



# LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

# OCTOBER 2008

## ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

### *KAREN REFUGEES*

**6 Oct 2008 Lord Alton of Liverpool** asked Her Majesty's Government: What action they have taken to raise concerns with the Government of Thailand regarding the recent deportation of Karen refugees, including women and children, to Burma from camps in Thailand.

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Malloch-Brown):** We are aware of reports of forced returns of Karen refugees in Thailand. Our embassy in Bangkok frequently raises refugee welfare issues with the Royal Thai Government. Recent discussions have covered the need for measures to mitigate the impact of the increase in the price of rice, refugees' access to jobs and education and the impact of Cyclone Nargis on the camps.

The Government have increased support for Burmese refugees in Thailand and have recently allocated a further £1 million to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium for its work supporting Burmese refugees in Thailand and internally displaced people inside Burma. In 2007-08, the Department for International Development provided £400,000 for assistance to internally displaced people through community-based organisations inside Burma. This reached over 100,000 displaced people, mostly in Karen communities, living near Burma's border with Thailand.

The UK condemns the continuing human rights abuses and the political, social and economic restrictions from which the ethnic groups of Burma—including the Karen—have suffered under the current regime. Acceptable agreement for the ethnic nationalities is key to a durable solution to Burma's problems. We continue to bring reports of human rights abuses to the attention of the international community, the UN and the UN Human Rights Council.

**6 Oct 2008 Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he has taken to raise concerns with the Royal Thai Government on the recent deportation of Karen refugees, including women and children, to Burma from camps in Thailand.

**Mr. Malik:** The UK Government is aware of recent reports of forced returns of Karen refugees from Thailand to Burma. The British embassy and Department for International Development officials in Bangkok frequently raise refugee welfare issues with the Royal Thai Government, most recently in August 2008.

In 2008-09 DFID is providing £1 million to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium for its work supporting Burmese refugees in Thailand and internally displaced people inside Burma. This is a 30 per cent increase on our 2007-08 contribution. In addition, DFID will provide £550,000 for assistance to internally displaced people through community-based organisations inside Burma, an increase of £150,000 over 2007-08. This aid will reach over 100,000 displaced people, mostly in Karen communities, living near Burma's border with Thailand.

The UK Government condemns the continuing human rights abuse inflicted by the Burmese regime on its people, including ethnic groups such as the Karen. A political settlement acceptable to the ethnic nationalities is key to a durable solution to Burma's problems. The UK Government frequently brings reports of human rights abuse to the attention of the international community, the United Nations and the Human Rights Council.

## **ETHNIC GROUPS**

**08 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Royal Thai Government on the recent deportations of Karen refugees from camps in Thailand back to Burma. [223298]

**Bill Rammell [holding answer 10 September 2008]:** We are aware of recent reports of forced returns of Karen refugees from Thailand. Our embassy in Bangkok frequently raises refugee welfare issues with the Royal Thai government. Recent discussions have covered the need for measures to mitigate the impact of the increase in the price of rice, refugees' access to jobs and education and the impact of Cyclone Nargis on the camps.

The Government have increased support for Burmese refugees in Thailand. It has recently allocated a further £1 million to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium for its work supporting Burmese refugees in Thailand and internally displaced persons inside Burma. In 2007-08, the Department for International Development provided £400,000 for assistance to internally displaced persons through community-based organisations inside Burma. This reached more than 100,000 displaced persons, mostly in Karen communities, living near Burma's border with Thailand.

The UK condemns the continuing human rights abuses and the political, social and economic restrictions from which the ethnic groups of Burma—including the Karen group—have suffered under the current regime. Acceptable agreement for the ethnic nationalities is key to a durable solution to Burma's problems. We continue to bring reports of human rights abuses to the attention of the international community, the UN and the UN Human Rights Council.

**22 Oct 2008 Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received of a military escalation in Karen state, Eastern Burma; and what steps his Department plans to take to seek to prevent military action against civilians there. [227581]

**Bill Rammell:** Our embassy staff in Rangoon are not granted direct access to Karen State to confirm reports of increased military activity but there is a history of fighting between the Burmese military and Karen groups. This only increases the humanitarian crisis facing the thousands of displaced people living near or on the Thai-Burma border.

The continued violence in Karen state is regrettable and highlights the need for a comprehensive and just settlement of Burma's ethnic conflicts. Stability and territorial integrity are important to all nations and the continued neglect of the needs of the people of Burma by the regime is at the root cause of conflict in many parts of the country. We regularly emphasise to the Burmese regime, and to countries in the region, the need for the full and fair participation of ethnic nationalities in the political process as key to a durable solution to Burma's problems. There can be little prospect of national reconciliation without genuine recognition of their political, economic and social rights.

## **INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

**20 October 2008 Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to encourage other donors to contribute to the joint UN-NGO fund in response to the cyclone in Burma, launched on 10th July.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** On 9 July the Secretary of State for International Development wrote to a range of like-minded development Ministers urging them to offer generous support to the UN appeal for Burma which was to be launched the following day. The Secretary of State has also offered to support the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, in his efforts to encourage other donors to contribute more to the UN appeal. The Department for International Development (DFID) and Foreign and Commonwealth (FCO) officials have followed up through bilateral contacts with other donors and in international forums.

