



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

NOV
2007

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Sanctions

27 November: Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the implementation of European Union sanctions on Burma, with particular reference to the UK's compliance; what the total amount of assets frozen is by (a) EU member states and (b) the United Kingdom in line with these sanctions; and if he will make a statement.

David Miliband: The UK is firmly committed to the full implementation of all EU Sanctions along with our EU partners. EU member states do not systematically share detailed information concerning the value of funds they have identified and frozen. However, they are legally obliged to freeze all funds and economic resources belonging to persons listed under the sanctions regime. It is prohibited to make funds or economic resources available, directly or indirectly, to these persons. The reported balance of UK frozen funds in relation to EU sanctions on Burma amounts to approximately £49,500.

Mining

26 November: Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government is taking to ensure that gems originally mined in Burma and processed in third countries will not be sold in the UK.

Mr. Jim Murphy: The UK played a key role securing EU agreement at the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) on 15 October to extend sanctions against Burma. These measures were formally adopted at the GAERC on 19 November, including the prohibition of the import of timber, metals, minerals and precious and semi-precious stones from Burma, and an investment ban in these sectors. The October GAERC made clear the EU stood ready to review, amend or reinforce these measures and requested relevant bodies to elaborate further restrictive measures. The regulation which will follow the adoption of the Common Position will address a number of points related to the implementation of the sanctions, including direct and indirect sales of precious and semi-precious stones from Burma. This will be negotiated in the coming weeks. The UK will press for the strictest possible implementation of the agreed sanctions.

Politics and Government

22 November: Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of progress in promoting democracy in Burma.

Mr. Jim Murphy [holding answer 19 November 2007]: Following the Burmese regime's brutal crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in September, the international community has made clear that there can be no return to the previous situation. The UN, EU and Association of South East Asian Nations have been pushing for fundamental political and economic transformation, leading to national reconciliation, respect for human rights and the establishment of accountable civilian government in Burma. The UN has led international efforts to bring about substantive political change. The UN Secretary-General's envoy to Burma, Professor Ibrahim Gambari, visited the country in October and November, and reported to the Security Council after each visit. The Government of Burma has so far taken only limited steps to address the international community's key concerns. They have released only a limited number of political prisoners and have not lifted the restrictions on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to allow her to participate fully in the process of national reconciliation. However, we welcome her constructive and forward-looking statement calling on the regime to enter into a 'meaningful and time bound dialogue'. We will continue to work with our partners in the UN, the EU and across the region to press the Government of Burma to establish a genuine dialogue between the regime, opposition parties and ethnic groups as a first step towards the re-establishment of democracy, stability and freedom in Burma.

Sanctions

21 Nov 2007: Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is Government policy to support further EU action against the Burmese regime by imposing EU sanctions in the oil and gas sectors; and when he last discussed the subject with his French counterpart.

Dr. Howells: EU partners are in general agreement that any new measures should be targeted towards sources of revenue for the regime. The UK would, therefore, be prepared to consider additional measures that would include the oil and gas sector. Whether these new measures are brought against the Burmese regime depends on the regime's willingness to allow a real political transition to begin. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last discussed the subject with his French counterpart at the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, which took place on 15 October. Since then Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials have been in regular contact with their French counterparts on this issue.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is Government policy to support (a) further UN sanctions and (b) economic incentives in relation to the Burmese regime; and which option the UK's partners on the UN Security Council favour.

Dr. Howells: The Government support the use of targeted sanctions against the Burmese regime. It expects to secure an amended EU Common Position at the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council on 19-20 November, extending EU sanctions against Burma. The Government fully support the efforts of the UN to bring about meaningful political dialogue and national reconciliation in Burma. The Government also recognise that there is a role for economic initiatives, conditional on progress with reconciliation and democracy. To that end, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote to the UN Secretary-General on 16 October outlining the case for the international community to pursue such an economic initiative. There is broad support within the UN for maintaining all forms of pressure on the regime for change.

Burma

20 November: Mrs. Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs If he will make a statement on the political situation in Burma.

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a statement on Burma on 14 November. We welcome Professor Gambari's report on his recent visit to Burma and look forward to his early return. We support Aung San Suu Kyi's statement and her call for a 'meaningful and time-bound dialogue' with the regime. These signs of progress are welcome, but much remains to be done to secure real political change.

Assets

20 November: Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what value of funds belonging to the Burmese regime have been (a) identified and (b) frozen since 2000 by EU member states in accordance with the EU's Common Position 2000/346/CFSP.

