



# LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

APRIL  
2009

## ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

### *Politics and Government*

**1 Apr 2009 Mr. Jim Cunningham:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps the Government has taken to monitor the political situation in Burma. [266093]*

**Bill Rammell:** *Our embassy in Rangoon continues its regular contact with representatives of political and ethnic groups, local and international non-governmental organisations, political prisoner support networks, and UN agencies operating on the ground, and our ambassador maintains a robust dialogue with ministers and officials in the military government.*

*We also remain in close contact with the UN Secretary-General, his special adviser Ibrahim Gambari, and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma. We discuss Burma frequently with countries in the region including China, India and Burma's fellow members of the Association of South East Asian Nations. Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development officials are in touch with a wide range of stakeholder groups outside of Burma, including in neighbouring Thailand and in the UK.*

### *Japan: Burma*

**23 April 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to encourage the Government of Japan to adopt a stronger position in regard to the political and human rights situation in Burma. [270424]*

**Bill Rammell:** *We regularly discuss the political and human rights situation with Japan at senior official level in Tokyo, London and in New York, where Japan attends meetings of the UN Secretary General's Group of Friends of Burma. I also raised Burma during my visit to Japan in March 2009. We hope there will be a further opportunity to discuss Burma at the G8 summit in July 2009.*

**23 April 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he (a) has had and (b) plans to have with the Government of Japan on the political and human rights situation in Burma. [270425]*

**Bill Rammell:** *We regularly discuss the political and human rights situation with Japan at ministerial and at senior official level in Tokyo, London and in New York, where Japan attends meetings of the UN Secretary General's Group of Friends of Burma. I also raised Burma during my visit to Japan in March 2009. We hope there will be a further opportunity to discuss Burma at the G8 summit in July.*

*We encourage Japan, as an important donor, to bring its influence to bear on the Burmese regime to respond to the demands of the UN Security Council, to implement peaceful political change and to respect human rights.*

**24 April 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the government of Japan on the forthcoming elections in Burma planned for 2010, with particular reference to the government of Japan's provision of technical training to election officials. [270423]*

**Bill Rammell:** *We have been in contact with our Japanese colleagues regarding the 2010 elections in*

Burma. We have raised our concerns that the elections look set to be neither free nor fair. The Japanese authorities recognise these concerns, but argue that the elections themselves represent progress and that the international community should be working within its framework if possible.

We are not aware of any plans by the Japanese government to train election officials.

### **Human Rights**

**23 April 2009 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has discussed the political and human rights situation in Burma with his Japanese counterpart; and what plans he has for future discussions. [270223]

**Bill Rammell:** We regularly discuss the political and human rights situation with Japan at ministerial and at senior official level in Tokyo, London and in New York, where Japan attends meetings of the UN Secretary-General's Group of Friends of Burma. I also raised Burma during my visit to Japan in March 2009. We hope there will be a further opportunity to discuss Burma at the G8 summit in July.

We encourage Japan, as an important donor, to bring its influence to bear on the Burmese regime to respond to the demands of the UN Security Council, to implement peaceful political change and to respect human rights.

### **Asylum: Overseas Aid**

**23 April 2009 Mr. John Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the Government's official development assistance has been spent on providing temporary assistance to refugees from developing countries in the last two years. [269085]

**Mr. Michael Foster:** Nearly all of the UK Government's support for refugees in developing countries is through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the lead UN agency for providing support to refugees. The assistance to UNHCR includes some support for internally displaced people as well as for refugees. Some funding is provided to other agencies. The most substantial of which is that given to the Thai Burma Border Consortium which provides support to refugees on the Burma/Thai border.

Funding	2007	2008
UNHCR (£ million)	30.7	27.7
Thai Burma Border Consortium (£ million)	0.3	1.1
Total (£ million)	31.7	28.5
As a proportion of official development assistance (%)	0.57	0.50

There may be some other small elements of funding through other organizations which support refugees as part of grants not specifically focused on refugees.

### **Asylum: Thailand**

**27 April 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what reports he has received on the percentage of people in refugee camps on the Thailand-Burma border who are malnourished.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** The Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) carries out annual nutrition surveys of children aged between six months and five years who are living in the refugee camps on the Thailand Burma border. According to TBBC's 2008 survey, the rates were 2.7 per cent. for acute malnutrition and 36.2 per cent. for chronic malnutrition.

