



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

APRIL
2007

Answers to Parliamentary questions

16 Apr 2007:

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 19 February 2007, Official Report, column 11W, on Burma, whether the UK is advocating a strengthening of the EU Common Position on Burma; and if she will make a statement. [128602]

Margaret Beckett: We believe that the present EU Common Position on Burma is the best achievable, given the views of some of our partners. Any additional measures would need the support of all other EU member states as the Common Position can only be amended by consensus. We do not believe that there would be consensus to amend the Common Position.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if she will take steps to strengthen the EU Common Position on Burma when it comes up for renewal. [130529]

Mr. McCartney: The EU Common Position on Burma is adopted by consensus. Any amendment or strengthening of the Common Position needs to be agreed unanimously. Our discussions within the EU have indicated there is no consensus to amend the Common Position. Given the views of some of our EU partners, we believe that the current Common Position is currently the best achievable policy. Despite criticisms of it, the Common Position is valuable in uniting 27 nations in an expression of concern about the abuse of human rights and lack of democracy inside Burma.

I raised the appalling human rights situation in Burma at the EU Association of South East Asian Nations Foreign Ministers' meeting in Nuremberg on 15 March.

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what reports she has received of the recent military activity by the Burmese Army in Karen state; and if she will make a statement; [130851]

(2) what recent reports she has received of (a) attacks by the Burmese Army on Karen civilians and (b) the displacement by the Burmese Army of civilians in the Mon Township; [130852]

(3) what recent reports she has received of attacks by the Burmese Army in the Papun District; and what her estimate is of the number of Karen villagers displaced by such attacks. [130859]

Mr. McCartney: We are aware of reports from the Free Burma Rangers of recent military activity in Mon Township and Papun District and the displacement of up to 1,400 people. Officials from our Embassy in Rangoon do not have access to conflict areas and cannot confirm the number of displaced people. We have repeatedly condemned attacks on civilians and remain concerned about the situation in conflict areas in Burma which has resulted in a significant increase in the number of internally displaced people and refugees on the Thai/Burmese border.

I raised our serious concerns about the Burmese army's offensive in Karen State when I called in the Burmese Ambassador on 15 June 2006 and wrote to the Burmese Foreign Minister on 5 July 2006. Most recently, I raised the Burmese regime's appalling human rights record at the EU/Association of South East Asian Nations Ministerial Meeting in Nuremberg on 15 March in the presence of the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister.

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the implications of reports she has received in the treatment of women of ethnic minorities in

Burma by the Burmese Army for initiatives to improve the Burmese government's record in human rights; and if she will make a statement; [131130]

(2) what representations she has received on the treatment of Chin women in Burma by the (a) Burmese Army and (b) other Burmese state agencies; and if she will make a statement. [131139]

Mr. McCartney: We are aware of the report "Unsafe State" published by the Women's League of Chinland, documenting the abuses of Chin women at the hands of the Burmese authorities.

On 24 January, I met representatives from the Women's League of Chinland and the Chin Human Rights Organisation to discuss the many difficulties faced by the Chin community in Burma, including sexual violence.

We condemn the use of all forms of sexual violence and all other human rights violations. I raised the issue of sexual violence directly with the Burmese ambassador on 15 June 2006 and again in my letter to the Burmese Foreign Minister on 5 July 2006. I have raised our concerns about the human rights situation in Burma with the Governments of India, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Japan and South Korea.

I raised Burma at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on 13 March. Most recently, I raised our concerns about Burma at the EU/Association of South East Asian Nations Ministerial Meeting on 15 March in the presence of the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister.

We have helped to ensure that resolutions at the UN General Assembly have called for an end to the use of rape and sexual violence by the armed forces in Burma. We shall continue, bilaterally and with international partners, to urge the Burmese regime to pursue laws and practices which will put an end to the Burmese army's use of sexual violence.

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal steps the Government has taken to enforce the Geneva Convention following the statement in the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Burma on human rights abuses in conflict areas and humanitarian law. [131421]

Mr. McCartney: We have repeatedly called on the Burmese government to comply with all international law and applicable humanitarian law and raised our concerns directly with the regime and in international fora most recently when I raised the issue in my intervention at the EU-Association of South East Asian Nations Foreign Ministers' meeting in Nuremberg on 14 March.

