



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

MARCH
2008

DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Discussions with EU on Burma

17 March

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): *The Prime Minister has stressed the importance of ensuring stability beyond the borders of Europe. Were there any discussions about Burma because, obviously, the UN envoy, Mr. Gambari, has failed in his mission to bring about stability and progress there? If the Prime Minister had no opportunity for discussions on this occasion, will he use the meeting with Mr. Sarkozy later in the week to discuss that matter?*

The Prime Minister: *My right hon. Friend is right that Burma is an issue on which we have common cause with many people in the rest of Europe and, indeed, in the rest of the world. Mr. Gambari has just finished his visits to Burma. It is important that we recognise that the Burmese regime's proposals for a referendum and elections that would exclude Aung San Suu Kyi are totally unacceptable. She should be released from house arrest immediately. Democratic elections should happen, and there should be reconciliation to bring the forces in the country together. I will continue to press that cause in the company of my European colleagues.*

Burmese Economy

18 March

Mr Alan Milburn (Darlington) (Lab): *The economies that have done best in recent times are those that have been most open. To see that, we need only compare the performances of Thailand and Burma or, even more graphically, North Korea and South Korea; we need only look at the experiences of the countries of Asia or Latin America, which by opening their markets—if not yet always their politics—have produced the biggest reduction in poverty that the world has ever seen.*

Need for International Pressure

25 March

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Meg Munn): *We were disappointed by the regime's refusal to engage with the UN special envoy on Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, during his visit. It shows no willingness to meet the demands of the international community, in particular the need for a genuine and inclusive process of national reconciliation. The regime is determined to press ahead with its flawed road map process, which risks entrenching division and instability in the country.*

Ann McKechin: *I thank my hon. Friend for her comments, and I share her disappointment with the outcome of the recent visit by the UN envoy. Does she share my concern about the proposed referendum that the Burmese regime anticipates will take place in May? It is likely that it will wish to retain a large block vote for the military in the new Parliament, and to ban opposition leaders. What dialogue has she had with Burma's neighbours, including China and India, on what they will do to put pressure on the Burmese regime to ensure that the process is much more democratic than is currently proposed?*

Meg Munn: *My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the proposals give no cause for optimism at all. There is no inclusive process in the proposals; indeed, the constitution on which the referendum would take place has not been seen. She rightly identifies the important role of China and India. My right hon. and noble Friend Lord Malloch-Brown has done a great deal to work with them. The Prime Minister raised the matters on his visits to China and India, and we will continue to press them to use their influence.*

John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): *On 19 November 2007, in response to the institutionalised bestiality*

of the Burmese regime, the Council of the European Union announced new sanctions in respect of the Government of Burma covering gems, metal and timber; 127 days later, why have those sanctions not been fully implemented? When does the Under-Secretary of State estimate that they will be, and do the Government intend to press for a strengthening of the EU common position, including a ban on all investment, when the matter comes up for consideration next month?

Meg Munn: *As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the EU ban on those matters was formalised in January, so sanctions should be in force, and we are monitoring their effect. However, we are not complacent, and we will consider pressing for further sanctions if the regime does not continue to take steps along the lines set out by the United Nations.*

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): *Peaceful attempts have been made to demand democratic values in Burma and other locations across the globe. What specific attention have the Government given to efforts to support those peaceful attempts, particularly by the opposition in Burma?*

Meg Munn: *The Government are in touch with a range of countries in the region, particularly neighbouring countries: not just China and India but the ASEAN—Association of South East Asian Nations—countries. ASEAN has made a decision to step back, but individual countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia have proposed talking to the Burmese about encouraging peaceful ways forward, and we support those efforts.*

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South) (Lab/Co-op): *A few weeks ago, I met Piero Fassino, the EU's envoy to Burma, who has been unable to go there since he was appointed, which indicates the military regime's attitude. What steps can my hon. Friend and her fellow Ministers in the EU take to press for tougher, co-ordinated international action, both within the EU and through their contacts with other international organisations?*