The Secretary-General of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, is also working to encourage other donors to increase their contributions to the Burma cyclone relief effort.

## **POLITICAL PRISONERS**

**22 Oct 2008 Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken to seek to secure the release of political prisoners in Burma in the last 12 months.

**Bill Rammell:** Over the last 12 months my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers have raised the need for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Burma on many occasions with key countries in the region including China, India, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia. Our ambassador in Rangoon has also repeatedly raised the issue with ministers in the military government. In October 2007 we helped to secure unprecedented UN Security Council action on Burma, which included a clear demand for the early release of political prisoners. This demand was reaffirmed by the UN Security Council in May under UK chairmanship. We continue to support the UN Secretary-General's efforts to work on the release of prisoners. The EU has also made its position clear, and with strong UK support, strengthened sanctions against the regime in response to the brutal crackdown on peaceful protests last autumn, when many political activists were detained. Our embassy in Rangoon continues to inquire about specific cases with political prisoner support networks and those non-governmental organisations concerned with prisoner welfare.

While we welcome the release during September of a small number of political prisoners, it is important to remember that arbitrary arrests continue, and more than 2,000 political prisoners remain in detention.

**22 Oct 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the government of Burma on the detention of opposition parliamentarians.

**Bill Rammell:** Over the last 12 months my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers have raised the need for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Burma on many occasions with key countries in the region including China, India, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia. Our ambassador in Rangoon has also repeatedly raised the issue with ministers in the military government. In October 2007 we helped to secure unprecedented UN Security Council action on Burma, which included a clear demand for the early release of political prisoners. This demand was reaffirmed by the UN Security Council in May under UK chairmanship. We continue to support the UN Secretary-General's efforts to work on the release of prisoners. The EU has also made its position clear, and with strong UK support, strengthened sanctions against the regime in response to the brutal crackdown on peaceful protests last autumn, when many political activists were detained. Our embassy in Rangoon continues to enquire about specific cases with political prisoner support networks and those non-governmental organisations concerned with prisoner welfare.

While we welcome the release during September of a small number of political prisoners, it is important to remember that arbitrary arrests continue, and more than 2,000 political prisoners remain in detention.

## **POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT**

**22 Oct 2008 Mr. Vara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the political and humanitarian situation in Burma; and if he will make a statement.

**Bill Rammell:** The military regime is determined to maintain its hold on power regardless of the cost and suffering of the people of Burma. The junta's 'Roadmap to disciplined democracy', including a new constitution and elections planned for 2010, is designed to entrench military rule behind a facade of civilian government. The process excludes the opposition and meaningful participation by the ethnic groups. Fundamental rights are consistently ignored. Over 2,000 political prisoners remain in detention, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and other pro-democracy leaders. Ethnic minority groups have been methodically marginalised. Against this backdrop, we will continue to do all we can to generate international pressure for a peaceful transition to democracy and respect for human rights in Burma. In particular, we will continue to give our full support to the UN Secretary-General and his efforts to break the current deadlock.

The humanitarian situation is of serious concern across the country. One third of the country's population lives on less than one third of a dollar a day, 10 per cent. do not have enough to eat, half of Burma's 20 million children do not complete primary school, and 70 per cent. of the population is at risk from malaria. The protests of August and September 2007 were sparked by this ever increasing poverty, and people's deep frustration with the economic and political failures of the Burmese regime. Relief aid for those affected by Cyclone Nargis, which struck Burma in May, is now getting through with greater co-operation from the Burmese regime than it showed in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. However, as many as 300,000 people remain highly vulnerable. The UK is committed to supporting the post-Cyclone Nargis relief effort and remains the biggest bilateral donor, contributing £45 million. UK aid for Cyclone Nargis is delivered through the UN, Red Cross and international and local non-governmental organisations to ensure that relief supplies are properly distributed to cyclone victims and do not benefit the regime.

**23 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the number of political prisoners in Burma.

**Bill Rammell:** In his report to the UN General Assembly of 5 September 2008, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma stated that "according to reliable sources, some 2,000 political and civil activists were still imprisoned in Myanmar".

This is consistent with other reports the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received. We continue to raise the need for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, in all our contacts with the Burmese regime and those countries with influence over it.

**23 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Chinese government on the conduct of the government of Burma.

**Bill Rammell:** My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised our deep concern about the situation in Burma with Chinese Premier Wen on 24 September, during UN General Assembly Ministerial week in New York. He also raised Burma with both Premier Wen and President Hu in Beijing in August. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed Burma with Foreign Minister Yang on 12 June, and will raise the issue again when they meet at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) summit in Beijing later this month. Officials maintain an active dialogue with the Chinese government through our embassies in Beijing and Rangoon, and with the Chinese embassy in London. In all these discussions, we have consistently encouraged China to bring its influence to bear on the Burmese regime to respond to the demands of the UN Security Council and broader international community.