Dr. Howells: EU member states do not systematically share detailed information concerning the value of funds they have identified and frozen. However, they are legally obliged to freeze all funds and economic resources belonging to persons listed under the sanctions regime. It is prohibited to make funds or economic resources available, directly or indirectly, to these persons.

Sanctions

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what broader measures that target sources of revenue for the Burmese regime the Government has discussed with other EU member states as referred to in the answer of 23 October 2007, Official Report, column 188W, on Burma: sanctions.

Dr. Howells: The UK has concentrated in its discussions with EU partners on implementation of the decisions, which were agreed by the EU on 15 October. Those decisions were aimed at increasing pressure on the Burmese regime through an export ban on equipment to the sectors of logs and timber and mining of metals, minerals, precious and semi-precious stones; an import ban of products of these sectors; and an investment ban on these sectors. The UK is also exploring with EU partners whether there are additional measures that could be brought to bear against members of the Burmese regime, should this become necessary.

Detainees

19 November: Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the numbers of those detained by the Burmese government following recent protests (a) who have been released and (b) who remain in detention.

Meg Munn: Official Burmese figures indicate close to 3,000 arrests during and after the recent protests, with 91 individuals still in detention. We believe, however, that these numbers are underestimated. The number of arrests is likely to be around 3,500. We believe the number still detained to be near to 1,000, although without independent access to prisons, it is impossible to give a firm figure. We remain in close touch with organisations and individuals who, over time, hope to build a clearer picture of the numbers involved. Given the regime's tight control and manipulation of information however, it may never be possible to establish verified and independent evidence.

Aung San Suu Kyi

19 November: Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari's recent meeting with National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi; what progress has been made towards securing her release; and if he will make a statement.

Meg Munn: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in his statement on 14 November: "We welcome the report of Ambassador Gambari to the UN Security Council...The signs of progress are welcome but...the Burmese regime has taken small steps that now need to be followed by larger steps." The full text of the statement is available on the FCO website at: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391638&a=KArticle&aid=1194715131090>.

The UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari met with Aung San Suu Kyi for one hour on 8 November. Following this meeting Aung San Suu Kyi was able to deliver a message to the international community, welcoming the efforts of the UN in Burma and calling for a 'meaningful and time bound dialogue' with the regime. Aung San Suu Kyi and a Burmese government liaison officer, Aung Kyi, have held preliminary discussions on the possibility of future talks and she has been allowed to meet some of her National League of Democracy colleagues. To help facilitate a dialogue, we hope that the restrictions placed upon Aung San Suu Kyi will be lifted.

Sanctions

14 November: Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which relevant bodies are charged with elaborating further restrictive measures against Burma, including a ban on new investments, as set out in the 15 October statement by EU Foreign Ministers.

David Miliband [holding answer 14 November 2007]: EU member states will elaborate further restrictive measures against Burma in the relevant council working parties, on the basis of a report by EU heads of missions in Rangoon requested by the presidency.

Human Rights

13 November: Mr. David Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is open to the UK to refer Burma to (a) the International Court of Justice and (b) another international body for persistent use of forced labour; and if he will make a statement.

Meg Munn: There are provisions in the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which allow a state to pursue a complaint that another state has breached an ILO convention; this could ultimately lead to proceedings in the International Court of Justice. However, the Secretariat of the ILO believe that it would be wrong to start such action now in respect of forced labour in Burma. The ILO want to see the Memorandum of Understanding, that they signed with the Burmese government on 26 February 2007, produce results. The memorandum provides that alleged victims of forced labour in Burma will have full freedom to submit complaints to the ILO Liaison Officer in Rangoon. We support the actions of the ILO aimed at ensuring that Burma complies with its international obligations on forced labour. We are actively working with our European and international partners, as well as through the UN and ILO, to press the regime to end the appalling human rights violations and to engage in a genuine process of national reconciliation involving all relevant parties and groups in Burma.

12 November : Mr Hague : One of those countries, of course, is Burma, which we debated in this House only two weeks ago. I will not cover all that ground again, but I repeat the request that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), the shadow International Development Secretary, made in that debate. We ask that the EU tightens targeted sanctions against the military regime, and that the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, demonstrates the huge importance attached to this issue by the international community by going to Burma himself to demand talks between the regime and opposition leaders without the farcical normal preconditions.