Meg Munn: *My hon. Friend is right that we should seek to get the Burmese regime to co-operate with a number of processes to demonstrate that it is willing to move towards a more democratic situation. We remain engaged in the United Nations through the Secretary-General's "group of friends". We are involved, too, through the EU, and as I have said, we continue to lobby and discuss the situation with countries in the region. We want Sergio Pinheiro, the UN human rights envoy, to be able to return and make a proper assessment of the human rights situation in Burma, and that is something to which we have given priority.*

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk) (Con): *Ministers have said on many occasions that the Government would support further action at the UN and through the EU on Burma if the Burmese Government failed to make progress on political reform and reconciliation. It appears to many hon. Members that the Burmese Government do not respond to virtually anything; the only thing to which they seem to respond in a small way is strong international opinion. Given that Mr. Gambari has said that his visit did not yield "any tangible outcome", will the Government push for Burma to be put on the UN Security Council's formal agenda, and for meaningful action such as a UN arms embargo to be finally adopted?*

Meg Munn: *The hon. Gentleman raises some important matters. We are concerned about the lack of progress and, indeed, in some respects, matters have gone backwards. We would certainly consider pushing for the issue to be discussed further at the UN, and we would support a UN call for an arms embargo.*

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Burma: Politics and Government

3 March

Mr. MacDougall: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's latest assessment is of the political situation in Burma.*

Dr. Howells [holding answer 29 February 2008]: *The Government continue to be deeply concerned by the political situation in Burma. Fundamental civil and human rights continue to be abused. Ethnic minority groups are subject to particular abuse and marginalisation. The military Government impose tight controls on the freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of the media. The civil opposition continues*

to be harassed and suppressed. 2,000 political prisoners continue to be detained.

On 9 February, the Burmese regime announced that it would hold a referendum on a new constitution in May 2008 and elections in 2010 as part of its "Roadmap" process. The civil opposition and representatives of many ethnic groups have been excluded from the constitution-drafting process. Unless the constitution and the process is truly inclusive and transparent, it will not lead to genuine national reconciliation. We are particularly concerned at the regime's attempts to exclude Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from the political process and fear that this will only exacerbate tension and instability in Burma. In our contacts with the military Government and those who have influence over them, we are stressing the need for all political actors, including Aung San Suu Kyi, to be allowed to play their full part in shaping the country's future.

On 12 February, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reiterated our demand that the Burmese regime immediately release Aung San Suu Kyi and called for the early return of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, to the country, to help facilitate political transition.

Burma: Arms Trade

4 March

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support calls for a universal arms embargo on Burma and to introduce such an embargo through the UN Security Council.

Meg Munn: The UK works closely with its partners at the UN to press the Burmese regime to engage constructively with the Secretary-General's Good Offices mission. We have made clear that, should the regime fail to make progress towards genuine national reconciliation, under UN auspices, we would press for further UN action. We would support the imposition of a UN arms embargo. Such a measure would require the adoption of a Chapter VII Resolution by the Security Council.

A strict EU arms embargo is already in place. We stand ready to elaborate further restrictive measures if we see no, or limited, progress on reform by the Burmese regime.

Banking Sanctions

4 March

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support calls for targeted banking sanctions against members of the military regime in Burma.

Meg Munn: We are actively examining the options for extending existing measures to include targeted banking sanctions against members of the military regime in Burma.

The EU common position on Burma includes a ban on investment and the provision of financial services to certain enterprises linked to the military regime. It also includes an asset freeze, which targets the regime leadership, the senior ranks of the military and their family members.

Burma: Singapore

4 March

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to urge the government of Singapore to introduce a visa ban on members of Burma's military regime to prevent them from entering Singapore for any reason.

Meg Munn: We are in regular contact with the Singaporean authorities regarding the situation in Burma. I spoke to the Singaporean Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2(nd) Permanent Secretary Bilahari Kausikan, on 18 February to discuss recent developments in Burma.

Singapore, both nationally and in its current role as Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) chair, has made clear its concerns about the violent repression carried out by the Burmese authorities last year, its wish to see the regime engaging in genuine dialogue with Burma's opposition parties, and its support for the UN Secretary-General's goodwill mission. Singapore and its ASEAN partners do not support the application of sanctions at this time. The imposition of sanctions is part of our ongoing conversation with Singapore and other countries in the region.