**23 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the government of Burma on the outcome of the most recent visit to Burma by the UN special rapporteur.

**Bill Rammell:** The UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma visited the country between 3 and 7 August and delivered a report of his observations to the UN General Assembly on 5 September 2008. Ministerial contact with the regime is restricted by the EU Common Position on Burma. However, our ambassador in Rangoon regularly raises our deep concern about the human rights situation, including the issues highlighted in the Special Rapporteur's report. We also support the work of the Special Rapporteur through the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly.

## **ARMS TRADE**

**23 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the government of India on arms sales to the government of Burma.

**Bill Rammell:** The matter was raised with the Indian Government last year when we became aware that India had sold arms to Burma. If further sales come to our attention, we will again raise our concerns. The EU has an arms embargo against Burma and calls on all countries to consider carefully whether arms which are used against civilians should be sold to Burma.

We continue to raise the need for political change in Burma with the Indian Government at the highest

levels. We hope that, as the world's largest democracy, India will use the influence that it has on the Burmese regime to encourage the start of an inclusive political process leading to genuine democracy and respect for human rights.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS**

**23 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the government of Burma about the incidence of human rights abuses in that country since 22nd July 2008.

**Bill Rammell:** As part of the EU Common Position, we do not engage at ministerial level with the regime in Burma. Our ambassador in Rangoon has met Burmese officials on a number of occasions since 22 July to raise our concerns about the human rights situation in the country. Recent exchanges have focused on prisoner welfare, the release of political prisoners and the need for a genuinely inclusive political process. The ambassador also discussed specific abuses inflicted on Burma's ethnic groups with Professor Gambari during the UN envoy's visit in August.

## **OVERSEAS AID**

**23 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his ASEAN counterparts on the supply of military police and security equipment to the government of Burma. [228215]

**Bill Rammell:** We are aware of reports that the Government of Burma has purchased military and security equipment from some Association of South-East Asia Nations (ASEAN) countries. Burma is subject to an EU arms embargo and we encourage all countries, including members of ASEAN, to observe responsible arms trade policies towards Burma and other countries whose activities may be a cause for concern. We regularly urge ASEAN countries to do all they can to promote respect for human rights and a genuine transition to democracy in Burma. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed these issues with the Foreign Ministers of Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia, and the Secretary-General of ASEAN during a meeting with the UN Secretary-General on 27 September in New York.

**29 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what grants were given to the Karen Development Committee in Burma in each of the last five years; and what the purpose of each grant was.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** The Department for International Development (DFID) has not made any grants to the Karen Development Committee (KDC) in Burma. During 2007 and January 2008, the KDC received support from a civil society project which DFID part-finances. That support ended in January this year.  
Burma: Overseas Aid

**29 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether (a) UN staff and (b) staff of his Department have unrestricted access to all areas of the delta region in Burma where UK-funded aid is being delivered.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** The Department for International Development (DFID) and United Nations (UN) staff are required by the Burmese authorities to seek permission to visit the cyclone-affected areas of the Irrawaddy Delta.

We understand that no request for permission for UN staff to visit the Irrawaddy Delta has been refused since the donor conference, which took place in Rangoon on 23 May. Since then every request for staff from DFID to travel to the Irrawaddy Delta area has been granted except for one in June. DFID staff have made at least 12 field visits to different sites in affected areas, and have been able to meet freely with the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisation which have received DFID funds, as well as with the beneficiaries of our assistance in local communities.

**29 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions he has had with the Government of Burma on the lifting of aid restrictions in eastern and other

parts of Burma.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** In August, senior officials from the Department for International Development (DFID) visiting Burma encouraged Burmese Ministers to extend the humanitarian access allowed in the Irrawaddy Delta to the rest of Burma. Although such an extension has not yet been agreed, DFID officials have been able to travel recently to other parts of Burma, including Shan State. DFID officials will continue to make the case for improved humanitarian access throughout Burma when appropriate opportunities arise.  
Burma: Storms

**29 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what mechanisms are in place to monitor the response to Cyclone Nargis of these organisations or companies using funds allocated by his Department.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** The Department for International Development (DFID) staff monitor the delivery of our response to Cyclone Nargis through field visits, reporting arrangements agreed with recipient organisations, and the annual audited statements of those organisations. A monitoring mission will spend three weeks in Burma in November reviewing the effectiveness of DFID-funded projects in the Irrawaddy Delta.

**29 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which sub-recipients and end recipients received UK relief aid following Cyclone Nargis in Burma.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** The Department for International Development (DFID) does not hold records of all the sub-recipients and end recipients of our assistance. The final beneficiaries of UK relief aid following Cyclone Nargis are Burmese communities and individuals living in the Irrawaddy Delta.