12 November : David Miliband: Finally, in Burma we await this week the report of Ambassador Gambari to the UN Secretary-General. Aung San Suu Kyi's first statement to the world in four years will have been encouraging to the whole House. The release of some prisoners to meet her is also welcome, but those are only the first steps towards genuine national reconciliation and democratic rule, and the road to what Aung San Suu Kyi has called "meaningful and timebound dialogue" is the only basis on which the international community could be convinced that the Burmese regime is serious.

Annex to reply to Written Question P-5253/07

EU27 Imports from Myanmar (million euros)

	2005	2006
EU27	288	306
AUSTRIA	7	6
BELGIUM	14	9
BULGARIA	0	0
CYPRUS	0	0
CZECH REPUBLIC	1	1
GERMANY	89	101
DENMARK	10	7
ESTONIA	0	:
SPAIN	17	35
FINLAND	0	1
FRANCE	35	29
UNITED KINGDOM	64	60
GREECE	1	1
HUNGARY	0	0
IRELAND	0	0
ITALY	28	30
LITHUANIA	0	0
LUXEMBOURG	0	0
LATVIA	0	0
MALTA	0	0
NETHERLANDS	13	17
POLAND	2	4
PORTUGAL	1	1
ROMANIA	0	1
SWEDEN	3	3
SLOVENIA	0	0
SLOVAKIA	:	0

Source: Eurostat (Comext, Statistical Regime 4)

DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

15 November : Mr Mitchell: On that note, I am particularly surprised that the Government have yet to accept in full the powerfully argued recommendation of the International Development Committee that aid to Burma should be quadrupled by 2013. The Conservatives have been making that argument now for nearly two years. As I said in the debate on Burma on Monday 29 October, we will honour the recommendation in full as soon as we have the opportunity in government. I invite the Secretary of State, who is not unreasonable on the matter, to reflect further on the proposal.

15 November : Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): We have been concerned with a number of countries in the past year. The Secretary of State referred in his opening statement to Burma and we recently published a report on that country. I want to thank the right hon. Gentleman first for his very prompt response in announcing the doubling of aid and secondly for his indication to the House today that that does not limit the aspirations. After all, we can always talk about money, but the ultimate point is always effectiveness. We all agree that there is a greater capacity for more aid to reach poor people in Burma than has been delivered. We greatly welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to achieve that. The Committee was concerned, however, although we understood the reasoning, about the basing of the entire Burma DFID staff in Rangoon. Many of the expatriate organisations supporting the Burmese people in a whole variety of ways are perforce operating out of Thailand. The suggestion that a quarterly meeting with those groups is sufficient and that Thailand is only a plane ride away does not fulfil the need for regular contact. I thus hope that the Secretary of State will think again about whether a permanent DFID presence in Bangkok might still be necessary and justified, as the Committee recommended.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

EDM 2194 FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND AND THE BURMESE JUNTA;
Proposed by Moore, Michael; signed by 4 MPs.

EDM 1971 MEMBERS OF BURMESE PARLIAMENT IMPRISONED IN BURMA;
Proposed by McCafferty, Chris; signed by 75 MPs.

EDM 1868 AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S 62nd BIRTHDAY
Proposed by Bercow, John; signed by 79 MPs.

EDM 1861 BURMA AND INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
Proposed by Clwyd, Ann; signed by 64 MPs.

EDM 662 VETO OF DRAFT UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION ON BURMA
Proposed by Clwyd, Ann; signed by 89 MPs.

EDM 658 RELIGIOUS RESTRICTIONS, DISCRIMINATION AND PERSECUTION IN BURMA
Proposed by Crabb, Stephen; signed by 150 MPs.

EDM 498 TARGETED INVESTMENT SANCTIONS AGAINST BURMA'S DICTATORSHIP
Proposed by Morgan, Julie; signed by 81 MPs.

EDM 367 UN SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION ON BURMA
Proposed by Bercow, John; signed by 177 MPs.

DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

The House met at three o'clock (Prayers having been read earlier at the Judicial Sitting by the Lord Bishop of Southwark): the LORD SPEAKER on the Woolsack.

Baroness Rawlings asked Her Majesty's Government:

What plans they have to increase the level of aid to Burma and the border areas.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development (Baroness Vadera): My Lords, our aid for Burma will double from £9 million this year to £18 million by 2010-11. We expect to expand our support for basic education, health and civil society development in Burma, as well as significantly increase our assistance to Burmese people in the border areas. In the event of genuine political change and progress with reconciliation and democracy, we of course stand ready to support transition and recovery.

