



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

JULY
2007

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

GENERAL

10 July 2007: Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for measures to (a) promote human rights and democracy and (b) encourage dialogue between parties in conflict in Burma.

Meg Munn: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) identifies Burma as a country of concern in our 2006 Annual Report on Human Rights. Our aim 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 are at the forefront of international efforts to encourage the military regime to restore 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, most recently when our ambassador in Rangoon met the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister and the Ministers of Planning and Health on 12-13 June. Our embassy in Rangoon is also delivering capacity building assistance through the FCO Global Opportunities Fund in support of these objectives.

We believe the UN has a key role to play in addressing the political and humanitarian challenges in Burma. We shall continue to support the efforts of the UN, including the good offices mandate of the Secretary-General.

AID

9 July 2007: Mr. Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how UK funds previously directed through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Burma are being allocated since the closure of ICRC offices in Burma.

Mr. Malik: In 2006 DFID allocated £500,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Burma, approximately two-thirds of which was used to provide humanitarian and protection assistance to internally displaced people (IDPs) in Eastern Burma. All of these funds have been spent and accounted for. The ICRC has not requested further funding. In 2007 DFID is providing support to internally displaced people in Burma through a grant of £400,000 to support community-based groups (mostly Christian and Buddhist networks) working inside Burma who are able to provide humanitarian assistance in the short term to IDPs who would otherwise receive no help. This complements the assistance to IDPs cross-border from Thailand which we also support.

9 July 2007: Mr. Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what action he is taking to urge the Burmese military regime to permit unhindered access to prisons in Burma by the International Committee of the Red Cross; (2) what action he is taking to urge the Burmese military regime to re-open the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Meg Munn: We share the deep concerns of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) over the large-scale violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Burmese Government against civilians. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development released a joint statement on 29 June condemning the Burmese Government's failure to co-operate with the ICRC in its efforts to alleviate the suffering of the ordinary people of Burma and to assist mine victims and prisoners.

The statement can be found at:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front/pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391629&a=KArticle&aid=1183540269106&year=2007&month=2007-06-01>

The European Commission has also issued a press statement expressing its concern about restrictions on the work of the ICRC in Burma. The statement can be found at:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1012&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>
<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1012&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

We regularly raise our concerns with the regime about the serious humanitarian and human rights situation in Burma and will continue to emphasise the importance of the ICRC's humanitarian assistance in Burma.

CROSS-BORDER AID

26 July 2007: Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contribution the Government are making to support the work of non-governmental organisations working with Karen refugees on the Thai-Burma border; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Malik: DFID will provide £1.8 million in the period from July 2005 to March 2008 to support Thai based non-governmental organisations to work with refugees, the majority of whom are Karen, and provide cross-border support to internally displaced people on the Thai-Burma border. The British Embassy in Bangkok regularly speaks to the Royal Thai Government on issues affecting Burmese refugees in Thailand.

DFID considers that both in-country and cross border support is important. It will continue to review the options for reaching displaced people, and the best balance between support from inside Burma and through cross-border border groups and support to refugees. Decisions will take into account planned new work by humanitarian experts from UN OCHA, which will provide better independent analysis of the needs of displaced people, a clearer picture of what other donors are doing, and a better assessment of where there are gaps.

INDIA

25 July 2007: Roger Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the reports that the Indian Government has confirmed that negotiations are ongoing to supply military advance light helicopters to Burma/Myanmar and that such helicopters would contain significant components from EU countries, including the UK; and what steps the Government are taking to ensure that the EU arms embargo on Burma is enforced and UK components are not transferred from India to Burma. (2) what discussions the Government have had with India on its proposed sale of military advanced light helicopters to Burma/Myanmar; and what steps the Government have taken to ensure that UK military equipment, including components, is not transferred to Myanmar as part of increasing defence co-operation between the two countries.

Meg Munn: The Indian Ministry of External Affairs has confirmed that they are not negotiating the sale of advanced light helicopters with the Burmese Government, as alleged in a report published by Amnesty International and Saferworld. The Government consider all applications for the export of military equipment on a case by case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. This includes an assessment of whether there is a risk that the goods in question will be diverted within the buyer country or re-exported under undesirable conditions. We would lobby India, or any other exporting country, in the event of any decision to re-export such goods to Burma.