**29 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which organisations have received funding from his Department to assist in the response to Cyclone Nargis in Burma.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** The following United Nations, international non-governmental organisations and other international bodies have received funding from the Department for International Development (DFID) to assist in the response to Cyclone Nargis in Burma: Action Against Hunger; Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA); Agency for Cooperation and Technical Development (ACTED); Aide Médicale Internationale; Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre; Care; Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); HelpAge; International Development Enterprises (IDE); International Labour Organisation (ILO); International Organisation for Migration (IOM); Internews; Médecins sans Frontières (MSF); Merlin; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); Red Cross; Samaritan's Purse; Save the Children; Solidarités; UN Habitat; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); Welthungerhilfe; World Food Programme (WFP); World Concern; World Health Organisation (WHO); and World Vision.

DFID provided in-kind assistance such as plastic tarpaulins, mosquito nets, water containers and flat-bottomed boats to: Médecins sans Frontières; Merlin; Red Cross; Save the Children; and the World Food Programme.

DFID has also provided funding to nine Burmese community-based organisations providing humanitarian relief in the Irrawaddy Delta.

**29 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the aid provided by his Department to alleviate the effects of Cyclone Nargis in Burma has been given to private companies for relief and reconstruction work; to which companies; and for what purpose.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** The Department for International Development (DFID) has not contracted private companies to undertake relief and reconstruction work in Burma. Approximately £4.46 million of DFID's £45 million Cyclone Nargis relief aid has been spent on the purchase outside Burma (mainly from the private sector) and the delivery to Rangoon of relief materials such as plastic sheets, mosquito nets, water containers and flat-bottomed boats. DFID funding is also used by recipient UN and non-governmental organisations for the external procurement and delivery of relief materials, and in some cases for the

purchase of materials from the private sector inside Burma. Most small scale reconstruction work, such as the repair of footpaths and jetties, is carried out by community-level cooperatives or individual labourers. DFID does not hold records of all the transactions made by the UN and non-governmental organisations which we fund.

DFID monitors relief activities through field visits, reporting from recipient organisations and audited statements. Organisations receiving grants from DFID are expected to adhere to the terms of the European Union Common Position on restrictive measures against Burma.

## **UN RESOLUTIONS**

**23 October 2008 John Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the pursuit of a United Nations Security Council resolution on Burma since 22 July 2008.

**Bill Rammell:** In the past 12 months we have helped to secure unprecedented UN Security Council action on Burma in the form of two strongly-worded presidential statements demanding: the release of political prisoners; the start of credible talks between the regime, opposition and ethnic groups; and full co-operation with the UN. We continue to work with EU partners to keep Burma on the UN Security Council agenda. A UN Security Council Resolution in the short term is not feasible as some members, including permanent members, will block action on this front. We have not discussed this specific issue with EU partners since 22 July 2008.

## **EDUCATION**

**23 October 2008 Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much UK aid funding in response to the cyclone in Burma has been allocated to education; and if he will make a statement.

**Mr. Michael Foster:** Although none of the Department for International Development's (DFID) cyclone relief assistance has been specifically allocated to education, the sector has benefited from our funding allocated to multi-sectoral programmes managed by UN agencies and non-governmental organisations, and from our support to the logistical effort needed to deliver aid supplies.

Early in the cyclone relief effort it became clear that education programmes, such as those being undertaken by UNICEF and Save the Children, were relatively well funded by other donors. DFID therefore chose to focus support on other critical priorities which were less well funded such as food, shelter, health care, clean water and the restoration of people's livelihoods.

Since around 75 per cent of the cost of education in Burma is met by communities, the restoration of people's income-earning capacity will have an important effect on their ability to educate their children.

DFID is now considering how best to assist recovery in the cyclone affected areas of Burma over the next two years, including possible direct support to the education sector.

DFID's long-term funding to UNICEF and Save the Children for primary and pre-school education across Burma is continuing

## **CYCLONE NARGIS**

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions he has had with his counterparts in (a) the European Union and (b) the USA on funding for the second year of the response to the cyclone in Burma.

**Mr. Douglas Alexander:** Officials from the Department for International Development (DFID) participate in frequent meetings with other donors in Rangoon where future spending plans are discussed. These meetings are usually attended by representatives of the USA and the European Commission.

DFID officials in Rangoon recently held discussions with the European Commission on the prospect of setting up a joint fund to support rural livelihoods, which will be critical to many of the most vulnerable households in the cyclone-affected area. DFID staff also undertook a joint review with the European Commission on UNICEF's education programme, which considered options for cyclone recovery funding over the next two years.

DFID's own contribution to cyclone recovery activities for 2009 and 2010 is currently under consideration.

In July, I wrote to a range of like-minded development Ministers urging them to offer generous support to the United Nations appeal for Burma. I have also offered support to the United Nations in its efforts to encourage other donors to contribute more to the Burma appeal. DFID and FCO staff have followed up these initiatives through bilateral contacts with other donors and in international fora.

## DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

### 13 October 2008: Debate on Democracy and Human rights

**Mr. Lidington:** The hon. Lady has made a good point, and I completely concur. Education—particularly the education of women and primary education—is an absolutely vital tool in a successful international development policy, including in those elements of the policy that focus on encouraging pluralism and respect for the civil rights of others.

