenditure.

Burma's Parliament has also formed a committee to review the constitution. The work of this committee is fundamental to achieving Burma's eventual democratisation.

During the President's visit to the UK, the Prime Minister welcomed the prospect of free and fair elections in 2015, and emphasised the importance of completing necessary changes to the constitution. I send this message again clearly and loudly now.

Recent events demonstrate only too clearly that the situation in Rakhine remains volatile. We called immediately for action to restore security and the rule of law in response to the violence last week, and we welcome both the President's visit to the scene and the arrests of suspected perpetrators. We have pledged £4.4 million to further the humanitarian effort. During my visit last year, I called for more co-ordinated action by the UN and the Burmese Government to ensure that assistance reaches those among the displaced who need it most. We continue to monitor the situation carefully. Continued action and strong political leadership are needed to resolve the citizenship status of the Rohingya community, and underlying sources of tension.

The Government share the concerns echoed by many Members regarding sexual violence against women in Burma. This is an important issue to address, as the President acknowledged during his visit here. I pressed the Burmese Foreign Minister to endorse the Foreign Secretary's preventing sexual violence initiative—signed by 119 other countries—and protocol at the UN General Assembly. We will continue lobbying to strengthen accountability systems and eliminate impunity for rape in Burma.

The British Government are committed to a stable, prosperous, more democratic Burma, where the human rights of all its peoples—of any religion and any ethnicity—are upheld, and where diversity is valued as a strength. We should not forget how far Burma was from this goal only two years ago. Continued progress will require determination, commitment and energy from the Burmese President and his Government. We will seek to deepen our engagement, offering support where it is requested and continuing to press where changes still need to be made.

It is not only the Burmese President and his Government who need to show determination, commitment and energy; it is parliamentarians in this House—in both Houses—who have expressed solidarity with the people of Burma and who want to see a better future for them. I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on taking your group to Burma. I hope we will have many more exchanges and visits on both sides in order that we can export some of our best practice to the Burmese and show them that a fair and proper democratic society where people of all races, ethnicities and religions are respected is the way forward for a country in the 21st century.

Burma mentioned in Financial Service (Banking Reform) Bill in the House of Lords

15 October 2013

Lord McFall of Alcluith: My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Brennan, and to have my name on these amendments. At Second Reading, I mentioned that the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards was charged with looking at culture and standards. We found a culture that was rotten

and standards that were abysmally low. That applies particularly in the area of senior management and we need to ensure that the individuals, the organisations and the regulator do something about it.

My concern is that these amendments might not fully deal with the anti money-laundering failings that we have seen. I looked to the Economist, courtesy of the December 2012 issue, to recap on what we have seen in terms of egregious examples. The biggest money-laundering settlement with the US authorities was made by HSBC, which settled for \$1,921,000,000—about \$2 billion. Its money-laundering activities involved countries such as Cuba, Iran, Libya, Mexico, Myanmar and Sudan. Standard Chartered's settlement was \$667 million and the countries with which it was involved were Iran, Libya, Myanmar and Sudan. RBS had a \$500 million settlement and it was involved with Iran and Libya. Lloyd's Banking Group's was \$350 million and was involved with Iran and Sudan. The settlement for Barclays was \$298 million and the countries were Cuba, Iran, Myanmar and Sudan. These were all UK-based companies, so our integrity as a financial centre in London is at risk as a result of the failings that we have seen.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/131015-0002.htm>

Written Statement: Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Foreign Affairs and General Affairs Councils

16 October 2013

Burma

There will be a short discussion of Burma at the FAC, before Foreign Ministers join Aung San Suu Kyi for lunch, who is visiting Luxembourg and the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The lunch with Aung San Suu Kyi will be an opportunity to hear her views on the reform process in Burma and discuss her priorities as we move closer to national elections in 2015.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm131016/wmstext/131016m0001.htm#13101664000001>

Foreign Affairs and General Affairs Councils (21-22 October)

29 October 2013

Before lunch with Aung San Suu Kyi, Baroness Ashton gave an overview of Burma's continuing reform process, highlighting progress made and the remaining challenges. In November she will lead a taskforce to Burma, the first outside Europe's neighbourhood, aimed at bringing EU representatives and businesses to Burma to offer comprehensive EU support for the transition to democracy.

Over lunch, Aung San Suu Kyi highlighted the central importance of amending the Burmese constitution in order to allow for credible presidential elections. The Foreign Secretary underlined his support for constitutional change, and the role the EU could play, including in supporting and monitoring the 2015 elections. He also raised the plight of the Rohingya and other ethnic and religious tensions.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm131029/wmstext/131029m0001.htm#13102961000005>

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR DEMOCRACY IN BURMA

On 21st October 2013, the APPG Burma organised a meeting with Valerie Vaz MP and Fiona Bruce MP, who visited Burma as part of a British Parliamentary delegation led by the Speaker of the House of Commons, Rt Hon John Bercow MP in July.