### **Burma: Overseas Aid**

**27 April 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether staff of his Department based in Burma have free access to visit all projects in Burma which his Department

funds.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** *Staff from the Department for International Development (DFID) are required to obtain permission from the Burmese authorities before visiting projects outside the city of Rangoon. Permission is usually granted routinely, and we have been able to monitor the progress of our projects effectively.*

**27 April 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** *To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what reports he has received of additional restrictions on access to the delta region of Burma imposed on aid workers in the last six months.*

**Mr. Michael Foster:** *Access for aid workers to the Irrawaddy Delta region of Burma has remained good for the last six months.*

*Earlier this month, responsibility for issuing visas to certain aid agency staff working in the Delta was transferred from the Tripartite Core Group (comprising representatives of the Burma Government, the United Nations and the Association of South East Asian Nations) to the Burmese Foreign Affairs Policy Committee and line Ministries. It is too early yet to assess whether this move will have a significant impact on humanitarian access to the Delta. The European Union, and other international donors, have raised the procedural changes with the Burmese authorities and expressed their concern that humanitarian access should not be affected.*

**27 April 2009 Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** *To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment his Department has made of (a) levels of poverty in Burma and (b) how aid to that country should be targeted.*

**Mr. Michael Foster:** *Little reliable data are available on Burma, but it is clear that poverty levels are very high and getting worse. The most recent overview of poverty across most of the country was an assessment of household living conditions which the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published in June 2007. This assessment found that over a third of the population lived below the poverty line, and 10 percent were in extreme poverty. The assessment was not able to cover areas affected by conflict, where poverty levels are likely to be even higher. Since the UNDP assessment, Burma was struck by Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, and the global economic downturn has reduced the income of many households. In addition, many parts of Chin State have experienced severe food shortages as a result of rat infestations; and conflict continues in some other border areas.*

*In response to this deepening poverty, DFID will expand its aid to Burma by £10 million in each of the financial years 2009-10 and 2010-11. These increases are in addition to those agreed under the comprehensive spending review. We now plan to spend £25 million on Burma in 2009-10 and £28 million in 2010-11. About 60 percent of the increase will be allocated to cyclone-related assistance, and about 40 percent to DFID's regular programme of humanitarian aid across the whole country.*

*The additional cyclone-related assistance will be focused on health, basic education and the restoration of people's livelihoods in rural areas. Much of the increase for the regular programme will be used to help fill funding gaps faced by the Three Diseases Fund to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. We are at the same time increasing our support to refugees, IDPs and others living in conflict-affected areas of Burma. We recently agreed additional funding of up to £280,000 in response to the food shortages in Chin State.*

*Our assistance will continue to be channelled through the United Nations and national and international non-governmental organisations, in line with the European Union Common Position on Burma.*  
*Politics and Government*

**27 April 2009 John Battle:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the new constitution for Burma that will be enacted after elections in 2010. [271108]*

**Bill Rammell:** *We continue to have grave concerns about the Burmese authorities 'roadmap process', the new constitution and elections planned for 2010. The referendum of May 2008 was deeply flawed and the*

*constitution that has emerged from it appears designed to perpetuate military domination of the state. The constitution was drawn up without any meaningful participation by the opposition or the main ethnic groups.*

## **Arms Trade**

**27 April 2009 John Battle:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department holds on which countries are the main arms suppliers to the Government of Burma. [271107]*

**Bill Rammell:** *We understand that the Burmese Government looks to procure military equipment from its traditional allies in the region. However, we do not collate or hold information on Burmese arms supplies or their sources.*

**27 April 2009 John Battle:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Japan on a global arms embargo against Burma. [271193]*

**Bill Rammell:** *The UK supports the imposition of a UN arms embargo but this would require the adoption of a Chapter VII resolution by the Security Council. The current composition of the UN Security Council makes a universal arms ban unlikely at the short term. We have had no recent discussions with Japan on the prospects for the imposition of a global arms embargo.*

*A strict EU arms embargo against Burma is already in place and we discourage all other arms producing countries from selling arms to Burma.*

## **Free Trade: Burma**

**29 April 2009 John Battle:** *To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform what progress has been made in securing an EU-ASEAN free-trade agreement; and whether Burma will be party to this agreement. [271109]*

**Mr. Thomas:** *EU-ASEAN free trade agreement negotiations were launched in May 2007 in Brunei. ASEAN, due to its competitiveness, is a very important market with which to further deepen trade relations. However, since 2007 progress on starting substantive negotiations has been very slow. This has been a result of ASEAN finding it difficult to agree a common negotiating position.*