Of course, we cannot simply reorder the world as we choose. We do not have the power to do so and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) hinted earlier, soldiers can remove a tyrant but find it difficult to build a functioning democratic system to take over. If the events of recent years have taught us anything, it is surely that if democracy and human rights are to take root, they need to grow in a way that is sensitive to each nation's history, culture and tradition. If we think about the history of Europe since 1989, it is striking that democracy and civil rights have flourished most quickly and richly in countries whose political cultures already had elements of pluralism within them and in which some people at least had a memory of how a democratic system of government and democratic and pluralist institutions ought to function.

However, there are things that we can and should do. As the Minister discussed, one is to give practical support for building and sustaining democracy. I agreed with her point that membership of the European Union has helped to strengthen new and fragile democracies in Spain, Portugal, Greece and, more recently, in eastern and central Europe. I agree, too, with her tributes to the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

This country has a good track record of contributing what one might term "democratic know-how" to new democracies. I had better declare that I am a governor of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy; I do so because I want to pay tribute to the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) and his predecessors as chairmen of the WFD, which has contributed hugely, in a largely unsung and unglamorous way, to the strengthening of democratic institutions in eastern and central Europe and now also in other parts of the world.

Secondly, we can speak out; we have the freedom to speak without fear of retribution. It therefore becomes our duty to lend a voice to the millions of people who are denied that right. I want to touch on one or two countries for which that duty is pressing. I should like to consider the case of Burma first. At the beginning of this year, I thought that the record of the Burmese Government could have plunged no lower. However, even those of us who believed that we were inured to the horror that is government in Burma were shocked by the ruthless brutality of a military junta who were prepared to obstruct efforts to bring help to the dying and destitute in the wake of cyclone Nargis.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations is due to visit Burma this December, and that is welcome. However, I hope that the Government agree that the time has come to bring to an end the apparently open-ended and inconclusive diplomatic exchanges with the regime. Do the Government agree that it is now time to set clear benchmarks for the Burmese junta and deadlines for meeting them? I hope that they will press for such an approach at the United Nations Security Council and in their bilateral exchanges with the



Secretary-General. The very first step should be the release of political prisoners in Burma—something that was demanded by the Security Council a year ago and on which no action has yet been taken by those who rule Burma.

**John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con):** I welcome my hon. Friend's reasonable and nuanced speech. As chairman of the all-party group for democracy in Burma, I pay tribute to what he just said. Does he agree that as the regime is unquestionably one of the most bestial oppressors in the world, and that as we in this country have no vested interest in turning a blind eye, we should press robustly for a binding Security Council resolution against the regime and support pro-democracy organisations in that country?

**Mr. Lidington:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. The Minister's particular responsibilities at the Foreign Office are to do with Europe, and I hope that she will go back from this debate determined to ensure that Burma is high on the agenda of meetings of European Foreign Ministers. An EU Heads of Government summit is due this week and an Asia-Europe meeting is due on 24 October. I hope that at the latter meeting in particular the British Government will ensure that the issue of Burma is brought to the fore.

This is not only to do with China or India but with Burma's neighbours—Malaysia, Indonesia and all the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations which have it in their power and influence to affect the survival and the manner of government of the Burmese junta. I hope that every bit of diplomatic weight that the United Kingdom can bring to bear will be used to determine a European approach to those discussions and to put the maximum pressure on our Asian friends in order to secure a measure of greater liberty and common decency for the people of Burma, who have suffered for far too long.

**Tony Baldry:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. May I put to him another reason why it is important that this must be done at EU level? It strikes me, as vice-chairman of the all-party China group, that one of the difficulties that we have in situations to do with countries such as China or India is that we are simultaneously trying to promote trade and talking about human rights. It is often difficult for individual countries to do that in the same conversation, whereas if the EU as a whole brings pressure to bear on China or India on an issue such as Burma, we are making it clear that irrespective of our separate interests our concern about human rights is paramount and overwhelming.

**Mr. Lidington:** My hon. Friend, who is Chairman of the International Development Committee, makes a powerful point, and I completely agree with him.

European action is necessary in respect not only of Burma but of Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, the fragile power-sharing agreement looks as if it is on the verge of collapse. Mugabe seems determined to wriggle out of sharing power and to inflict yet further hardship on his wretched and long-suffering people. I hope that during the concluding stages of this debate the Government will be prepared to say clearly that if that power-sharing deal does indeed break down the United Kingdom will not hesitate in pressing in the European Union and at the United Nations for further action, particularly for further targeted sanctions directed against Mugabe and his henchmen, who run that despotic regime.

## DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

**13 October 2008**

**Baroness Cox asked Her Majesty's Government:** What representations they have made to the Government of Burma about the treatment by the State Peace and Development Council in Burma of ethnic national people, in particular the Karen, Chin and Rohingya peoples; and whether they will provide assistance for the relief of famine in the Chin State.

**Lord Tunncliffe:** My Lords, we consistently raise human rights issues with the regime. Our ambassador in Rangoon has repeatedly made it clear that Burma's many problems will be solved only through dialogue between the Government, opposition and ethnic groups. DfID is providing £600,000 of emergency assistance in response to food shortages in Chin State. This year, DfID is also providing £1.8 million to assist Burmese refugees in Thailand and internally displaced people in Burma.