We will continue to encourage all our ASEAN partners to do all they can to support political reform and national reconciliation.

Burma: Ethnic Groups

13 March

Mr. Crabb: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the assassination of the General Secretary of the Karen National Union, Padoh Mahn Sha Lah Phan;*

(2) what steps he has taken to raise the assassination of the General Secretary of the Karen National Union (a) with the regime in Burma, (b) with the Royal Thai government and (c) the United Nations. [

Meg Munn: *The death of the Secretary-General of the Karen National Union, Pado Mahn Sha, on 14 February, further underlines the need for a comprehensive and equitable settlement of Burma's ethnic conflicts. The failure of the regime's roadmap to meet the aspirations of the ethnic groups, including the Karen, for a greater degree of autonomy, is fuelling internal divisions and violence.*

We continue to raise a range of issues relating to the ethnic groups with our partners in the region, internationally and with representatives of the ethnic groups themselves, including the exile community. I raised the issue of the death of Pado Mahn Sha with the Thai Minister of Interior during my visit to Thailand on 29 February. Meeting the aspirations of the ethnic groups was a fundamental demand in the UN presidential statement of 11 October 2007.

Mr. Crabb: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the Government has had with the Karen National Union on (a) the security and humanitarian situation in Karen State and (b) the political situation in Burma*

Meg Munn: *We remain engaged with a wide range of stakeholders and representatives of the ethnic groups in Burma. We are concerned about the situation in Karen State. Attacks carried out by the Burmese army on civilians in northern and western Karen State have been particularly intense over the past two years. These have resulted in a significant increase in the number of internally displaced people and refugees on the Thai/Burmese border. We have repeatedly called for a halt to such offensives and have urged both the military regime and the Karen National Union to intensify their efforts to find a peaceful settlement that will bring about a permanent end to the conflict. We continue to support Aung San Suu Kyi's statement of 8 November 2007 calling for a genuine national dialogue between the government, opposition parties and ethnic groups in Burma. We believe that this statement is all the more relevant in light of the regime's announcement to hold a referendum on the constitution in May 2008 and elections in 2010. If the process is to lead to national reconciliation and stability, it must allow for the full participation of opposition and ethnic groups.*

Burma: Sanctions

13 March

Mr. Crabb: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on targeted financial sanctions on those associated with the military regime in Burma.*

Meg Munn: *I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East (Dr. Howells) gave on 26 February 2008, Official Report, columns 1363-64W to the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson).*

The EU listed companies with links to the Burmese military regime in its new package of measures agreed in October 2007.

EU member states are currently considering further restrictive measures against Burma.

Mr. Keith Simpson: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) of 4 March 2008, Official Report, column*

2355W, on Burma: sanctions, by what means options for extending existing measures against members of the military regime in Burma to include targeted banking sanctions are being considered; and by what date he expects such consideration to be complete.

Meg Munn: *The EU common position on Burma includes a ban on investment and the provision of financial services to certain enterprises linked to the military regime. It also includes an asset freeze, which targets the regime leadership, the senior ranks of the military and their family members.*

The UK is still exploring with its EU partners how best to target financial transactions owned or controlled by Burmese officials. As discussions are still continuing I am unable to comment on specific nominations under discussion as to do so could risk asset flight.

No date has yet been set to present the conclusions of these discussions.

Burma: Overseas Aid

13 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the effect on the delivery of UK restrictions imposed by the Burmese military regime on international aid agencies working inside Burma.*

Mr. Malik: *All aid agencies working in Burma have to operate within a context of restrictions on travel by international staff and difficulties for international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in obtaining Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) from the Burmese regime. In recent weeks the regime has emphasised the importance it attaches to international NGOs in Burma operating strictly within the terms of their MOUs. In January, the Ministry of Health held a meeting to remind NGOs of their existing guidelines. Since then, most NGOs have been able to continue their work effectively. More recently however a number of NGOs have been asked to curtail particular aspects of their operations in some parts of the country. These additional restrictions appear to be related to the regime's sensitivities over external contacts with Burmese civil society in advance of the constitutional referendum planned for May.*

