



# LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

FEB  
2009

### ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

#### CROSS BORDER AID

**4 Feb 2009 Lord Avebury :** *To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their reaction to reports from the Karen Women's Organisation regarding malnutrition experienced by children in the Ei Thu Ta camp for displaced people in Karen State, Burma, as a result of lack of funding for food rations; and how they will support international humanitarian agencies seeking to alleviate these problems. [HL901]*

**Lord Tunncliffe:** *The Department for International Development (DfID) recognises that child malnutrition among internally displaced people in Burma is a significant concern.*

*In 2008-09 DfID has contributed £1 million to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), which provides food rations to displaced people in Karen state as well as to Burmese refugees in Thailand. This funding represented a 30 per cent increase over our contribution in 2007-08.*

*In December 2008 TBBC submitted to DfID, through Christian Aid, a funding proposal covering three years from April 2009 to March 2012. DfID is considering this proposal in consultation with Christian Aid, other donors to TBBC and TBBC itself. The head of DfID's office in Burma discussed funding needs with TBBC's executive director on 19 January.*

**11 Feb 2009 Ben Chapman:** *To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans his Department has for aid to Thailand. [255793]*

**Mr. Michael Foster:** *We have no plans for bilateral aid to Thailand, which is a successful middle-income country. We are, however, providing this financial year £1 million to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium to assist Burmese refugees in Thailand and internally displaced people in Burma, and £220,000 to three Burmese non-governmental organisations working in northeast Thailand. We are considering proposals for future assistance to organisations on the Thailand-Burma border.*

#### CHIN FAMINE

**12 Feb 2009 Baroness Cox:** *To ask Her Majesty's Government what use has been made of the £600,000 made available by the Department for International Development for food aid for the relief of famine in Chin state, Burma, in the light of recent reports that the majority of people in the affected areas have received no food. [HL1156]*

**Lord Tunncliffe:** *DFID's grant of £600,000 for people affected by food shortages in Chin State is being used by two United Nations agencies and their partners as follows:*

*The United Nations Development Programme is giving funds to 85 villages in the worst affected areas in southern Chin state to provide food. The World Food Programme, alongside three non-governmental organisations working in Chin state, is providing a mixture of food and cash for work in 54 villages.*

*DFID has asked both agencies to investigate reports from Chin organisations that some villages are not being reached by this aid.*

**Baroness Cox:** *To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they are making to the United Nations Development Programme and the World Food Programme to provide help with logistical support,*

*including helicopter food drops, bulldozers for road access and equipment to clear rivers for boat transport to accelerate delivery of food to people suffering from famine in Chin state, Burma. [HL1157]*

**Lord Tunncliffe:** *The Department for International Development (DFID) regularly discusses with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP) their logistic arrangements for delivering food to people who need it in Chin state.*

*WFP's view has been that the use of helicopters would not be the most appropriate means of delivering food in the context of Chin state. We will, however, encourage WFP to keep the situation under review and to discuss with the Burmese authorities whether helicopters could be used effectively.*

*The provision of bulldozers or other equipment to improve roads and clear rivers would not be consistent with the EU common position on Burma.*

## **POLITICAL PRISONERS**

**2 Feb 2009 John Bercow:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government has taken through the United Nations on the arrests of democracy activists in Burma. [250799]*

**Bill Rammell:** *The UK has consistently supported firm action in all UN bodies on the human rights abuses perpetrated by the Burmese regime. The UK supported a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly on 21 November 2008 which called on Burma to release, without delay and conditions, opposition activists who have been arrested arbitrarily. It also condemned the ongoing, systematic violations of civil, political, economic and social rights of the people of Burma.*

*Our ambassador in Burma has made clear to Burmese Ministers that all political prisoners must be released in line with UN Security Council demands. We will continue to work to keep the issue of Burma on the agenda of the UN Security Council.*

## **RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION**

**4 Feb 2009 Mr. Crabb:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the State Peace and Development Council in Burma on its recent order to close churches in Rangoon. [253435]*

**Bill Rammell:** *We are concerned that the Burmese regime has imposed restrictions on churches and other places of worship for religious minorities in Rangoon. We condemn the marginalisation or persecution of any community based on their religious beliefs. The regime's actions are part of a wider deterioration of the human rights situation in Burma and the UK will continue to ask the UN Secretary-General's Good Offices mission and representatives of the UN human rights bodies to raise our concerns with the State Peace and Development Council.*

**12 Feb 2009 Mr. Clappison:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received of (a) closures of churches in Burma and (b) the treatment of Christians in that country; what recent representations he has made to the government of Burma on the matter; and if he will make a statement.*