**Baroness Cox:** My Lords, I thank the Minister for that very encouraging reply. Is he aware that on a

recent visit to the peoples of the Chin Hill tribes in Burma, we found evidence of a serious famine which had already killed hundreds of people? Many hundreds more were ill and dying. Since we left, in just one week in one village whose people we met, seven people died—six of them children. Will DfID's welcome commitment to provide relief ensure that food reaches those most affected, particularly in view of extremely disturbing news received this morning that the SPDC authorities are not going to allow the World Food Programme or the NGOs access to those in need? The situation is desperate and I hope that the Minister can give some specific reassurance.

**Lord Tunnickliffe:** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness for her work on this issue and for prior notice of her Question. The situation there is truly desperate, and any delays will be very serious. DfID's staff in Rangoon have become aware of the reports, but we do not know how substantial they are going to be; we will use all efforts to follow them up. The £600,000 will be routed through our UN partners, the World Food Programme and the UN Development Programme. If it goes ahead smoothly, we expect it to get to most villages within a week and the more remote villages within the next 10 to 12 days.

**Lord Archer of Sandwell:** My Lords, can my noble friend confirm that the famine was largely caused by a massive infestation of rats? Can he further confirm that that infestation was clearly predictable, because it was associated with the blooming of the bamboo, and that the Indian Government intervened quite successfully in Mizoram to prevent a similar tragedy? Are the Burmese Government prepared to discuss famine relief with aid organisations outside, or does my noble friend share the widespread belief that the failure to act was deliberate?

**Lord Tunnickliffe:** My Lords, it is clear that Burmese preparation for this famine, which is predictable because it happens every 50 years when the bamboo goes through a particular stage, was inadequate. However, that is more symptomatic of the Burmese Government's failure to commit adequate resources to the needs of their people than poor organisation. We believe that United Nations organisations on the ground are best placed to raise these issues with the Burmese authorities. They did so in developing the aid package that DfID recently agreed to finance. We believe that a bilateral approach from the United Kingdom to the authorities on the situation in Chin State would not be effective.

**Lord Avebury:** My Lords, is the Minister aware of the suggestion made by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees last May that the quarter of a million Rohingyas in Bangladesh should return voluntarily—a forlorn hope as long as their relatives are being treated as non-citizens? What can be done to step up the pressure on Burma, called for by the EU a couple of weeks ago, to engage in dialogue with the ethnic groups? In particular, would the EU be prepared to visit the unofficial camps in which the quarter of a million Rohingyas are suffering appalling conditions in Bangladesh?

**Lord Tunnickliffe:** My Lords, the efforts of the EU on the political level have been significant—it is the strictest regime that has been introduced. The United Kingdom and the EU are constantly concerned about it. Whether we will be able to make more direct progress is difficult to foresee. The situation, certainly among the minorities, is terrible, with dreadful human rights violations. At the moment, we are working through the EU, the United Nations and neighbouring countries to bring pressure on the regime.

**Lord Elton:** My Lords, reverting to Chin State, the noble and learned Lord, Lord Archer, asked whether it was possible that the failure of the Government of Burma to bring relief was in any way deliberate. Is the Minister aware of reports that their troops in Chin State are not only resorting to what appear to be customary methods of forced labour and rape, but are destroying the population's remaining minimal stores of food? In one case, a village's entire herd of pigs was shot by the military who then demanded payment for the bullets.

**Lord Tunnickliffe:** My Lords, the Government are aware of the dreadful behaviour of this particular regime. Nevertheless, we were hopeful that the United Nations partners had agreed effective understandings with the regime that this aid would get through. We will monitor these reports carefully to see whether there is more that we can do, but at the moment we continue to believe that pressure through our UN partners will be most effective.

**Lord Soley:** My Lords, can the influence of India, China and Thailand be brought to bear on this state? They are the only countries in the area that Burma is willing to listen to. Can we exercise our influence

through them to do something about this terrible regime?

**Lord Tunncliffe:** My Lords, I am sure that we will. The adjacent nations, ASEAN and the UN achieved an agreement with the regime about the cyclone, which has actually worked quite well: aid is getting through. I am therefore sure that, if we have more problems than we originally thought in getting the aid through, the strong influence of adjacent nations will be brought to bear.

**Baroness Rawlings:** My Lords, my colleague Andrew Mitchell in the other place has been pressing for more aid to Burma for a long time. Further to the Minister's Answer, what support have Her Majesty's Government been giving to the cross-border aid from Thailand?

**Lord Tunncliffe:** My Lords, we only resort to cross-border aid in extreme cases, when it is not getting through any other way. However, we are providing modest financial support for cross-border aid from Thailand.