5 July: Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the use that the Army and Air Force in Burma will make of military material and training recently provided by India; (2) what plans he has to make representations to the government of India on its proposed training of Burma Army personnel in India.

Meg Munn: We have made no such detailed assessment, but we raise Burma with the Indian authorities as part of our regular dialogue with the Indians on regional security and they are aware of our concern. We ask

the Indian authorities to use their influence with the Government of Burma to encourage them to respect human rights and to restore democratic rule. We are concerned that the Government of Burma continues to spend scarce resources on weaponry for its 400,000-strong army, while expenditure on health and education is at minimal levels.

25 July 2007: Lord Hylton: asked Her Majesty's Government:

Whether supply by India to Burma of the Advanced Light Helicopter, containing many components made in Europe, would breach the current European Union arms embargo on Burma; and what representations they have received on this matter from British and European non-governmental organisations.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Malloch-Brown): We have received the report released by European non-governmental organisations, including Amnesty International and Saferworld, on 16 July, suggesting that exports of Advanced Light Helicopters from India to Burma may be planned. We welcome the subsequent statement by the Indian authorities denying that this is the case. We have, none the less, raised our concerns with our partners in Brussels and will be discussing the matter with them. If we found that European components were to be used in goods being exported to an embargoed country, we and EU partners would make representations to the exporting country.

SANCTIONS

9 July 2007: Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the objectives are of the EU sanctions against Burma; and what assessment he has made of progress made towards meeting these objectives.

David Miliband: The EU's sanctions, as set out in the EU common position on Burma, are an expression of the EU's disapproval of the Burmese regime and its policies and are intended to apply pressure for change. The common position includes a visa ban and assets freeze aimed at the Burmese leaders, their families and associates who formulate, implement or benefit from policies that impede Burma's transition to democracy. The common position has two strengths: firstly, it delivers a message to the regime that the EU condemns the regime's actions towards the Burmese people; secondly, it is a unified position supported by all members of the EU and thus delivers a common and united EU message to the regime. We are disappointed that the Burmese Government has so far failed to respond to the pressure and encouragement of the international community to embrace substantive democratic change and national reconciliation. While we do not believe that sanctions used in isolation will bring about political change in Burma, we take the view that targeted measures aimed at senior members of the regime and their associates, applied in combination with the engagement of the UN and our international partners in the region, provide a clear incentive for substantial political change.

UNITED NATIONS

3 July 2007: Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what diplomatic steps the United Nations has taken on Burma since a resolution was vetoed in January.

Meg Munn: On 22 May, the UN Secretary-General announced that Ibrahim Gambari, the UN Special Adviser on the International Compact in Iraq and Other Issues, would continue to pursue the Good Offices mandate on Burma. The UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, visited Burma from 25 to 29 June to address compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1612, which lays down reporting requirements for a number of countries of concern, including Burma. The UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Margareta Wahlstrom, visited Burma from 4 to 9 April to assess the humanitarian situation in Burma. The UN has a key role to play in addressing the political and humanitarian challenges in Burma. The UK will continue to support the UN's efforts in Burma.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

A new Early Day Motion on MPs in Burma was tabled in the last week of Parliament and received an incredible 50 signatures of support in just three days. With the total number of EDMs now at seven, this is the highest number of EDMs on Burma in a single Parliamentary year that there has ever been.

EDM 1971: MEMBERS OF BURMESE PARLIAMENT IMPRISONED IN BURMA: Signed by 50 MPs

EDM 1868: AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S 62nd BIRTHDAY: Signed by 76 MPs.

EDM: 1861: BURMA AND INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS: Signed by 60 MPs.

EDM 662: VETO OF DRAFT UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION ON BURMA: Signed by 83 MPs.

EDM 658: RELIGIOUS RESTRICTIONS, DISCRIMINATION AND PERSECUTION IN BURMA: Signed by 150 MPs.

EDM 498: TARGETED INVESTMENT SANCTIONS AGAINST BURMA'S DICTATORSHIP: Signed by 81 MPs

EDM 367: UN SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION ON BURMA: Signed by 175 MPs.