Baroness Rawlings: My Lords, I thank the Minister for her encouraging reply, which adds to the

Government's response to the report of the Select Committee on International Development. What specific measures are the Government taking to encourage India and China, with their huge investments in Burma, to use their contacts with the Burmese regime to restore democracy and respect for human rights? I also have to mention that the report states, with great alarm in Recommendation 35, paragraph 100—the final paragraph of the report—that Russia has agreed with Burma to design and build a nuclear reactor. How are we, with a regime that will not allow the BBC into the country, can we be assured that this is safe?

Baroness Vadera: My Lords, we have been in constant dialogue with the Indian Government and the Chinese Government, and have been encouraged by the position of the Chinese Government, who assisted us in getting access to Burma for a special envoy, Professor Gambari, twice recently, and shifted their position historically to enable the UN Security Council's presidential resolution. The situation with India is somewhat less encouraging. Nevertheless, we maintain a dialogue and, yesterday, we heard reports unofficially that there was a discussion about stopping arms sales to Burma, for which we have sought clarification. We have heard the reports about the Russian nuclear discussions and currently seek clarification. I shall write to the noble Baroness once I have that.

Baroness Cox: My Lords, is the Minister aware that last week I was in the border areas of Burma—in Karen, Karenni and Shan states—with the internally displaced people who urgently need this cross-border aid. I can testify to the horror of their plight. Tens of thousands of people have been driven from their villages by the SPDC regime. They are now hiding in the jungle and scavenging for food, with no shelter, healthcare or education. Will the Minister give an undertaking that in all discussions with the SPDC regime, the Government highlight the plight of all ethnic national groups and their right to participation in all discussions concerning the future of Burma?

Baroness Vadera: My Lords, I was indeed aware of the noble Baroness's recent intrepid visit and I look forward to her detailed report. She refers movingly to the plight of 100,000 IDPs who cannot be reached except through mobile units from across the border. Aid to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium can now fund this activity. We are currently in discussions with it and other local civil society organisations to increase our assistance to this target group. It is crucial that all minority ethnic groups are included, as Aung San Suu Kyi emphasised in her call for a meaningful and time-bound process of dialogue. We cannot achieve reconciliation and peaceful transition to a representative and accountable government without their involvement, so we continue actively to reach out to all those groups.

Lord Davies of Coity: My Lords, uncomfortable as the agreement between the Russians and the Burmese over building nuclear reactors may appear, what can we in Britain do? We cannot police the world other than by referring this to the United Nations. Given the nature of the Question, it seems that the British Government are expected to be able to do something about it.

Baroness Vadera: My Lords, the first focus of our action will be through the United Nations, but we should recall that Russia is a member of the G8 and has other bilateral relationships with us and through other groups. We will continue to press them for clarification on this matter.

Lord Avebury: My Lords, I welcome the doubling of aid and in particular the increase in the amount of aid going to the cross-border consortium. Can the noble Baroness give the House details of when the OCHA report on IDPs across the frontier in Burma is likely to be published, and the response to it? In view of the fact that the Government themselves estimate that there are between 400,000 and 500,000 IDPs in Burma, will they increase the percentage of aid going to the cross-border and in-country projects that will result from the OCHA report?

Baroness Vadera: My Lords, we have seen a preliminary draft of the OCHA report and anticipate the final draft early in, we hope, the new year. We will take it into consideration in our discussions with the Thailand Burma Border Consortium as well as other groups in order to increase our aid significantly for these groups. Currently, 20 per cent of our aid to Burma goes to the cross-border groups regardless of the fact that they have 5 per cent of the population and in light of their specific needs, but we will review that once we have the OCHA report.

Lord Tomlinson: My Lords, does my noble friend agree that the major criticism made of Burma at the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference was on the basis of a resolution that came from the ASEAN

countries? In the light of that, what pressure are the Government maintaining, or which contacts are they pursuing on the ASEAN countries to make sure that they, as the authors of the condemnatory resolution, bring appropriate pressures to bear on Burma ?