## **EARLY DAY MOTIONS**

### **EDM 1988: REFERRAL OF BURMA TO THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT 08.07.2008**

Signed by 63 MPs  
(Bercow, John)

That this House condemns ongoing crimes against humanity in Burma, whereby the dictatorship systematically commits crimes against civilians including torture, rape of ethnic women, systematic sexual violence, slavery, murder, mass imprisonment, forced labour, persecution of dissidents, conscription of child soldiers and forced relocation; further expresses deep concern that the dictatorship refused to allow humanitarian assistance to survivors of Cyclone Nargis; welcomes the European Parliament Resolution of 22nd May 2008 calling for the dictatorship to be referred to the International Criminal Court; and calls on the British Government to use its membership of the United Nations Security Council to secure support for the Council to refer the situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court.

### **EDM 1653: AUNG SAN SUU KYI 02.06.2008**

Signed by 85 MPs  
(Evans, Nigel)

That this House is saddened that Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader in Burma, has had her house arrest extended by the Burma junta; notes that she has been held without trial for more than 12 of the last 18 years; and calls on the Government to urge the Burma junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi and the further 2,000 political prisoners so that democratic politics can be restored to Burma.

### **EDM 1578: BURMESE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM 15.05.2008**

Signed by 72 MPs  
(Crabb, Stephen)

That this House condemns the announcement by Burma's ruling junta that a new constitution was given overwhelming backing in a referendum carried out on 10th May in the midst of the catastrophe caused by Cyclone Nargis; notes that the draft constitution has been designed to entrench military rule in Burma and is opposed by pro-democracy groups within Burma; is appalled that the regime continued with the planned referendum even as thousands of Burmese men, women and children were dying in the devastated Irawaddy Delta region; dismisses the claims by the generals that voter turnout was 99 per cent. and that the constitution was approved by more than 92 per cent. of all eligible voters; again calls on the junta to release all political prisoners inside Burma including Aung San Suu Kyi; and encourages the Government to continue working with international partners to overcome the resistance of the regime in Burma to a full international humanitarian effort to bring relief to the cyclone survivors.

## **EDM 1515: BURMESE CYCLONE**

**08.05.2008**

Signed by 51 MPs  
(Abbott, Diane)

That this House is shocked by the news of the cyclone that has struck Burma; is saddened by reports that 22,000 people have lost their lives and 41,000 people are missing; is concerned by reports that almost one million people have been made homeless; and calls on the Government to follow up its generous aid contribution with the highest level of support for aid agencies working in the area.

## **EDM 1143: BURMA'S CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM**

**10.03.2008**

Signed by 62 MPs  
(Evans, Nigel)

That this House notes the decision of the Burmese military regime to hold a referendum on a new constitution in early May 2008; is concerned that clauses in the draft constitution would preclude the election of Aung San Suu Kyi or other legitimate non-military opposition leaders; condemns the harsh restrictions in place against campaigners against the referendum; further notes that among those Burmese citizens to be denied the opportunity to vote within Burma will be approximately 350,000 Buddhist clergy, 500,000 internally displaced Burmese and 160,000 refugees on the Thai-Burma border; further notes the opportunity to vote will also be denied to an estimated 150,000 Burmese migrant workers in Malaysia, Singapore, China and India, to 50,000 Burmese refugees in India, and to an estimated four million Burmese living in exile around the world, including in Britain; calls for the referendum to be held in an atmosphere of freedom and respect for basic rights; looks forward to the day when all Burmese citizens over 18 are afforded the right to vote, without regard to religion, gender, ethnicity or political affiliation; and calls on the Government to continue to press the EU, the US and Burma's neighbours to take a strong and united position on Burma and to support the Burmese people in their struggle for full democratic rights.

## **EDM 1003: ASSASSINATION OF DEMOCRACY LEADER FROM BURMA**

**21.02.2008**

Signed by 58 MPs  
(Bercow, John)

That this House condemns the assassination of Padoh Mahn Sha Lah Phan, General Secretary of the Karen National Union; pays tribute to his tireless work to bring freedom to the people of Burma; condemns the junta ruling Burma for its terrorist act in organising the assassination; sends its condolences to the family of Mahn Sha; and calls on the British government to take action to stop the Burmese junta's brutal attacks against the Karen and other ethnic civilians in Eastern Burma.

## **European Parliament Resolution of 23 October 2008 on Burma**

– having regard to its resolutions of 19 June 2008, 24 April 2008, 27 September 2007, 21 June 2007<sup>4</sup> and 14 December 2006 on Burma,

– having regard to the Council's Conclusions on Burma/Myanmar of 29 April 2008, adopted at the General Affairs and External relations Council in Luxembourg, and the Council Common Position 2006/318/CFSP of 27 April 2006 renewing restrictive measures against Burma/Myanmar<sup>6</sup>,

– having regard to the report of 3 September 2008 (A/63/341) by the United Nation's (UN) Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana,

– having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas 24 October 2008 marks the 13th anniversary of the unjust incarceration as a political prisoner of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, General Secretary of the National League for Democracy (NLD); whereas an

additional 2 120 individuals continue to face imprisonment in atrocious conditions merely for expressing the wish to bring democracy to Burma; and whereas on 3 October 2008 Navanethem Pillay, newly appointed UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, formally appealed to the Burmese military authorities to release all political prisoners,