To view the full list of Mps who have signed these EDMs please visit:

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/Default.aspx>

DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

On **3rd July** Burma was discussed during Foreign Office questions:

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the situation in Burma.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Meg Munn): I have not had any discussions on the situation in Burma with my EU counterparts. However, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Margaret Beckett), the then Foreign Secretary, and her EU colleagues issued a statement at the General Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg on 23 April expressing concern about the situation in Burma. EU Ministers and their Asian counterparts issued a further statement at the Asia-Europe Foreign Ministers meeting in Hamburg on 29 May.

Julie Morgan: Congratulations, Mr. Speaker, on your birthday.

I thank the Minister for her response, and I welcome her to her new post. Does she think that there is any more that the EU can do to help end the suffering and the abuse of human rights endured by many thousands of people in Burma? Those abuses, particularly the practice of portering—using detainees as porters in armed conflicts—were even condemned last Friday by the International Committee of the Red Cross, which usually remains neutral. That is the strongest example of its speaking out since Rwanda.

Meg Munn: I thank my hon. Friend for her warm comments, and I pay tribute to the work that she has done on Burma over many years. The EU common position is the best achievable policy. The EU acting as 27 carries more weight than individual members acting alone. However, we are deeply concerned that the ICRC has been forced to close two field offices in Burma, and we share the concerns that it has expressed. We will continue to keep the matter under review, and I entirely share the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I welcome the Minister to her new position. As secretary of the all-party group for democracy in Burma, may I tell her that we enjoyed a very good relationship with her predecessor, the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), and I hope that

we will enjoy a similar relationship with her? Her predecessor wrote to me last month explaining that the Government were pursuing the question of non-British companies investing in Burma through the British Virgin Islands. Requests were made for that claim to be investigated by the local authorities there, so can she tell me what progress has been made?

Meg Munn: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and congratulate him on his work on the all-party group on Burma; that group is widely appreciated throughout the House. Unfortunately, during my few days in post I have been unable to attain the level of detail to be able to answer his question. I hope that he will bear with me by allowing me to write to him on it. I will certainly pursue the matter on his behalf.

On **19 July 2007** Burma was raised during a discussion on business of the house:

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North) (Lab): When can we have a debate about arms exports? I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend is aware of the report published by Amnesty and other organisations this week about the possibility of India supplying Burma with advanced light helicopters, which are built containing components made in the EU and the UK, despite the EU arms embargo as a result of the appalling history of human rights in Burma. I have been contacted this week by a number of my constituents about this issue. How can we take it forward?

Ms Harman: First, I pay tribute to Amnesty for the work that it has done on this report and for all the important work that it does. The House may be aware that the Indian Government have denied that they have sold the helicopters to Burma, but it is something that we are concerned about and that we have raised with our partners in the European Union. We are all appalled at the human rights abuses in Burma, and want to work as hard as we can to put pressure on it.

On **24th July** Burma was raised during a debate on global poverty:

Mr. Thomas: I turn to the comments of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone). She rightly raised the issue of corruption and governance. She will know of the considerable effort that we have made to help countries put in place the robust financial systems that they need to ensure that our aid money, and their own tax revenues, are well spent. She will know, too, that on occasion we have withheld aid from countries which we did not think had made enough progress in putting such financial systems in place.

On governance, we know that charity is not enough. The point did not seem to have been properly grasped in the report. NGOs have a crucial role to play, but on their own they are not enough. In the end, it is Governments whom we must help—not Governments in Sudan, of course, or in Zimbabwe, and certainly not in Burma, but yes, Governments in Ghana, Zambia, Mozambique, in Rwanda definitely, India, Afghanistan, Tanzania and Botswana. We must help Governments so that they can help their people. In the end it is Governments who have to create health services for all their people, build an effective civil service, and put in place the mechanisms to ensure that their countries have a strong Parliament, free media and a vibrant civil society. It is Governments who can create the economic stability necessary for the private sector to thrive.