The Department for International Development, along with other donors in Burma, are keeping the situation closely under review.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Burma: Free Trade

14 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the proposed EU-ASEAN free trade agreement on the military regime in Burma.*

Meg Munn: *The UK has consistently made it clear that the Government cannot agree to Burma benefiting from an EU-Association of South East Asian Nations Free Trade Agreement until it achieves an inclusive transition to democracy.*

Burma: Human Rights

14 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that the United Nations and ASEAN bring pressure on the military regime in Burma to (a) revise its proposed constitution, referendum and elections and (b) engage in dialogue with the National League for Democracy and the ethnic nationalities.]*

Meg Munn: *Since the announcement of a referendum and elections, the Government have been at the forefront of international calls to the Burmese regime to ensure it is a genuinely inclusive process. Our permanent mission in New York has discussed the fundamental flaws of the constitution with Professor Gambari, who has just completed his third visit to Burma since the crackdown last autumn. We will continue to press for action within the UN. We keep in close contact with partners in the region, including*

the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), to build up constructive pressure on the Burmese regime and their continued engagement on Burma related issues. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed Burma with his Vietnamese counterpart in London. I spelt out our concerns with the Singaporean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (18 February 2008), the Thai Foreign Minister, Noppadon, and the Thai Minister of Interior, the ASEAN Secretary-General (29 February 2008) and the Indonesian Foreign Minister (3 March 2008). I spoke to Thai Foreign Minister Noppadon again on this issue on 11 March 2008.

Burma: India

14 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Indian government on the situation in Burma.*

Meg Munn: *We continue to raise Burma regularly with the Indian Government and at the highest levels. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed the situation with Prime Minister Singh during his January visit to India and Burma featured in the joint statement that emerged from that visit. Our high commission in Delhi remains engaged on the issue in its discussions with the Indian Government. We continue to encourage all those with influence on the Burmese regime to keep up pressure for reconciliation and reform, which must allow the full participation of the opposition and ethnic groups.*

Burma: Prisoners

14 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has recently discussed the case of Khun Htun Oo with the Burmese military regime.*

Meg Munn: *U Khun Tun Oo, Leader of Shan National League for Democracy, remains in prison serving a 93-year sentence. The Government have, bilaterally and through EU and UN mechanisms, repeatedly called for the release of all political prisoners in Burma. This was a fundamental demand in the UN Presidential Statement of 11 October 2007.*

Burma: Referendums

14 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the role that the Union Solidarity Development Association will have in (a) organising local-level voting and (b) other respects in the referendum and proposed elections in Burma. [193465]*

Meg Munn: *While the precise role of the Union Solidarity Development Association is as yet unknown, we believe that the regime in Burma will use its membership in the election process to secure the result that it desires. We do not discount the possibility that the semi-government social organisation will play a central role both in the organisation of the voting and counting processes and in supporting the 'yes' vote for the forthcoming referendum in Burma. This would further undermine the credibility of the regime's roadmap.*

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the rules for the conduct of the proposed constitutional referendum in Burma, with particular reference to those which indicate that the regime will not take account of abstentions and no votes.*

Meg Munn: *On 27 February 2008 the State Peace and Development Council issued the referendum law, announcing a referendum committee and setting out regulations on electoral rolls, voting and counting procedures for the proposed constitutional referendum. The regulation (Chapter VIII 22 (a)(I)) states*

“votes in favour, votes against and cancelled votes shall be differentiated and counted”.

There is no indication that abstentions and no votes will be ignored. It is, however, unclear what percentage of the vote will be needed for the constitution to be passed. We continue to press, bilaterally and through the UN, for a credible process that allows people to voice their views freely, including political prisoners and ethnic nationalities, and responds to the aspirations of the people of Burma.

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on Burma's military regime new law which will result in the potential imprisonment of anyone who*

distributes leaflets or delivers speeches against the proposed constitutional referendum.