Baroness Vadera: My Lords, no doubt noble Lords will be aware that the recent ASEAN summit was deeply disappointing in not being able to hold a firm line on Burma and, indeed, in withdrawing the invitation of special envoy Dr Gambari to speak. Nevertheless, we are maintaining all possible pressure on the regional partners and do not accept the line that the ASEAN group does not have any influence and that it is simply a matter for the United Nations. We are therefore continuing a dialogue at all levels with the regional parties, including those which originated the statement referred to.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom: My Lords, if Russia, China and India continue to trade with Burma, how can sanctions have any impact whatever on that country? If they were to impact on the export of timber and precious stones, surely that would affect some of the poorest people in Burma who make their living from cutting down trees and mining jewels.

Baroness Vadera: My Lords, it is true that the major partners of Burma in trade are in the region and not in the EU. Nevertheless, the EU took the view that it was important to extend the current position on sanctions to timber, gems and metals, and we do have some trade in the EU in these areas. We have attempted to target the sanctions so as to have an impact not on poor people but on the regime. We continue to press India, China and Russia on their trade and, as I mentioned earlier, we look forward to a clarification on the issue of arms sales from India.

7 November: Baroness Cox: My Lords, I will focus on the Government's commitment in the gracious Speech to the eradication of poverty worldwide. In so doing, I will highlight the plight of people in three areas I visited recently: northern Uganda, Burma and southern Sudan, where conflict and oppression have long been contributory factors towards grinding poverty.

I turn briefly to the tragic plight of the people of Burma, which has been seen on TV screens around the world, as monks, nuns and civilians made their courageous public stand for democracy until the brutal SPDC regime moved in with violence to obliterate communications and punish the demonstrators. Only a trickle of information has since leaked out about torture, killing and the continued imprisonment of at least 2,000 demonstrators, including many monks. We have even less knowledge of the fate of the ethnic national groups such as the Shan, Karen and Karenni peoples fighting for survival along the eastern border in a bitter war which has left 500,000 living as displaced people, including 90,000 still living and dying in appallingly harsh and precarious conditions inside Burma. They are hiding in the jungle with little food, shelter, health care or education. Meanwhile, the SPDC regime continues to attack villages, to murder, rape, torture, to use forced labour in conditions so harsh that many perish and to force civilians to act as human minesweepers.

The plight of other ethnic groups such as the Chin, Kachin and Rohingya people is also dire. Although not engaged in active conflict, they suffer all the horrors of occupation, with SPDC troops stealing their crops and livestock as well as carrying out extrajudicial killings, rape, torture and forced labour. Health care is virtually unobtainable, so many die of treatable diseases. No education is allowed beyond primary level. One woman whom I met speaks for countless others as her story is typical. Her husband was forced to serve as a porter and as a human minesweeper and was blown up. She was then compelled to work as a porter, carrying 30 kg of rice or ammunition from dawn to dusk with little rest, food or water. At night, she and other female porters had to undertake a different kind of service for the SPDC soldiers. She eventually escaped to Thailand with her children, but her eldest son was so badly beaten by the SPDC that he suffers permanent brain damage.

The ethnic national peoples of Burma are in a horrendous predicament: those who oppose the regime militarily in an attempt to retain some freedom face the threat of ethnic cleansing by the SPDC's overwhelming military might, and those who seek accommodation by laying down their arms face physical and cultural extinction by strangulation of resources and systematic oppression. I welcome assurances given by the Government in another place on 29 October to increase pressure on the SPDC through increased EU sanctions and statements by UN Security Council. I also welcome the commitment by DfID to increase aid. In the welcome increase in aid, will there be more provision for those suffering and dying as

internally displaced people in the jungles of Burma and the occupied territories, including support for organisations whose personnel risk their lives to take aid across the border? How do Her Majesty's Government assess the role played by China and India? Is China doing all that it should to bring the SPDC to account? If not, what is the Government's view of the appropriateness of China acting as host to the forthcoming Olympic Games? And will the Government raise with India its policies of selling arms and providing military training to the SPDC?

7 Nov 2007 : Lord Malloch-Brown: It is six weeks since the demonstrations in Burma . There is a danger that they are already slipping from the front pages. It is incumbent on all of us in this House to make sure that we keep up public pressure on this issue, because the ability to say, "This problem is not going away; it is not going to slip again out of public sight", is critical to securing Asian co-operation.

Select Committee on European Scrutiny Second Report

21 Sanctions against the regime in Burma

Background

21.1 Starting with Common Position 96/635/CFSP, the EU has adapted and strengthened its sanctions regime against Burma over the last ten years in response to deteriorating circumstances on the ground, failure by the government of Burma to make progress on human rights, national reconciliation and use of forced labour. In line with EU sanctions policy the EU has sought positive change in Burma by placing pressure on those responsible for its policies, whilst endeavouring to minimise any adverse impact on the general population.