We fully support the work of Professor Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, and his reports on the Burmese regime's serious human rights violations.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will take steps to increase financial support provided for projects promoting (a) human rights and (b) democracy in Burma. [130530]

Mr. Thomas: DFID already provides significant support to projects to help the people of Burma access their human rights and build the foundations for sustainable democracy. Our programme includes a wide variety of activities, such as capacity-building for local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), training for journalists, work to involve poor people in decision-making about issues that affect them, and support for the empowerment of poor women. In addition, the British embassy in Rangoon is carrying out extremely valuable work to build local capacity.

DFID is about to start work on the implementation of a £3 million programme designed to expand and strengthen DFID's work to support increased prospects for a successful transition to democracy and respect for human rights in Burma. The programme will increase opportunities for Burma's people to engage in political decision-making processes at the local level affecting their welfare, livelihoods and governance.

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development why his Department has ended funding for the Burma projects of the BBC World Service Trust. [130608]

Mr. Thomas: DFID has recently only supported one BBC World Service Trust project in Burma: a grant of £1,997,513 for a radio soap opera to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS in audiences in Burma. The project started

in January 2003 and was to last three years. By late 2005, the project was spending DFID's grant more slowly than budgeted, so we agreed an extension until September 2006. A review at that point judged that the project was judged likely partly to achieve its purpose. When the project managers requested a further extension we declined in order to focus our resources on other projects which we judged would be even more effective in reducing poverty in Burma.

Lord Alton of Liverpool asked Her Majesty's Government:

What representations they have made to the Government of Burma about the increased number of attacks on villages in the Papua district of the Karen state by the Burmese Army. [HL3002]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Triesman):

We have made no specific representations about the increased attacks on villages in the Papun district of Karen state.

My right honourable friend the Minister of State for Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs, Ian McCartney, raised our serious concerns about the Burmese army's offensive in Karen state when he called in the Burmese ambassador on 15 June 2006 and wrote to the Burmese Foreign Minister on 5 July 2006.

Most recently, he raised the Burmese regime's appalling human rights record at the EU/Association of South East Asian Nations Ministerial Meeting in Nuremberg on 15 March in the presence of the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister.

19th April:

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports she has received of the welfare of Aung San Suu Kyi. [132001]

Mr. McCartney: We remain concerned about the welfare of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been detained by the Burmese government since May 2003.

The conditions of her detention are very restrictive. Her doctor is allowed to visit her occasionally. On 24 November 2006, our Ambassador in Rangoon formally requested authority from the Burmese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to pay a courtesy call on her. The request was refused.

I discussed the situation of Aung San Suu Kyi when I met the UN Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, on 15 November 2006. Mr. Gambari met her during his visit to Burma in November 2006. We understand that Aung Sang Suu Kyi assured Mr. Gambari that she was in reasonably good health. Mr. Gambari raised concerns about her welfare with the Burmese government.

We have repeatedly called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners in Burma.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations the Government has made to the United Nations Human Rights Council on (a) conditions of political prisoners, (b) freedom of the press and (c) food provision in Burma. [132604]

Mr. McCartney: I raised the human rights situation in Burma when I addressed the Human Rights Council on 13 March. I expressed our concern that the people of Burma did not enjoy the most basic of human rights, including the rights to freedom of speech and association; and that the fundamental tenets of good governance and the rule of law were not upheld. I also drew attention to ongoing serious human rights abuses, particularly in areas of armed conflict. The European Union Presidency and our Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva also set out our concerns in statements to the Council on 23 March.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress she

has made in persuading the government of Burma to improve its observance of human rights. [132000]

Mr. McCartney: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office identifies Burma as a country of concern in our 2006 Annual Report on Human Rights. The Government's policy is to promote full respect for human rights in Burma encouraging the rule of law, democracy and good governance, and the freedom of association and speech in accordance with international human rights law.

We have been at the forefront of international efforts over many years to bring pressure to bear on the military regime to re-establish democracy and to respect human rights. We take every opportunity to raise human rights issues with the regime and remind them of their obligations to adhere to international human rights law. Our Embassy in Rangoon also delivers capacity building assistance through our Global Opportunities Fund in support of these objectives.