Meg Munn: *On 27 February, the State Peace and Development Council issued the referendum law, announcing a referendum committee and setting out regulations on electoral rolls, voting and counting procedures for the proposed constitutional referendum. One element of the regulation is a ban on public or private anti-referendum activities. The crime carries a sentence of up to three years or a heavy fine. The regulation is clearly intended to silence opposition. Unless the process allows people to express their views on the referendum freely, including those who have been silenced by their detention, the process will not be credible, neither to the people of Burma nor to the international community.*

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether the proposed referendum on the draft constitution in Burma will be free and fair. [*

Meg Munn: *We have consistently made clear that only an inclusive process of national reconciliation can bring stability and prosperity to the country. Laws that make it a crime to criticise the referendum and to campaign against it are also unacceptable. The regime's attempts to exclude certain groups and individuals from the political process fail to meet international demands and will exacerbate tension and instability in Burma. In our contacts with the military government, and those who have influence over them, we continue to stress the need for all political actors, including Aung San Suu Kyi and all political leaders, as well as political organisations representing ethnic nationalities, to be allowed to play their full part in shaping the country's future.*

Treatment of Burmese Refugees by Malaysia

14 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with the government of Malaysia their treatment of Burmese refugees in Malaysia.*

Meg Munn: *Our high commission in Kuala Lumpur keeps in regular contact with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Malaysia. Our high commission has consistently supported the work of the UNHCR, including in addressing the issue of recognition of UNHCR-certified persons of concern.*

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no plans to raise this issue with the Malaysian Government. Our high commission in Kuala Lumpur is working with the UNHCR on the way forward.

Burma: Thailand

14 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the policies of the Royal Thai Government towards the military regime in Burma.*

Meg Munn: *I discussed issues relating to Burma with the Thai Foreign Minister, Noppadon Pattama, on 29 February during my recent visit to Thailand.*

The Thai Foreign Minister assured me that the new Thai Government want to become more actively engaged on Burma as part of a wider "Neighbourhood Engagement Policy". Foreign Minister Noppadon has said that he wants to help move Burma towards democracy. He stated that the political process in Burma must be inclusive and the forthcoming referendum credible. We continue to discuss all aspects of the Burma situation with the Thai Government on a regular basis and have asked the Thai Government to convey the concerns of the international community when Prime Minister Samak visits Burma this month.

Visas for Foreign Sportspersons

17 March

John Thurso: *To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the Answer of 3 March 2008, Official Report, column 2083W, on foreigners: sports, whether she plans to increase (a) the visa fee payable for a sportsperson from a visa national country coming to participate at a sporting event in the UK and (b) what the visa national countries are.*

Mr. Byrne: *The visa fee currently payable for a sportsperson from a visa national country coming to*

participate at a sporting event in the UK is £99.

Applications made under the creative and sporting sub-category of tier 5 of the points based system will be set at £99—also below cost recovery levels.

Countries subject to a visa regime... (Include Burma)

Arms Embargo on Regime

17 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to secure a universal arms embargo on the military regime in Burma.*

Meg Munn: *I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) on 4 March 2008, Official Report, column 2354W.*

Burmese Refugees in Malaysia

17 March

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Malaysia on the provision of improved protection to Burmese asylum seekers in Malaysia by registering such applicants for asylum.*

Meg Munn: *Our high commission in Kuala Lumpur keeps in close contact with the local office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees on issues relating to the circumstances of Burmese refugees in Malaysia.*

The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Malaysia has confirmed it registers Burmese asylum applicants while their applications are being considered.

Burma: Indonesia

17 March

Mr. Hancock: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he discussed (a) West Papua and (b) human rights with the Indonesian Minister for Finance, H. E. Dr. Sri Mulyani Indrawati, during his visit to the UK on 14 and 15 January 2008; and if he will make a statement.*

Meg Munn: *I met Indonesian Finance Minister, Dr. Sri Mulyani Indrawati, in London on 15 January. I discussed with her a range of bilateral and multilateral issues, including climate change and Burma as well as the situation in Papua.*

Food Supply in Chin State

25 March

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: *To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what reports he has received of the adequacy of the harvest in Chin state, Burma; what discussions he has held with the World Food Programme and other humanitarian agencies on the adequacy of food supply in Chin state; what assessment he has made of the risk of famine there; and if he will make a statement.*