**Bill Rammell:** *We are concerned that the Burmese regime has imposed restrictions on churches and other places of worship for religious minorities in Rangoon. We condemn the marginalisation or persecution of any community based on their religious beliefs. We also remain concerned about reports that the mainly Buddhist Burmese authorities restrict freedom of religion. There are Christians among a variety of ethnic groups in Burma, though their persecution by the authorities appears to be based largely on their ethnicity rather than their faith.*

*The regime's actions are part of a wider deterioration of the human rights situation in Burma and the UK will continue to ask the UN Secretary-General's Good Offices mission and representatives of the UN human rights bodies to raise our concerns with the State Peace and Development Council.*

## DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

**24 Feb 2009 Baroness Cox:** *In Burma, the SPDC military regime is notorious for its brutal suppression of Buddhist monks and systematic oppression of non-Buddhists. Rohingya Muslims are denied citizenship and suffer systematic discrimination; mosques and madrassas have been demolished and, to quote a Rohingya leader,*

*“We are a people at the brink of extermination”.*

*Christians also suffer. Last month more than 100 house churches were forced to close, and pastors were threatened with imprisonment, while in the Chin state, Christians have been forced to destroy crosses and churches and to build Buddhist pagodas in their place. Will Her Majesty’s Government make strong representations to the SPDC concerning religious persecution in Burma today?*

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth office (Lord Malloch-Brown):** *The noble Baroness, Lady Cox, also raised the case of Burma. I reassure her that our ambassador in Rangoon frequently presses the Burmese authorities to end human rights abuses. We condemn the marginalisation or persecution of any community based on its religious beliefs. Although it makes the abuses no less serious, the persecution of religious minority groups by the Burmese authorities is often based in reality on their ethnicity and a perceived threat to security rather than solely on their faith.*

*Her full speech and a link to the Hansard record of the debate is as follows:*

*<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/text/90224-0011.htm#09022472000227>*

## EU Presidency Statement calling for all-inclusive dialogue in Burma/ Myanmar

*The Presidency of the EU notes the recent visits by the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser Ibrahim Gambari and UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Tomás Ojea Quintana. The Presidency also notes the briefing by Mr. Gambari in the Security Council last Friday (20th February), and attended the meeting of “Group of Friends of SG on Myanmar” today.*

*In this context, the Presidency reiterates the EU’s support for the good offices role of the UN SG as mandated by the UN General Assembly resolution 63/245 from December 24, 2008, and, with regret, notes the information by Mr. Gambari that, so far, there is no tangible outcome of his visits to Burma/Myanmar.*

*The Presidency recalls that the UN GA resolution stated that the political process in the country is “not transparent, inclusive, free and fair, and that the procedures established for the drafting of the constitution resulted in the de facto exclusion of the opposition from the process.” The Presidency shares the view expressed by Mr. Gambari that it is the time to demonstrate the Myanmar’s commitment to addressing concretely the issues of concern to the international community.*

*The Presidency of the EU strongly calls for an immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, lifting all restrictions on political parties, and all-inclusive dialogue between the authorities and the democratic forces, including ethnic groups.*

## EARLY DAY MOTIONS

### EDM 670: THAILAND’S TREATMENT OF ROHINGYA REFUGEES

03.02.2009

Signed by 44 Members

(Bercow, John)

*That this House is appalled that Thailand’s navy has left around 1,000 Rohingya refugees adrift in the ocean in boats without engines or food or water; is deeply concerned that hundreds may have died as a result; notes that the Rohingya people face severe persecution in Burma, including denial of citizenship, a ban on marriage without government permission, severe restrictions of movement, religious persecution,*

*extortion, land confiscation and restrictions on access to education; and calls on Thailand to grant UNHCR access to Rohingya refugees in Thailand, to end forced repatriations and to allow Rohingya and other refugees in Thailand to claim asylum and be given sanctuary.*

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

03.02.2009

Signed by 66 members  
(Bercow, John)

*That this House expresses deep concern at recent events in Burma with authorities in Rangoon ordering that services cease in at least a 100 local churches with a threat of prison for non-compliance; notes the concern of some of the local Christians who believe that the immediate cause of the crackdown is church involvement in providing relief for victims of Cyclone Nargis; further notes continued widespread discrimination against religious minorities and in some places violent persecution of Christians and Muslims in other parts of Burma; calls on the Government to raise concerns about religious freedom 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 United Nations Secretary General to increase and intensify efforts to urge 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.*

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