



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

SEPT
2010

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

BURMA: CHINA

6 September 2010 Angus Robertson : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on defence collaboration between China and Burma, with particular reference to the purchase by Burma of the K-8 aircraft from China.

Jeremy Browne: We are aware of media reports alleging that the Burmese military regime purchased K-8 aircraft from China. The EU has had a comprehensive arms embargo in place against Burma for a number of years. Moreover, the Government are committed to the view that no one should be selling arms to a military regime with an appalling human rights record. The Chinese Government are well aware of our concerns over arms sales to a country where the military is involved in violent suppression of its citizens.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

6 September 2010 Angus Robertson : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of recent reports that Burma is attempting to acquire nuclear weapons.

Jeremy Browne : We are aware of recent media reporting suggesting that Burma may be seeking to develop military nuclear capability. We take such issues very seriously, and remind all states to adhere to their obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and all relevant UN Security Council resolutions. We continue to urge Burma to act strictly in accordance with its obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, to abide by the terms and conditions of its International Atomic Energy Agency Safeguards Agreement and declare all nuclear material in its possession. Our ambassador to Rangoon has lobbied the Burmese regime on their obligations under UN sanctions and raised proliferation concerns with senior members of the military regime. Burma cannot afford to risk the grave consequences of breaching the measures that have been adopted to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

HUMAN RIGHTS

8 September 2010 Jeremy Lefroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had (a) in international fora and (b) with the Burmese regime on the rights of the Rohingya people in Burma.

Jeremy Browne: The UK is deeply concerned at the continuing ethnic, religious and political persecution endured by the Rohingya ethnic group in Burma. They are victims of widespread human rights violations including denial of citizenship, economic deprivation and restrictions on freedom of movement. I discussed the situation faced by ethnic groups, including the Rohingya, at an EU/ASEAN meeting on 26 May, at which the Burmese Foreign Minister was also present. At the end of July I travelled to South East Asia and raised our concerns about ethnic minorities in Burma with representatives from the Thai, Philippine and Indonesian governments. We also plan to raise the issue in the forthcoming session of the UN Human Rights Council. Our ambassador in Rangoon repeatedly raises his concern at the discrimination and treatment of ethnic minorities with the Burmese regime and will continue to do so.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS

8 September 2010 Rehman Chishti : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Burmese military leadership on freeing (a) Aung San Suu Kyi and (b) other political prisoners.

Jeremy Browne : Aung San Suu Kyi and over 2,100 other political prisoners continue to be unjustly detained. Many prisoners are held in harsh conditions in remote locations far from their families. I raised Burma at the EU-ASEAN meeting on 26 May, at which the Burmese Foreign Minister was present. I made clear that the continued detention of political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi was unacceptable. Our ambassador in Rangoon repeatedly raises the need for the release of all political prisoners, with ministers in the Burmese military government and will continue to do so.

9 September 2010 Laurence Robertson : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Burma on the detention on Aung San Suu Kyi; and if he will make a statement.

David Lidington : The continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent 15 of the last 21 years as a prisoner, is a deliberate policy by the military regime to isolate her from her supporters and to prevent a legitimate expression of the will of the people of Burma. Her sham trial in 2009, which extended her house arrest by a further 18 months, highlights the regime's fear of her influence as a credible political leader. My hon. Friend Jeremy Browne raised Burma at the EU-ASEAN meeting on 26 May 2010, at which the Burmese Foreign Minister was present. He made clear that the continued detention of political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi is unacceptable. Our ambassador in Rangoon repeatedly raises the need for the release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, with ministers in the Burmese military government and will continue to do so.

13 September 2010 David Miliband : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken in relation to the treatment of the Generation 88 Burmese activists Htay Kywe, Mie Mie and Zaw Htet Ko Ko.

William Hague : The arrest in 2007, of Htay Kywe, Mie Mie and Zaw Htet Ko Ko and their subsequent long term imprisonment, were actions by the military Government of Burma designed to keep the leaders of the 1988 Generation Students movement out of politics. We are aware of reports that Zaw Htet Ko Ko is suffering from medical problems and that many detainees suffer ill treatment and are held in harsh conditions far from their families. The Coalition Government have sustained international attention on the plight of all political prisoners in Burma and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Jeremy Browne, publicly endorsed Amnesty International's campaign for the release of the three leaders. In my meetings with ASEAN and other regional Ministers, I have specifically raised the UK's continuing concern over political prisoners. Our embassy in Rangoon is monitoring these specific cases closely and our ambassador in Rangoon repeatedly raises the need for the release of all political prisoners with ministers in the Burmese military government and will continue to do so. We will raise the issue of Burma's political prisoners in the forthcoming session of the UN Human Rights Council and other multilateral meetings.

13 September 2010 David Miliband : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken in relation to the arrests of the Burmese ethnic Karenni political activists Khun Bedu, Khan Kawrio and Khun Dee De.