Mr. Douglas Alexander: *The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP) and non-governmental organisations have reported on the risk of food shortages in western Burma resulting from rodent infestations. The WFP has sent a mission to Chin state to assess the extent of the problem. The Department for International Development's (DFID) office in Burma is in contact with the UNDP and WFP about what humanitarian response may be required.*

Political Situation

25 March

Ann Clwyd: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the political situation in Burma.*

Meg Munn: *The Government continue to be deeply concerned by the political situation in Burma. The*

regime's proposed referendum on a new constitution in May, and elections in 2010, will not bring peace, stability and national reconciliation to Burma. By excluding the opposition and the ethnic groups, the process will entrench division rather than unite Burma. The regime has made no progress towards meeting the demands set out by the UN Security Council in October 2007.

Home Department **Prisoners: Foreigners**

26 March

David Davis: *To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many foreign prisoners from each country of origin there were in prisons in England and Wales on 1st March 2008.*

Mr. Straw: *The following table gives a breakdown by nationality of all foreign national prisoners in prison establishments in England and Wales as at 31 December 2007...*

Burma: 5 male, 0 female

Asylum Grants to Families

26 March

Mr. Clappison: *To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 16 January 2008, Official Report, column 1297W, on asylum, how many grants of indefinite leave to remain (ILR) under the 2003 family ILR exercise were for families in the categories (a) Africa other, (b) Middle East other and (c) Asia other, broken down by nationality.*

Mr. Byrne: *The requested information is contained in the following table...*

...Myanmar (Burma): Copies of asylum statistics publications are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics website at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office **Burma: Sanctions**

26 March

Mr. Clifton-Brown: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria were used in deciding to establish EU sanctions against Burmese companies.*

Meg Munn: *The EU Common Position on Burma dates back to 1996 and imposes restrictive measures on members of the military regime, the military and security forces, the military regime's economic interests and other individuals, groups, undertakings or entities associated with the military regime who formulate, implement or benefit from policies that impede Burma's transition to democracy, and their families and associates.*

In November 2007, the EU strengthened the Common Position to add further state economic enterprises to the investment ban extant on Burmese state owned enterprises. Further restrictive measures include a ban on trade and investment in the timber, gemstones and other extractive industries, which provide a source of revenue for the military regime, including companies trading in these commodities.

In drawing up these measures, the aim of the EU is to target those closely associated with the regime and to minimise the impact on ordinary Burmese citizens.

Burma: Overseas Students

31 March

Mr. Clifton-Brown: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will increase funding for scholarships in the UK for Burmese students.*

Mr. Jim Murphy: *Against an overall reduction in Chevening funding, the allocation for Burma for 2008-09 remains the same as for 2007-08. This has enabled 12 Burmese scholars to undertake Open university courses. We have no plans at present to increase this allocation, which has been made in accordance with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's global priorities.*

DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

Burma: International Response

31 March

Lord Hannay of Chiswick asked Her Majesty's Government:

What is their assessment of the prospects for a meaningful dialogue between the Government and the Opposition in Burma over constitutional reform; and what they are doing to increase humanitarian aid to that country.

Lord Bach: *My Lords, the regime appears intent on resisting the UN Security Council's call for a meaningful dialogue with the Opposition. It maintains that position, despite the fact that only an inclusive political process stands any chance of bringing stability and national reconciliation to Burma. UK humanitarian aid to Burma will increase from £9 million in 2007-08 to £18 million a year by 2010-11. The United Kingdom is one of the country's biggest donors. In addition, the EU programme for Burma in 2007 was €19 million.*

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: *My Lords, I thank the Minister for that reply, depressing though it is. It illustrates well why we should not allow events in Tibet to distract us from the plight of the long-suffering people of Burma. Does it not serve to show that the Burmese regime's dialogue with the UN Secretary-General's special representative is little more than a sham designed to gain time while the regime rams through its own constitution? What is the international community going to do about that? On the question of humanitarian aid, the Answer was certainly more encouraging. We have imposed targeted sanctions but do we not need more, together with more targeted humanitarian aid designed to reach those who need it most?*