On **26 July** Burma was again raised during a discussion on business of the house:

John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): May we please have a debate in Government on time on the Floor of the House on the continuing crisis in Burma? Given that the illegal military dictatorship there is guilty of extra-judicial killings, rape as a weapon of war, compulsory relocation, forced labour, the use of child soldiers, the use of human minesweepers and the bestial destruction of villages throughout eastern Burma on virtually a daily basis and given that this week the report of the Select Committee on International Development calls for significant changes in Government policy towards the internally displaced people and refugees in the area, does the right hon. and learned Lady not agree that it is about time that we had the first ever debate here in this Chamber on how, through concerted action, we can force the Government of Burma to stop slaughtering their people and to start liberating them?

Ms Harman: The whole House will identify with the sentiments that the hon. Gentleman has expressed about the Government of Burma. As I have announced, there will be on a debate on Thursday 11 October

on the report on human rights from the Foreign Affairs Committee. I hope that will give him and other hon. Members the opportunity to raise the issue of the appalling breaches of human rights in Burma.

DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

On **12th July** Burma was raised during a debate on the UK Borders Bill:

Lord Hylton: I added my name to Amendment No. 33, already spoken to by the noble Lord, Lord Judd. That does not mean to say that I do not support the right reverend Prelate's Amendment No. 32. However, I shall raise one or two minor points about it. First, I wonder whether it goes sufficiently wide, particularly in the direction of the dependant children of families already in this country. Secondly, in subsection (1)(d) it refers to those who remain in the UK following the making of a claim. Would that also cover those whose cases fail but who cannot be returned to their country of origin, for one reason or another? At Second Reading I mentioned the significant numbers of asylum applicants who failed to present their cases to the high standard required for refugee status. Many of those thus refused have not been deported, nor have they been able to return voluntarily. Many genuinely need humanitarian protection because they come from countries in turmoil such as Iraq, Somalia or Darfur, or countries suffering repression such as Iran, Burma or China. Others are at risk because of their religious beliefs.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO AID TO BURMA.

The International Development Committee published its report on aid to Burma on **July 25th**. It can be viewed at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmintdev.htm>

The report contained strong criticism of existing DFID policy, supporting arguments made by organizations such as the Burma Campaign UK that aid should be increased, delivered cross-border, and support be given to projects and organizations promoting human rights and democracy in Burma. More information is available in Last Month in Burma, the sister publication of Last Month in Parliament.

QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE

The Quadripartite Committee is a joint committee of the Defence, Foreign Affairs, International Development and Trade and Industry Committees. They work together to examine the Government's strategic export control system and policies. On **July 23rd** they issued their first report, which contained several references to Burma. It can be viewed in full at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmtrdind/117/11702.htm>

Extracts referring to Burma follow:

326. When she gave evidence we asked the then Foreign Secretary how explicit the link had to be between an export and the risk of its use for internal repression before an export licence was refused. She replied:

Obviously we take a certain amount of account of the country—for example, if it were Burma then we just would not be selling anything—but the emphasis on scrutinising and taking human rights issues into account is more on the basis of what is the equipment rather than the top of the list being what is the country, so that is always what you would look at. First, is this equipment that could be misused in this way, and then one would look at whether these are circumstances in which one might anticipate it would be safe to let such equipment go, or not so safe.

111. The Minister explained that, while the IDA list was the “most appropriate of those that are available”, [154] it was not exhaustive and the Government looked at all licence applications for Iraq, Sudan and Nepal where they went beyond the value threshold using the methodology, and that “we have recently taken a decision to extend still further to Afghanistan, Burma, Burundi, Chad, Cote D'Ivoire, DRC, [155] Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Zimbabwe for which we look at all the licence applications in those circumstances”. [156]

Here you can browse the report together with the Proceedings of the Committee. The published report was ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 23 July 2007.