I have raised the human rights situation regularly with the Burmese regime and other governments in the region. On 16 June 2006, I called in the Burmese Ambassador and on 5 July 2006 I wrote to the Burmese Foreign Minister, highlighting our many concerns. On 18 September 2006, I raised the serious human rights situation with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Ambassadors, including the Burmese Ambassador, and on 4 December 2006 with the ASEAN Secretary-General. I have also raised Burma with the Governments of China, India, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea. I have discussed the human rights abuses taking place in Burma with Juan Mendez, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. I discussed Burma in detail with Ibrahim Gambari, the UN Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs, on 15 November 2006, following his visit to the country. Most recently, I raised the human rights situation in Burma in my address to the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 13 March and at the EU/ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Nuremberg on 15 March, in the presence of the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister.

In addition, our Ambassador in Rangoon regularly raises human rights with the regime, most recently when he met the Burmese Ministers for Planning and Immigration and the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister on 5 January.

The UK works closely with the EU and other international partners, including the UN and ASEAN, to promote human rights in Burma, and fully supports the efforts of the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Professor Sergio Pinheiro.

We supported the efforts to have Burma added to the UN Security Council agenda in September 2006 and co-sponsored with the US a UN Security Council Resolution on Burma. This was put to the vote on 12 January. Nine members of the Security Council supported the Resolution. However, three States, including two Permanent Members of the Council, voted against and as such the Resolution was not adopted. While the result was disappointing, it is important to note that all Security Council members agreed that there were serious issues of concern in Burma. This, and the positive votes from the majority of Security Council partners, reflected the international community's deep concern over the plight of Burma's people. Burma remains on the UN Security Council agenda.

23rd April:

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports she has received on the treatment of four girls aged between 14 and 16 years in Putao District, Kachin State by members of the Burma Army and the subsequent imprisonment of the girls; what representations she has made to the Burmese Government on this case; and if she will take steps to press the Burmese authorities (a) to release the girls, (b) to investigate the case and (c) to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators. [131129]

Mr. McCartney [holding answers 16 April 2007]: We are aware of reports in the Burmese media about the detention of four girls in Putao District and we are concerned about how their complaint has been treated by the authorities. I intend to raise this issue at a senior level with the Burmese authorities to demand a formal investigation into the alleged rapes at the earliest opportunity.

24th April:

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions she has had with the government of Burma on its treatment of political opponents. [131999]

Mr. McCartney: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had no bilateral discussions with the Burmese government.

She remains deeply concerned about the treatment of the Burmese regime's political opponents. Over a thousand political opponents are held in prison and others are subject to harassment and exile for their political beliefs.

As a result, I have on my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's behalf raised the treatment of political prisoners with the Burmese ambassador on 15 June 2006 and in my letter to the Burmese Foreign Minister of 5 July 2006; raised human rights abuses in Burma during a meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) ambassadors in London last September, and with UN Under-Secretary General, Ibrahim Gambari, in November 2006; and also highlighted our concerns about the appalling treatment of political opponents in separate statements on 2 June 2006, concerning the harsh sentences given to Shan democracy leaders; 2 October 2006, concerning the arbitrary detention of six Burmese democracy activists; 19 October 2006, concerning the death in custody of Ko Thet Win Aung and 15 February concerning the deplorable decision to extend the house arrest of U Tin Oo, the Vice Chairman of the National League for Democracy.

Most recently, I raised the human rights situation in Burma in my address to the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 13 March and at the EU/ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Nuremberg on 15 March, in the presence of the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister.

I will be again raising Burma when I attend the 8th Asia-Europe Foreign Ministers' Meeting, in Hungary on 28-29 May.

25th April:

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what targets his Department has to reduce debt in developing countries over the next two years. [132864]

(EDITED) **Mr. Thomas:** DFID's 2005-08 public service agreement (PSA) includes a target shared with Her Majesty's (HM) Treasury, that 90 per cent. of heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs) that have reached Decision Point by end 2005 should receive irrevocable debt relief by end 2008. By the end of 2005, 28 HIPCs had reached HIPC Decision Point (thereby demonstrating their commitment to poverty reduction and qualifying for interim debt relief). Of these 28 countries, 22 have now completed the HIPC initiative and received irrevocable debt cancellation. The PSA target requires that four more countries complete HIPC before the end of 2008. Current indications are that this target will be met.

The UK remains committed to 100 per cent. bilateral and multilateral debt relief for poor countries that will use the savings for poverty reduction. We have cancelled bilateral aid debts from low income countries (except

Zimbabwe and Burma, neither of which are making payments) and qualifying lower middle income countries. We also pay our share (10 per cent.) of debt service to the World Bank and African Development Fund for eight low income countries that are not eligible for assistance under HIPC. We hope that other countries will soon also reach the standards of public financial management and commitment to poverty reduction necessary to receive this support.