21.2 On 8 October, the Minister for Europe at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Jim Murphy) alerted the Committee to efforts within the EU to strengthen the current level of sanctions against Burma , to send a strong signal to the Burmese regime about the unacceptability of their recent response to the peaceful demonstrations led by monks and civilians and to put pressure on the regime to engage in a genuine process of national reconciliation. The Minister talked of the UK working with EU partners towards "a credible package which goes beyond the existing measures", and of the Presidency having circulated a paper outlining possible options, building on investment sanctions already in place, and including a ban on Burmese imports of commodities, "which are exploited by interests close to the regime". However, the Minister said that the "degree of uncertainty as to the final nature of the package" meant that he was not yet able to submit the proposal for scrutiny; and expressed the hope that, "given the fast moving, high profile nature of this issue and the desire of many Member States, including the UK, to take immediate action," the Committee would understand were he to decide to agree to the proposal before scrutiny had been completed. He concluded with an assurance that he will submit an EM as soon as possible.

21.3 In response, the Committee noted that it was, of course, at one with the Government's aims; and said that, in all the circumstances that he outlined, it was prepared, on this occasion, to accept a decision to agree the revised Common Position before scrutiny had been completed.

21.4 That said, however, the Committee said that it would have expected — and would on future such occasions expect — a lot more information than was contained in the Minister's letter. We felt that a reminder of the present sanctions upon which the proposed changes would seek to build would have been helpful. More importantly, the Committee would have expected to have been given some idea of what proposals were currently in play; which ones the Government favoured; and which ones it did not. Moreover, were it not to be given the opportunity to scrutinise the proposal before the event, for the reasons given, it would have liked some idea of what contact he or other FCO Ministers had had with interested Members about the UK position during the negotiation phase. The Committee therefore asked for these matters to be dealt with in an eventual Explanatory Memorandum, along with the final outcome, and for the Minister to take account of these points in any future such "early warning" letters.

The proposed revised Common Position

21.5 The preamble to the draft Common Position notes that, on 15 October 2007, the Council strongly condemned the brutal repression perpetrated by Burmese authorities against peaceful protestors and the continuing serious violations of human rights in Burma /Myanmar, and welcomed the UN Security Council Presidential statement of 11 October 2007 and the adoption by the UN Human Rights Council on 2 October

2007 of a Resolution strongly deploring the continued violent repression in Burma /Myanmar and urging its government to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

21.6 In his 12 November 2007 Explanatory Memorandum the Minister for Europe confirms that, in view of the seriousness of the current situation in Burma , the EU is now proposing to adopt a revised Common Position, amending Common Position 2006/318/CFSP, to extend current restrictive measures and include additional restrictive measures against Burma , at the 19 November General Affairs and External Relations Council.

21.7 He summarises the existing sanctions regime as follows:

- a travel ban and assets freeze against named 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 and their families. A travel ban against serving members of the military of the rank of Brigadier-General and above;

- a comprehensive embargo on arms and equipment that might be used for internal repression and ban on Burmese military personnel being attached to diplomatic missions in the EU;
- a ban on high-level bilateral government visits at the level of Political Director and above;
- a suspension of most non-humanitarian aid;
- prohibition on EU companies making finance available to, or extension of participation in, named Burmese State owned companies, their joint ventures and subsidiaries.

21.8 Although the official text is still not available, he says that the proposed Common Position:

- extends and updates the list of persons subject to a travel ban and;
- extends the freezing of their assets;
- extends and updates the list of enterprises in Burma subject to an investment ban.

and contains additional restrictive measures to include:

- a ban on the export of equipment and technology to three key sectors; logs and timber, high value metals and minerals, precious and semiprecious stones, including diamonds, rubies, sapphires, jade and emeralds;
- an import ban on products from the above mentioned sectors;
- a ban on new investment in the above mentioned sectors;
- a ban on the provision of technical assistance or training related to relevant equipment and technology destined for enterprises in the above industries.