B. whereas, on the anniversary of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's captivity, leaders of Asian and European countries will convene the Seventh Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in China on 24 and 25 October 2008,

C. whereas the Burmese military junta is purposely refusing to take any preventive or protective measures to safeguard against the severe famine threatening Chin state in the West of the country,

D. whereas in September 2008 the Burmese authorities staged a five-day crackdown on widespread protests that had begun six weeks earlier,

E. whereas the human rights situation has continued to deteriorate, political repression has escalated and the military junta has failed to deliver on promises made to the international community in the aftermath of the Saffron revolution of September 2007, whereas in 2003 the United States forbade the import of all Burmese clothing, which is manufactured in conditions of virtual slavery, and whereas the Council of the European Union has hitherto failed to reach consensus among Member States on taking equivalent measures,

G. whereas the Secretary-General of the United Nations has announced that he may cancel a visit to Burma planned for December 2008 should there be no discernible improvement in the national situation in the months ahead,

H. whereas the UN revealed in August 2008 that the Burmese military authorities were fraudulently seizing a percentage of humanitarian aid remitted to Burma through falsely weighted currency exchange rates,

I. whereas the Burmese military authorities have paralysed internet access to the free media, impeded the circulation of independent information sources and imprisoned so-called cyber- dissidents for attempting freely to express their political opinions,

1. Condemns the continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under intermittent house arrest since her victory at the last democratic elections in 1990, and insists upon her immediate release;

2. Deplores the fact that the number of political prisoners has increased from 1 300 to 2 000 in the aftermath of the Saffron Revolution, and that, despite the release of veteran journalist and NLD secretary U Win Tin and six other leaders in September 2008, 23 NLD members were subsequently arrested;

3. Denounces the arbitrary charges behind the arrests of many dissidents and the harsh conditions of detention of political prisoners including widespread use of torture and hard labour; expresses deep concern about the systematic denial of medical treatment to political prisoners, and calls for the International Committee of the Red Cross to be allowed to resume visits;

4. Urges the ASEM states at their Summit to jointly appeal to the Burmese military authorities to release all political prisoners;

5. Strongly condemns the ethnic cleansing directed against the Karen minority, including those seeking refuge in neighbouring Thailand; calls in this respect on the international community to exert stronger pressure on the junta to stop military actions against civilians and to increase humanitarian assistance to affected populations, including by cross-border mechanisms, where necessary;

6. Calls on the Commission to insist on the lifting of all restrictions on aid delivery imposed by the Burmese military authorities on areas afflicted by Cyclone Nargis, and to present a full report on the efficacy of its assistance and the extent of assistance still required;

7. Calls on the Burmese authorities urgently to attend to their humanitarian responsibilities, in particular with

respect to the impending famine in Chin state;

8. Notes that 37 visits by UN envoys in the past 20 years have not secured a single reform by the Burmese State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and draws attention to the UN Security Council Presidential Statement of 11 October 2007 on the situation in Myanmar (S/PRST/2007/37), which has also been ignored by the SPDC; calls for timelines and benchmarks to be set for reform, and for the UN Security Council to resolve to take further action on Burma if the timelines and benchmarks are not met;

9. Calls on the Burmese Government to progressively implement the four core human rights elements requested by the UN Special Rapporteur, namely: freedom of expression, assembly and association; release of prisoners of conscience; transition to a multiparty democratic and civil government; and an independent and impartial judiciary;

10. Calls on the Secretary-General of the United Nations to press ahead with a second visit to Burma in December 2008, irrespective of prevailing conditions, in order to make an urgent personal appeal for the release of all political prisoners and the full inclusion of the NLD in preparations for the 2010 elections, and to emphasise that UN demands must be met;

11. Calls on the European Council to use its meeting on 11-12 December 2008 to review Council Regulation (EC) No 194/2008 of 25 February 2008 renewing and strengthening the restrictive measures in respect of Burma/Myanmar<sup>1</sup>, to broaden targeted sanctions to include access to international banking services for companies, conglomerates and businesses owned by or closely linked to the Burmese military, to halt all imports of Burmese manufactured clothing, and to terminate access by selected generals and their families to business opportunities, health care, consumer purchases, and foreign education;

12. Calls on the Commission to explain what action it intends to take with respect to the UN admission that a percentage of all humanitarian aid remitted to Burma is falling victim to state-sponsored exchange rate abuse;

13. Expresses grave concern that the 'Investigation Body' established by the Burmese military authorities to investigate the deaths, arrests and disappearances linked to the peaceful demonstrations of September 2007 has produced no response, and calls on the Burmese authorities to facilitate the operation of a UN-sanctioned investigative commission;

14. Urges the Governments of China, India and Russia to use their considerable economic and political leverage with the Burmese authorities in order to bring about substantial improvements in the country and to cease the supply of weaponry and other strategic resources;

15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the EU Special Envoy for Burma, the SPDC, the Governments of the Association of South East Asian Nations' (ASEAN) and ASEM member states, the ASEM secretariat, ASEAN's Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD, the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

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**CAMPAIGNING  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND DEMOCRACY IN BURMA**