On **April 18th** John Bercow MP raised the issue of Burma during a debate on modern slavery in the House of Commons:

John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one often-neglected modern form of slavery is the use of child soldiers? Given that the Government of Burma, a brutal military dictatorship, use such soldiers on a scale that is proportionately greater than in any other country of the world, will the Deputy Prime Minister consider launching an international initiative to bring that appalling practice to an end?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I very much agree with every word that the hon. Gentleman says about that. When I have addressed meetings of the Association of South East Asian Nations on behalf of the Prime Minister, we have discussed Burma's membership and the terrible circumstances of child soldiers. We are doing everything that we can to do end that deplorable practice.

On **16th April Lord Blaker** raised South Africa vote against a UN Security council resolution on Burma during a debate about Zimbabwe in the House of Lords: "South Africa is now in the UN Security Council, and was last month its president. Its record in that body is interesting. On a mild motion criticising Myanmar, alias Burma, calling for national reconciliation and release of political prisoners, and other measures not even including sanctions, South Africa cast a no vote—it voted against that mild resolution. It also used its position in the presidency to block debate on violent repression of the opposition in Zimbabwe. Archbishop Tutu, who with Vaclav Havel had taken part in reporting on conditions in Burma, said: "I am deeply disappointed by our vote. It is a betrayal of our noble past". He is, as we know, a Nobel Prize winner. He has also criticised the Government of South Africa on their stand in the Security Council on Zimbabwe."

On **24th April Baroness Royall of Blaisdon** referred to a DFID funded project in Burma during a debate on children and HIV/AIDS in the House of Lords:

"The Government are working to help to ensure that support is provided where it is most urgently needed. That is why Taking Action, the UK Strategy for Tackling HIV and AIDS in the Developing World, gives a high priority to the rights of children and orphans. Between 2005 and 2008, DfID will spend £150 million, from an overall commitment of £1.5 billion, to meet the needs of children affected by AIDS, including street children. Expenditure on street children will be part of this commitment. The UK also supports programmes and organisations that work directly with street children. In Burma, for example, DfID is contributing £450,000 to the street and working children programme. One element of the programme is HIV and AIDS education."

Press Release

Conservatives

17th April 2007

Ref: 0699/07

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown writes to Margaret Beckett about Burma In a letter to the Foreign Secretary, Shadow Foreign Minister, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown asked Margaret Beckett about sanctions banning all European Union investment in Burma.

In his letter today, he wrote:

"I note the Chancellor of the Exchequer's comments regarding Aung San Suu Kyi in yesterday's Guardian, where he praises the imprisoned Leader of the National League Democracy (NLD) in Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi. He states that she defines "the meaning of courage...facing one of the most tyrannous regimes in the world, she had demonstrated that courage." He goes on to note that "Suu Kyi represents the power not of the powerful but of the powerless: a woman, a prisoner of conscience up against a state with one of the worst human-rights violation records in the world; a country of only 20 million people with 1,000 political prisoners, 500,000 political refugees, children as young as four in prison, and poets and journalists tortured just for speaking out."

I welcome and agree with the Chancellor's comments, which are timely. My Party has long argued for the release of political prisoners, an end to human rights abuses and in order to bring this about, the Government, with our European Partners should increase sanctions on the Yangon regime.

You may recall that on 24 October 2006, I spoke at a Westminster Hall debate on Human Rights in Burma, where I spoke at length on the plight of the Burmese people, and the need for action from the United Kingdom, the European Union, and our international partners. More specifically I said: "There is no legal barrier preventing European or Asian companies from investing in or trading with the Burmese dictatorship. The regime survives through foreign investment, and the National League for Democracy has asked the world to cut lifelines that keep that regime alive." Similarly, there is nothing to prevent investment being channelled through any overseas or dependent territories controlled by EU nations.

At the end of April, the European Union's Commons Position on Burma is to be renewed. In light of the

Chancellor's sympathies for the National League for Democracy in Burma, when can we expect sanctions, banning all European Union investment in Burma? The Conservative Party believes wholeheartedly that only through continuing and increased sanctions can effective action be taken to alleviate the suffering of the Burmese people. It seems incongruous that other countries, like the United States can take such strong steps to confront the Yangon regime, yet the European Union's actions have, to date, been weak:

"President Bush signed into law the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act 2003, which restricts the financial resources of Burma's ruling military junta and bans the importation to the US of any products that originated in Burma. More importantly, the American Government backed those actions with tough penalties. Anyone who violates the orders risks a fine of up to \$50,000 or up to 10 years' imprisonment, and companies risk a \$500,000 fine. Why have the British Government not persuaded or tried to persuade the European Union to take such tough action?"