William Hague : The arrest in May 2008, of Khun Bedu, Khun Kawrio and Khun Dee De by the military regime of Burma and their long prison sentences are part of a concerted effort to suppress the legitimate demands of Karenni and other ethnic communities. My right hon. Friend, the Minister responsible for our relations with South East Asia, Jeremy Browne, raised Burma at the EU-ASEAN meeting on 26 May 2010, at which the Burmese Foreign Minister was present. He made clear that the continued detention of all political prisoners is unacceptable and that a process of inclusive dialogue and reconciliation with the ethnic groups is essential for the future stability of Burma. G8 leaders released a statement urging the regime to release without delay all political prisoners, with strong UK support. Our ambassador in Rangoon also repeatedly raises the need for the release of all political prisoners with ministers in the Burmese military government, and will continue to do so.

ELECTION

15 September 2010 John Pugh : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether officials in the British Embassy in Burma have had recent discussions with leaders of ethnic minorities in Burma on the forthcoming elections.

David Lidington : Our embassy in Rangoon regularly meets representatives of ethnic minority groups both inside Burma and on the Thai-Burma border. This includes recent meetings with the Karen, Shan, Rohingya, Mon and Chin where forthcoming elections were discussed. Such groups have faced difficulties with the process of registration, membership listing, candidate nominations, severe funding restrictions and in some cases harassment from the regime. Foreign and Commonwealth officials also recently met a delegation of ethnic representatives in London to discuss forthcoming elections and further meetings with ethnic leaders are scheduled. Our ambassador in Rangoon repeatedly raises his concern with the regime that forthcoming elections will not be free and fair while ethnic and other opposition parties continue to be excluded or face tough restrictions.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BURMA AID

16 September 2010 John Pugh : To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the effects on internally-displaced people in eastern Burma of the reduction in the level of cross-border aid by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium.

Alan Duncan : The Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) has indicated that the reduction in its budget for cross-border food aid this year will affect approximately 8,000 internally displaced people in Burma. The Department for International Development's (DFID's) financial contribution to TBBC has expanded significantly in recent years and now stands at £1.1 million annually. This funding is used to provide assistance to refugees in Thailand and people displaced by conflict inside Burma. In November 2010, DFID will host TBBC's annual Donor Meeting which will consider the Consortium's budget for 2011.

HOUSE OF LORDS

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

ROHINGYA REFUGEES

27 September 2010 Baroness Cox : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will make representations to the Government of Bangladesh about alleged harassment, arrest and forced deportation of ethnic Rohingya refugees from Burma.

Lord Astor of Haver : We have raised the plight of Rohingya refugees with the Government of Bangladesh both bilaterally and in concert with EU partners. Most recently, my honourable friend the Minister of State at the Department for International Development, Alan Duncan, discussed the issue with the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister, Dr Dipu Moni, on 14 July 2010. We support the European Commission and UN programmes for Rohingya refugees through the UK's core funding to the EU and the UN.

BURMA AID

27 September 2010 Baroness Cox : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they are considering an emergency grant to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium to prevent rations to Burmese refugees falling below minimum nutritional requirements.

Earl Attlee : The UK Government are concerned that funding for Burmese refugees in Thailand should be sufficient to meet their basic needs. The Department for International Development's (DfID's) financial contribution to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) has expanded significantly in recent years, now standing at £1.1 million annually. We are aware of the financial pressures facing TBBC this year. Any

proposed increase in TBBC's budget should be examined by its donors in a co-ordinated manner and in the context of its overall requirements. The next donor meeting will be hosted by DfID in November.

27 September 2010 Baroness Cox : To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of internally displaced people in Burma who will be affected by cuts in the budget for cross-border food aid due to financial shortfalls of the Thailand Burma Border Consortium.

Earl Attlee : The Thailand Burma Border Consortium has indicated that the reduction in its budget for cross-border food aid this year will affect 8,000 internally displaced people in Burma. The Department for International Development's (DfID's) financial contribution to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) has expanded significantly in recent years and now stands at £1.1 million annually. This funding is used to provide assistance to refugees in Thailand and people displaced by conflict inside Burma.

27 September 2010 Baroness Cox : To ask Her Majesty's Government how much aid they will provide for refugees on the Thailand-Burma border in the next year.

Earl Attlee : The Department for International Development (DFID) has allocated £1.1 million to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) in 2010-11. The majority of this funding is expected to be used for TBBC's programmes for refugees in Thailand. A proportion of this grant may also be used to provide assistance to people displaced by conflict inside Burma. In addition, DfID plans to provide about £650,000 to the International Rescue Committee to improve access to legal assistance for refugees in Thailand in 2010-11. The overall size of DfID's future programme for Burma will be decided later this year, following a review now being undertaken of all bilateral aid programmes and the results of the comprehensive spending review.

27 September 2010 Baroness Cox : To ask Her Majesty's Government how much aid they provide for cross-border medical programmes in Burma.