*The UK position is that Burma should not benefit from a future EU ASEAN FTA. This is an issue to which the UK attaches great importance.*

## **EARLY DAY MOTIONS**

### **EDM 1336: HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA**

23.04.2009

Bercow, John

*That this House expresses profound concern at the desperate and deteriorating human rights situation in Burma; condemns the continuing widespread and systematic use of rape as a weapon of war, torture, forced labour, forced relocation, religious persecution, forcible recruitment of child soldiers and use of human minesweepers by the military regime; further condemns the military offensives in eastern Burma, including attacks on civilians, resulting in the internal displacement of one million people and the destruction of more than 3,300 villages in eastern Burma alone, and the imprisonment of over 2,100 political prisoners and continued detention of Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi; calls on Her Majesty's Government to draw these gross violations of human rights to the urgent attention of the UN Security Council and the Secretary-General; urges Her Majesty's Government, along with other governments, to propose the establishment of a commission of inquiry to investigate allegations of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma; and urges the UN to invoke the principle of Responsibility to Protect in relation to the crisis in Burma.*

## **EDM 670: THAILAND TREATMENT OF ROHINGYA REFUGEES**

03.02.2009

Signed by 52 MPs

## **EDM 671: CLOSURE OF CHURCHES IN RANGOON**

03.02.2009

Signed by 113 MPs

## **EDM 343: UNITED NATIONS AND POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BURMA**

17.02.2009

Signed by 177 MPs

To view the whole list of EDM, please see the below link

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/edmi/>

## **COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

### **2938th GENERAL AFFAIRS Council meeting**

**Luxembourg, 27 April 2009**

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

*“1. The Council reaffirms the European Union’s unwavering commitment to the people of Burma/Myanmar in achieving a peaceful transition to a legitimate civilian system of government, to fight poverty and to improve their social and economic conditions. The Council recognises that the political and socio-economic challenges facing the country can only be addressed through genuine dialogue with all stakeholders, including those from ethnic groups. The Council notes, however, that the authorities of Burma/Myanmar have still to take the steps necessary to make the planned 2010 elections a credible, transparent and inclusive process, based on international standards. It calls for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners and detainees.*

*2. In these circumstances, the Council deems it necessary to extend the current EU Common Position by another year, including the restrictive measures. The Council underlines its readiness to revise, amend or reinforce the measures it has already adopted in light of developments on the ground. The Council reiterates that the EU stands ready to respond positively to genuine progress in Burma/Myanmar. The EU remains open to dialogue with the authorities of Burma/Myanmar and is willing to meet them at ministerial level in the margins of the ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting in Hanoi in May 2009.*

*3. The Council urges the government of Burma/Myanmar to engage more with the international community, to work towards a peaceful transition to democracy. It reaffirms the EU’s support for the Good Offices Mission of the UN Secretary General and his Special Advisor, Mr Gambari, and welcomes their continued personal commitment to further the political process. The EU will continue to promote the action of the Group of Friends of the SG and step up its dialogue on this issue, and on its implications for regional stability, with key actors, including ASEAN and its Member States, the United States, China, India and Japan. The EU encourages the authorities of Burma/Myanmar to engage the UN in a meaningful manner. In this context, the Council expresses its full support for the continued work of EU Special Envoy Piero Fassino in support of UN efforts, as well as coordinating with Asian partners, and in this context invites the Burma/Myanmar authorities to cooperate with him.*

*4. The Council welcomes the adoption of the Resolution 10/27 of the UN Human Rights Council and urges the authorities of Burma/Myanmar to comply with it, in full cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, Mr Quintana, whose extended mandate the Council welcomes. The Council is concerned by the deprivation of fundamental rights of ethnic minorities in Burma/Myanmar, in particular over the situation of the Rohingya ethnic minority in Northern Rakhin State, and urges the authorities to recognize their right to citizenship, and to protect all their human rights.*

5. The Council welcomes the extension of the mandate of the Tripartite Core Group in coordinating post-Cyclone Nargis rehabilitation efforts, and hopes that the TCG will be able to continue its effective role in facilitating the flow of international assistance. In this context, it is critical that unfettered access by humanitarian agencies continues to be ensured. The EU recalls its large and growing role as a donor to the country and stands ready to increase its assistance to the people of Burma/Myanmar further.”

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**Published by The Burma Campaign UK, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT  
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**CAMPAIGNING  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND DEMOCRACY IN BURMA**