At this meeting, Valerie Vaz MP and Fiona Bruce MP discussed their trip to Burma where they met with the Burmese President, Aung San Suu Kyi, various organisations and politicians, political activists, representatives from ethnic and religious organisations, civil society, non-governmental organisations, UN agencies and international agencies.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

SPEAKER'S DELEGATION TO BURMA

Date tabled: 08.10.2013

That this House wishes to thank Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker's Office and the British Embassy staff in Rangoon who helped to organise Mr Speaker's successful delegation to Burma on 28 July to 4 August 2013; welcomes the constructive meetings with Daw Suu Kyi, President Thein Sein and other Burmese politicians and activists; notes the need for constitutional change to allow Daw Suu Kyi to stand for election as President of Burma; further notes the meetings between faith leaders and the delegation, and hopes that this continued contact brings lasting peace to Burma; further welcomes Mr Speaker's speech at Yangon University; praises the hard work by all parties to reform Burma's political process, but also notes the work left to do to strengthen Burma's democracy; further welcomes the enthusiasm and desire for democracy from the younger generation shown during the meeting with youth activists in Mon State; calls for the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Beliefs to be allowed to carry out his work with the full protection of the local police; further calls for the establishment of a UN Office of Human Rights in Burma as agreed to by President Thein Sein; and further calls on the Government to continue to provide practical assistance to strengthen the capacity building of the Burmese Naypyidaw Parliament's research department to help reduce the workload of the Bill Committees and help assist Burmese Members of Parliament to carry out their work.

Total signatures: 24

SPEAKER'S DELEGATION TO BURMA (No. 2)

Date tabled: 08.10.2013

That this House notes the Speaker's successful delegation to Burma which visited that country between 28 July and 4 August 2013; welcomes the constructive meetings with Daw Suu Kyi, President Thein Sein, HE U Soe Thane, Minister Presidential Office, HE U Khin Aung Myint, Speaker of the Upper House, HE U Thura Shwe Mann, Speaker of the Lower House, Burmese MPs from all parties, Burmese Committee Chairs, non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, international agencies, Rohingya and Rakhine leaders, 88 Generation, ethnic and faith leaders, including Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Anglican and Catholic representatives, the Burmese business community, the Chief Minister of Mon State, the Speaker of Mon State Parliament, local MPs, and young political activists; further notes the visits to a DFID-funded school, UK-funded law clinic, a Commonwealth War Cemetery, a Migrant community clinic, and humanitarian projects; further notes the work by all parties to reform Burma's democratic process, but notes that there is still more work to be done, especially in the area of human rights; and calls on the Government to continue its support for democratic reform in Burma and to provide the resources necessary to strengthen Burma's democratic institutions.

Total signatures: 24

DAW BAWK JA AND THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN MYANMAR (BURMA)

Date tabled: 05.09.2013

That this House notes that Daw BawkJa was arrested in July 2013, and that the charges against her are currently unknown to her or her lawyer, and her trial is still pending; further notes that Daw BawkJa has actively supported local Kachin farmers against illegal land grabbing in 2009 and the resulting trial sided against the farmers; further notes that Daw BawkJa ran as a National Democratic Force candidate in the November 2010 election and lost by under 8,000 votes after 13,255 votes were deemed invalid; welcomes the political reforms and progress that have been made in Burma since the 2012 UN General Assembly Resolution on Human Rights in Myanmar (Burma) but notes that there are still concerns that need to be addressed, including the detention of political prisoners; further notes that President TheinSein is still discussing the opening of the UN Office of Human Rights in Burma; and calls on the Government to help facilitate the release of Daw Bawk Ja and to continue its support for the UN General Assembly Resolution on Human Rights in Myanmar (Burma).

Total Signature: 5

ANTI-MUSLIM VIOLENCE IN BURMA

Date tabled: 11.07.2013

That this House expresses deep concern at the growing anti-Muslim violence in Burma; is concerned that the government of Burma has still not taken action against those inciting and organising violence; is further concerned by growing Buddhist nationalism in the country and that other religious minorities could also be targeted; is further concerned that, despite Muslims being the majority of the victims of violence, they also make up the vast majority of those being charged with violent offences; calls on the Government to significantly increase support for programmes promoting religious tolerance in Burma; and further calls on the Government to mobilise and co-ordinate an international task force to help address religious violence in Burma.

Total Signature: 33

ROHINGYA MUSLIM PERSECUTION IN MYANMAR

Date tabled: 20.05.2013

That this House notes that the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar is not only continuing but sectarian violence is getting worse; further notes that a boat carrying well over 100 Rohingya Muslims fleeing a cyclone capsized on 14 May with many drowned; further notes that the Myanmar President Thein Sein has been invited to Washington to meet President Obama as part of the normalisation of relations with western countries; deplores the continued persecution of the Rohingya Muslims; and calls on the Government to take all necessary measures to get the Myanmar government to act to protect the Rohingya Muslims from sectarian persecution and violence.

Total Signatures: 14

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Thank you.

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