The Government's view

21.9 The Minister recalls that in April 2004 the EU extended restrictive measures against Burma in view of the political situation at the time, which measures were further strengthened in October 2004 because of the regime's failure to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD detainees. He notes that Burma 's military regime continues to detain Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and many of her National League for Democracy (NLD) supporters. Given the current political and human rights situation in Burma , it is, he says, therefore consistent with previous EU policy "to increase pressure on the military regime to enter into a meaningful and genuine dialogue with the democratic opposition. The ultimate aim being the eventual transition to civilian rule; and to fully respect human rights including the release of political prisoners and recognition of the rights of ethnic communities. The extension of current measures and the inclusion of additional measures shows that the European Union remains committed to keeping up such pressure". He fully supports this approach.

Conclusions

21.10 So do we, and accordingly clear the draft revised Common Position.

21.11 We note, however, that there is no mention of what contacts the Minister had with the House or others in formulating the Government's position, nor of what contending views there may have been among Member States when deciding on the extension now outlined. We shall not pursue this further on this occasion, but remind the Minister, as we said in our exchange of correspondence, that we shall expect more enlightenment on future occasions when sanctions regimes are under consideration.

IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2830th Council meeting

General Affairs and External Relations

General Affairs

Brussels

19 November 2007

The Council adopted strengthened and additional restrictive measures against Burma/Myanmar, following the brutal repression of peaceful protestors and continuing human rights violations by the Burmese authorities. The measures include an extension of the list of persons subject to an entry ban and freeze of assets, and an extension of the ban on investments in Burmese state-owned companies. Additional measures are targeted at the sources of the regime's revenue, such as the logging, timber and mining industries.

Burma/Myanmar -Restrictive measures

The Council adopted a common position amending common position 2006/318/CFSP on restrictive measures against Burma/Myanmar, in view of the seriousness of the current situation in the country (14443/07). This follows a political agreement reached by the Council at its meeting on 15 October.

The common position is aimed at :

- reinforcing existing measures in respect of Burma/Myanmar, extending and updating the list of persons subject to a travel ban and freezing of assets. The scope of the investment ban on Burmese state owned enterprises is also extended by including enterprises that are owned or controlled by the regime or by persons or entities associated with the regime.
- introducing additional restrictive measures against Burma/Myanmar, targeting the regime's sources of revenue, including in sectors where human rights abuses are common. To that end, it prohibits the export to Burma/Myanmar of equipment and technology destined for enterprises engaged in logging, timber and the mining of metals and minerals, precious or semi-precious stones, as well as related technical and financial assistance. It also prohibits the import into the Community of round logs, timber and timber products, metals and minerals, as well as precious and semi precious stones. Moreover, new investments in enterprises in Burma/Myanmar that are engaged in these industries are also prohibited.

In October, the Council condemned the brutal repression by the Burmese authorities of peaceful protestors and the continuing serious violations of human rights in Burma/Myanmar.

WESTMINSTER HALL DEBATES

Thursday, 22 November 2007: [Sir Nicholas Winterton in the Chair] — Inter-Parliamentary Union

Then there is Burma. In 1990, following their electoral success, newly elected representatives from the National League for Democracy should have taken their seats in Parliament and formed a Government. Instead, they disappeared or were killed, imprisoned or hounded out of the country. Since that time, the IPU and UK parliamentarians have lobbied on their behalf and met exiles on many occasions to discuss their plight and that of their fellow countrymen.

Unfortunately, however, as we all know, far from improving, the situation in Burma has worsened. The recent massive crackdown by the military on the peaceful demonstrations by monks and civilians bears testimony yet again to the fact that the military junta does not want to engage in any credible process of transition to democracy. Scores of protesters—we do not know how many; we can only guess at the number—have been arbitrarily arrested, as have 13 parliamentarians-elect. In several cases, the whereabouts of prisoners remain unknown.

I am sure that all members of the British group and Members of this House will join me in endorsing the IPU's call to the Burmese authorities to release the prisoners immediately and unconditionally, along with the 13 MPs-elect who were already languishing in prison before the demonstrations took place, and to refrain from further repressing dissent, lift all restrictions on human rights and end the harassment of political activists.

It is important that member Parliaments of the IPU, particularly those from countries such as China, India

and the Association of South East Asian Nations countries, pursue and strengthen action in support of the parliamentarians-elect, and in support of respect for democratic principles in Burma. I and others on the IPU executive have been in regular contact with members of the ASEAN inter-parliamentary Myanmar caucus to discuss joint action. Indeed, at the recent conference in Geneva, the UK withdrew its urgent resolution on climate change in favour of a resolution that criticised events in Burma. Since then, we have continued to be in regular contact with the caucus, and I commend the delegates' continued efforts to lobby their Governments for specific measures to be taken against the Burmese military regime.