Earl Attlee : In 2009-10, the Department for International Development (DfID) provided £636,000 for cross-border medical programmes in Burma. DfID has allocated £1.1 million for these programmes in 2010-11 and is considering a proposal for additional health aid for displaced people in conflict-affected parts of eastern Burma. The overall size of DfID's future programme for Burma will be decided later this year, following a review now being undertaken of all bilateral aid programmes and the results of the comprehensive spending review.

27 September 2010 Baroness Cox : To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the Department for International Development is funding organisations promoting women's rights and equality in Burma.

Earl Attlee : In the coalition programme, the UK Government recognised the vital role of women in development and laid out our commitment to promote gender equality and focus on the rights of women, children and disabled people to access services. The Department for International Development (DfID) is supporting several programmes that promote women's rights and equality in Burma. UK aid is supporting the Shan Women's Action Network to empower women and promote their rights in communities displaced by conflict along the Thailand-Burma border. DfID aid is providing improved access to maternal health services for up to 18,000 women in areas affected by Cyclone Nargis. Through the Three Diseases Fund, DfID supports HIV prevention services for female sex workers and other vulnerable groups. UK aid is contributing towards improved income-earning opportunities for rural women through a new Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund. In 2009, DfID support for the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Initiative helped to enable about 135,000 women in rural communities across Burma to form self-reliance groups to pool their savings and access credit.

ANSWERS TO ORAL PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

BURMA

14 September 2010 Paul Uppal : What recent assessment he has made of the state of UK relations with

countries in south-east Asia.

Henry Bellingham : South-east Asia includes some of the world's most important emerging powers, and offers huge opportunities for the United Kingdom. The Government enjoy excellent relations with most countries in the region. Burma is the exception, but we continue to work for democratic change so that its people can realise their potential.

14 September 2010 Ivan Lewis : I do not regard deciding to attack Pakistan when in India as a great foreign policy triumph, particularly on the part of a Prime Minister of this country. When we were in government, we took every opportunity to highlight and campaign against the horrendous human rights abuses perpetrated by the Burmese regime, to demand the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2,000 political prisoners, and to apply maximum pressure on the international community to challenge that regime. May I ask the Minister what his Government are doing to put pressure on the Burmese regime? Does he accept that the November elections were entirely illegitimate, and that there is a flawed constitution? Can he tell us what progress is being made on an arms embargo against the Burmese regime, and will he guarantee no dilution of the BBC's World Service output in Burma?

Henry Bellingham : The Prime Minister recently met the Foreign Secretaries of India and China to express our concern about Burma and to urge them to use their good offices to push for change. I certainly agree with the shadow Minister, because for elections to take place on 7 November and to be credible in any way Aung San Suu Kyi must be released, as well as 2,100 other political prisoners.

14 September 2010 Duncan Hames : I welcome the Minister's earlier remarks about political prisoners in Burma. Will he now use his good offices to seek to persuade our EU partners to back United States-United Kingdom calls for a UN commission of inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma?

Henry Bellingham : The UK supports the UN special rapporteur's call for the UN to consider a commission of inquiry, and we are working to build international support for that and putting a lot of emphasis on it. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question.

15 September 2010 Valerie Vaz : Burma and Iran were signatories to the universal declaration on human rights, but there are some men and women who cannot exercise those rights. In particular, Sakineh Ashtiani awaits death by stoning, and Aung San Suu Kyi has been imprisoned because she won an election. Will the Prime Minister make urgent and renewed representations to the Governments of Burma and Iran in order to free those brave and courageous women?

David Cameron : The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise that issue, and I shall do precisely as she says and continue to make those representations. It is important that we make them not just to those Governments, but to Governments who sometimes take a slightly different view. When I was in India I raised the issue of Burma with the Indian Government, because I think it is important that we talk to the neighbouring states of those countries and make sure that they are campaigning in the same way. The human rights record in Iran is absolutely appalling. The person to whom the hon. Lady refers is being treated in a completely inhuman and despicable fashion, and we should be absolutely clear that the situation in Burma is an affront to humanity. Aung San Suu Kyi's continued detention is an outrage. She has spent 14 of the past 20 years under house arrest, and her example is deeply inspiring. All of us like to think that we give up something for democracy and politics; we do not. Compared with those people, we do nothing. They are an inspiration right across the world, and we should stand with them.

Early Day Motions

Early Day Motion 112: Human Rights in Burma

John Pugh

30.05.2010

Signed by 148 MPs

That this House sends its best wishes to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who will spend her 65th birthday in detention on 19 June 2010; calls for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in Burma; rejects the elections planned by Burma's generals later this year which, due to election

laws and ongoing repression in Burma, cannot be free and fair; condemns Burma's new constitution which is designed to maintain dictatorship in civilian guise and does not grant rights or protection to Burma's ethnic minorities; notes that all diplomatic efforts to reform the dictatorship's sham roadmap to democracy have failed; recalls that the United Nations Security Council, General Assembly, Secretary General and Human Rights Council have all stated that the solution to the problems in Burma lies in dialogue between the dictatorship, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, and ethnic representatives; and calls on the Government to support a United Nations-led effort to pressure the dictatorship to enter into such dialogue.

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