Lord Bach: *My Lords, we believe that the United Nations should continue to play a leading role in resolving this crisis. We welcome the personal engagement of the Secretary-General. He has the support of the entire Security Council and the wider international community in taking forward his good offices mission. I agree with the noble Lord this far: we are very disappointed by the outcome of the latest visit of the UN special envoy, Mr Gambari. No progress appears to have been made by the regime in meeting the reasonable expectations of the Security Council.*

Lord Howell of Guildford: *My Lords, does the Minister recall that on 10 March the European Union announced its new upgraded sanctions on the Burma regime? What is his opinion of those? Is there not a danger that they will hit mostly smaller enterprises which have nothing to do with the unpleasant regime in Burma and leave untouched the generals who are awash with petrodollars and who are developing trade, through their businesses, with China and Thailand? What is his opinion of that?*

Lord Bach: *My Lords, we do not agree with what the noble Lord suggests. We believe that EU sanctions send an important and clear message of our determination to seek change in Burma and the new sanctions are specifically designed to target senior members of the regime and their business associates. There have been constant regime calls for them to be lifted and some anecdotal evidence of their impact: for example, Air Bagan, the airline closely linked to the regime, has had to suspend operations. I emphasise that they are just one part of a broader strategy towards Burma. Another part is to increase humanitarian aid, not through the regime, but through the United Nations and NGOs.*

Lord Anderson of Swansea: *My Lords, China is obviously the key influence on the Burma regime and now it must surely be on the defensive, not only because of the events in Tibet and in Darfur, but also because of the Olympics. Is not now the appropriate time for the European Union to press China to intervene more positively in respect of Burma?*

Lord Bach: *My Lords, we encourage and we expect China to use its great influence positively and constructively to urge reconciliation and genuine reform in Burma. My noble friend knows, of course, that China supported the UN Secretary-General's good offices mission and signed up to the clear demands for progress in the very significant 11 October Security Council presidential statement. We look to China to maintain the pressure for change and my right honourable friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary raised Burma with the Chinese leadership during their visits in February.*

Lord Avebury: *My Lords, in the circumstances, what will the Government do to follow up the recommendation of Sergio Pinheiro, the UN special envoy, that the Human Rights Council should find a means of following up its recommendations? In particular, will the United Kingdom at least draft a resolution for presentation to the Security Council, considering that presidential statements have previously been ignored? On the humanitarian front, will the Government take steps to increase the supply of cross-border aid to affect the tens of thousands of people who are displaced by military action by the regime in the border regions?*

Lord Bach: *My Lords, on the UN and the Security Council resolution, we are in discussion with our partners about options for that. Whether we take it forward will depend on how much progress the Secretary-General and his envoy, Mr Gambari, are able to make towards establishing a reconciliation dialogue. It is very important that we understand that the regime has not really moved at all.*

Aid for Ethnic Groups

31 March

Baroness Cox: *My Lords, having returned last night from the region, may I ask the Minister whether he is aware that the plight of the ethnic national groups, such as the Karen, the Karenni, the Shan, the Rohingya and the Kachin peoples, continues to deteriorate as the SPDC military offensives continue against innocent civilians? More than 60,000 Karen have been displaced since 2006 and more than 80,000 Karenni are living in hiding in the jungle. The Minister has said that DfID has been increasing its aid, but last year there was a commitment to cross-border aid and we have been told that so far none of that has materialised. Why has there been such a delay and can the position of cross-border aid, which is needed by those people in order to survive, be addressed urgently?*

Lord Bach: *My Lords, we certainly appreciate the huge difficulties of the ethnic minority population in Burma. We are of course talking with Burma's neighbours, where the refugee problem is great indeed. The noble Baroness should be pleased, though, that we are going to double our humanitarian aid in the next few years. As regards what the noble Baroness says is a lack of progress over the past year or so, I will write to her.*

LORDS SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

Documents cleared from scrutiny, awaiting outcome of correspondence with ministers.

Council Regulation renewing and strengthening current restrictive measures in respect of Burma and repealing Regulation (EC) No 817/2006 (FCO)

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