We, together with the Burma Campaign, the global movement campaigning for human rights and democracy in Burma, also believe that Myanmar Timber Enterprises should be added to the list of state owned companies that European businesses are barred from investing in.

Owing to the urgent nature of this matter, I look forward to your speedy response, and positive news for the people of Burma."

EARLY DAY MOTIONS ON BURMA

EDM 662

VETO OF DRAFT UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION ON BURMA 17.01.2007

Clwyd, Ann 83 signatures

That this House is deeply dismayed by the veto by the Russian and Chinese governments of the draft United Nations Security Council Resolution on 12th January calling on Burma's rulers to free all political detainees, cease attacks on ethnic minorities and speed a transition to democracy; shares the concern expressed in the draft resolution at the slow pace of tangible progress in the process of national reconciliation in Myanmar and the continuing detention of political prisoners, including the leader of the National League of Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi; notes that the draft resolution also accused Burma's armed forces of attacking and raping civilians from the country's ethnic minorities and causing a refugee crisis in the region; believes that the situation in Burma threatens international peace and security; is appalled by the continuing suffering of the Burmese people; and calls upon the international community to address the situation as a matter of urgency.

EDM 658

RELIGIOUS RESTRICTIONS, DISCRIMINATION AND PERSECUTION IN BURMA 17.01.2007

Crabb, Stephen 150 signatures

That this House notes the evidence of the widespread restrictions on religious freedom, discrimination against religious minorities and in some places violent persecution of Christians and Muslims in Burma; welcomes the publication of a comprehensive new report Carrying the Cross: the military regime's campaign of restriction, discrimination and persecution against Christians in Burma by Christian Solidarity Worldwide, which complements past reports of the persecution of Muslims and the imprisonment of Buddhist monks and nuns; further notes the military regime's persecution of Christians among the Chin, Kachin, Naga, Karen, Karenni and other ethnic nationalities and the persecution of the Rohingya Muslims; calls on the Government to raise concerns about religious freedom and specifically the persecution of Christians and Muslims in Burma with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC); urges the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and Belief to investigate violations of religious freedom in Burma; and calls on the UN Security Council to pass a binding resolution requiring the SPDC to cease its widespread violation of human rights, including violations of religious freedom, to release all political prisoners, to open all parts of the country to unhindered access for international humanitarian organisations, and to engage in meaningful tripartite dialogue with the National League for Democracy and the ethnic nationalities.

EDM 498

TARGETED INVESTMENT SANCTIONS AGAINST BURMA'S DICTATORSHIP 13.12.2006

Morgan, Julie 81 signatures

That this House recalls that 243 hon. Members signed Early Day Motion 1311 in the 2002-03 parliamentary session calling on the British Government to act unilaterally to ban new investment in Burma; notes that despite stating it opposes investment the Government has still not taken action to ban British companies from investing in Burma, or taken steps to stop foreign companies using British Overseas Territories to channel investment to Burma; commends the Channel 4 Dispatches documentary 'Burma's Secret War' which exposed the appalling human rights situation in Burma and the role that foreign investment has played in propping up the dictatorship in that country; further notes that Burma's democracy movement has called for a ban on new investment in Burma; and calls on the Government to introduce legislation enabling the prohibition of new investment in Burma and to stop foreign companies channelling investment to Burma via British Overseas Territories.

EDM 367

UN SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION ON BURMA 30.11.2006

Bercow, John 175 signatures

That this House welcomes the first formal discussion on Burma held by the United Nations Security Council in September 2006; appreciates the efforts made by the British and American governments to secure those discussions; notes that the human rights situation in Burma continues to deteriorate and that there is no indication that the regime is willing to reform of its own volition; calls on the Government to do everything in its power to secure a binding Security Council resolution on Burma that would require the government of Burma to work with the Secretary-General's office in implementing a plan for national reconciliation and a restoration of a democratically-elected government; requests that the Secretary-General remain engaged with the dispute resolution process and that he report to the Security Council on a regular basis; urges the government of Burma to ensure immediate, safe and unhindered access to all parts of the country for United Nations and international humanitarian organisations to provide assistance to the most vulnerable groups, including internally displaced persons; calls for the immediate unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all prisoners of conscience; and further calls for an immediate end to attacks on civilians and ethnic minorities.