I was encouraged by a robust emergency resolution last October that we all agreed to, with some exceptions. There were some very interesting votes, as hon. Members will know, by some of the delegations that we did not quite expect to come on board with us. At that IPU assembly, the British delegation had formal meetings with the Chinese, Indian and Singaporean delegations and asked them to consider travel bans and targeted sanctions if the junta did not take concrete steps to restore democracy in Burma.

Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley, Conservative) Does the right hon. Lady agree that one of the ideal opportunities afforded by the assemblies is less formal dialogues between parliamentarians? Conversations are held not between Members of Parliament and Governments but between MPs and MPs from other countries. The last assembly in Geneva gave us such an opportunity. In particular, we had lengthy discussions with a Chinese member of Parliament with whom we were able to raise directly the issue of Burma. MPs may not be able to do anything about a situation, but they can certainly take back to their own Parliaments the intensity of feeling that exists in countries such as the United Kingdom about the atrocities in countries such as Burma.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley, Labour) The hon. Gentleman was a member of the delegation and took part in some of the bilateral meetings. I absolutely agree that they are useful, informative and vital to both groups. Delegations have not agreed on some issues, as the hon. Gentleman knows, but on others there has been surprising consensus, even among countries from which we did not expect consensus to be forthcoming. The parliamentary authorities—I am particularly addressing the Whips of all parties—should not underestimate the importance of IPU delegations.

John Bercow (Buckingham, Conservative) I apologise for my tardy arrival. I was in an evidence session of the Select Committee on International Development, to which I shall have to return in due course. My hon. Friend has rightly focused on the bestial atrocities committed in Burma. Does he agree—I know that the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) has been extremely robust on this point—that the situation in Burma, which affects citizens as much as parliamentarians who are denied their rightful legislative slot, underlines the importance of having such matters raised consistently and multilaterally in every conceivable forum by Ministers of the highest level in our Government? That sends a signal. Equally and conversely—although I intend no disrespect to the Minister for Europe—if those issues are raised only by more junior Ministers, that sends a negative signal.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold, Conservative) Of course those issues need to be raised at the most senior level, when the most senior Ministers, from the Prime Minister downwards, visit the relevant countries, or neighbouring countries, such as, in Burma's case, China. That matter should be raised whenever a high-level visit is made to China. That would be helpful.

The right hon. Lady made a good point, which was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), about the fact that the IPU provides a useful forum for meetings between Members of different Parliaments. That does not apply in Burma's case—it is impossible—but IPU members have met Chinese parliamentary members informally. If it can be stressed to them how appalling and unacceptable the situation is in their neighbouring country of Burma, the message does, over a period, reach those in charge of China. It is to be hoped that, after a time, it will bring about a change in China's attitude towards Burma. That has probably happened in North Korea, where there has undoubtedly been a change in the Chinese Government's attitude towards the way the North Koreans are governed—or perhaps I should say misgoverned. I think that the relationship between North Korea and South Korea is beginning to thaw very slightly. Let us hope for the people of North Korea, who live under one of the most autocratic Governments on the planet, that that thaw will continue...

... **Jim Murphy (Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office):** On the points raised by almost everyone about Burma, it is clear that the IPU's work on that country is of crucial importance. The decision to prioritise the resolution sent a clear and important message. The UK Government—supported on a cross-party basis, it is fair to say—continue to send that message. A Government who can abuse the many hundreds of peaceful, spiritual monks in public view in the way that they did, are a Government who, in private, behind closed doors and away from the TV cameras, are doing much worse to their general population. Perhaps that is the wrong way of looking at the situation, but it is one way of judging it.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary therefore raised Burma with the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and senior leaders and Ministers in Europe, Asia and north America, and will continue to do so. We have discussed the matter at the EU. Indeed, I attended a meeting earlier this week at which it was discussed, and the Foreign Secretary attended a meeting last month at which specific, detailed agreements were put in place. Important sanctions have been put in place, but we do not rule anything out in terms of further European sanctions against Burma.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester referred to the British Council, and an interesting insight into its work is that its offices are one of the few places where the country's citizens can still access the internet. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) referred to his experience of queues outside another British Council office, but that is also happening in Burma. There is anecdotal evidence that the children of the regime are also trying to find out what is happening in the world. That is not the British Council's purpose, but it plays a crucial role there, as in many other places.

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