215. Following press reports we asked the Foreign Secretary about reports that maritime-patrol aircraft which had been exported from the UK to India were to be sold by the Indian government to Burma and suggested that the export licence should have required a clause in the contract restricting resale.[290] The Foreign Secretary commented:

With the benefit of hindsight I suppose one could say it might have been desirable [emphasis added] but I think the original contract would have been rather a long time ago, possibly even decades [...] because we are talking about quite elderly aircraft, but certainly obviously that is something that if a similar export took place today one would consider. We have been in touch with the Government of India to express our concern and they have assured us that these are unarmed aircraft and it is thought that that will remain the position, and obviously we would look very carefully to see whether any requests that were being made for military components in the future might be relevant to these aircraft because [...] there was nothing in the original contract.[291]

216. The Government confirmed that it had complete discretion to revoke an export licence. Subject to due process and proper consideration, this discretion was not fettered in any way, including the possibility that compensation may need to be paid.[292]

217. While we accept that little can now be done in respect of the proposed export of British-made maritime-patrol aircraft from India to Burma, we recommend that it should become a standard requirement of licensing that export contracts for goods on the Military List contain a clause preventing re-export to a destination subject to UN or EU embargo. In addition, the contracts should include a subrogation clause allowing the UK Government to stand in the place of the exporter to enforce the contract in British or foreign courts. We also recommend that the Government require as a condition of licensing that all export contracts make provision to allow for end-use inspections.

218. After we had taken evidence in July 2007 European and international NGOs, including Amnesty International and Saferworld, claimed in a report[293] that a transfer to Burma of a military helicopter containing components and technology from as many as six European Union countries—including the UK—threatened to undermine an EU arms embargo on Burma. We have raised the case with the Government.

STATEMENTS BY MPs

Government must tackle loopholes in Burma arms embargo - Moore

16 July 2007

Commenting on a joint Saferworld and Amnesty International report which suggests that British military components could be sold to the military junta in Burma in contradiction of the European arms embargo, Liberal Democrat Shadow Foreign Secretary, Michael Moore MP said:

“The European Union has rightly imposed an arms embargo on the barbaric military junta in Burma, but this report highlights what appear to be serious flaws in arms export controls which threaten to undermine such embargoes.

“The Government must urgently address loopholes which allow British military components to be re-exported by third party countries and ought to use the current review of the Export Control Act as an opportunity to establish robust end-use monitoring of arms sales.

“Internationally, the Government must put itself at the heart of efforts to establish a robust Arms Trade Treaty and should use its influence to bring key states such as the United States and China on board.”

IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

From Christian Solidarity Worldwide:

PHOTO EXHIBITION ON BURMA OPENS AT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

MONDAY **16 JULY 2007**, 6.30PM

A new photo exhibition on Burma will open on Monday 16 July 2007 at 6.30pm with a cocktail reception at the European Parliament in Brussels. The event is being hosted by British MEPs Timothy Kirkhope and Geoffrey Van Orden in cooperation with Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and the Euro-Burma Office. The exhibition will showcase the work of photographers Philip Daly and Toby Madden. Their pictures highlight a number of human rights issues related to Burma including landmine victims, refugees on the Thai side of the border, and the plight of Burma's internally displaced population.....The exhibition will run until the European Parliament closes for summer on July 18.

STATEMENT BY EUROPEAN COMMISSION

IP/07/1012 Brussels, **4 July 2007**

Burma/Myanmar: the European Commission supports ICRC's demand for the respect of International Humanitarian Law

On 29 June 2007, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) publicly denounced the government of Burma/Myanmar for violations of international humanitarian law affecting civilians and detainees and for imposing increasingly severe restrictions on ICRC's work. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood policy, and Louis Michel, Commissioner in charge of Humanitarian Aid, have both voiced their concerns about ICRC's work in Burma/Myanmar being subject to increasing pressure and restrictions. They called on the Burma/Myanmar authorities to re-start the dialogue with ICRC as soon as possible.

Commissioner Michel said: "I am concerned about the seriousness of the violations denounced by the ICRC. The Commission is a long-time supporter of ICRC. Its activities to help civilians in conflict and detainees are recognised worldwide and the provisions of the international humanitarian law should also be fully applied in Burma/Myanmar."

Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner added: "It is indeed essential that the organisation can resume its activities in Burma/Myanmar according to its international mandate. The Commission stands ready to facilitate the dialogue between the government and the ICRC."

The European Commission, under its humanitarian aid (ECHO) programmes and under other aid programmes, continues to provide substantial assistance to civilian population of Burma/Myanmar through International NGOs, United Nations agencies and the Red Cross family. Since 2003, ECHO has supported the ICRC with €3.5 million.

For more information: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/myanmar/intro/index.htm

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