EUROPEAN UNION AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Council Conclusions on Burma/Myanmar

2795th GENERAL AFFAIRS Council meeting Luxembourg, 23 April 2007

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

“The Council:

- Reaffirms its commitment to supporting the process of peaceful change and national reconciliation in Burma/Myanmar and renews the Common Position extending restrictive measures against Burma/Myanmar.
- Expresses deep concern on the lack of tangible progress in the promised transition towards a legitimate civilian government. The Council encourages Burma/Myanmar to make progress towards national reconciliation and to involve constructively all political parties and ethnic groups in an inclusive dialogue. The Council reiterates its call for the early release of all political prisoners and calls for an end to the military campaign against civilians in conflict areas.
- Continues to be concerned by serious violations of human rights, restrictions on domestic human rights organisations and international human rights institutions by the government Of Burma/Myanmar.
- Expresses its support for the UN Secretary General's good offices to bring about peaceful political change and welcomes ASEAN's continued efforts to encourage reform and reconciliation.

- Supports the on-going efforts by the international community, the Commission and Member states to address Burma/Myanmar's humanitarian challenges and welcomes the establishment of the Three Diseases Fund to tackle the problems of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.
- Welcomes the Supplementary Understanding agreed between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the government of Burma/Myanmar on 26 February to enable victims of forced labour to seek redress, and urges the government of Burma/Myanmar to ensure the full implementation of this agreement.
- Reaffirms its willingness to consider the suspension of these restrictive measures and to substantively step up co-operation in response to substantial improvement in the political situation in Burma/Myanmar."

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0685/07

by Glenys Kinnock (PSE) to the Commission

Subject: Aid to Burma

Would the Commission clarify what proportion of aid to Burma is directed to promoting human rights and democracy?

Is it the case that the Commission has more than halved funding for these essential activities?

Is it not also the case that human rights and democracy is listed as the first priority in the EU Common Position on Burma?

E-0685/07EN

Answer given by Ms Ferrero-Waldner on behalf of the Commission

(10.4.2007)

The Commission wishes to underline that all programmes and projects identified for, and implemented in, Myanmar/Burma, are directly or indirectly promoting human rights. This is being done either in the geographic programme as a cross-cutting issue, or through dedicated thematic programmes.

Overall Commission funding for programmes in Myanmar/Burma is in fact increasing. The current (2006) commitment amounts to approximately €11.9 million, including for example the budget lines for Food Security, Decentralised Cooperation, Environment and Uprooted People. Funding under the specific Human Rights and Democracy programme – with six ongoing projects – amounts to approximately 10% of the total. The ongoing projects cover (i) civil society capacity building in response to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS); (ii) the development of participatory communities; (iii) the advancement of indigenous peoples' rights; (iv) reconciliation among five ethnic groups; and (v) the development of small communities.

The EU Common Position does not explicitly list the policy priorities, but is nevertheless clear that Myanmar/Burma's transition to civilian legitimate government, respect for human rights and national reconciliation are the EU's policy objectives.

Department of Foreign Affairs

Republic of Ireland

Minister of State Conor Lenihan Meeting with Burmese Opposition Leaders

25/04/2007

Discussions Focus on Human Rights issues

Mr. Conor Lenihan T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for human rights, met yesterday in Dublin with representatives from the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), Dr. Sein Win and Dr. Thaug Htun.

They briefed the Minister on the situation in Burma and on the work of the NCGUB to promote peaceful political change in that country. Dr. Sein Win also welcomed Irish Aid support for human rights and democratisation in Burma, particularly in support of Burmese refugees in Thailand.

Minister Lenihan expressed the Government's deep concern at the human rights situation in Burma, and particularly expressed his deepest concern at reports of the use of rape as a weapon by the military. The Minister strongly stated Ireland's commitment to supporting political change, peaceful reconciliation and respect for human rights in Burma.

"I am horrified by reports of the use of rape as a weapon by the military regime in their ongoing campaign against civilians in conflict areas. The regime in Burma must immediately put a stop to this utterly reprehensible practice, as well as other serious human rights violations. I remain deeply concerned at the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and would, once again, urge the Burmese government to restore fully her freedom and civil liberties, as well as those of other political prisoners."

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