



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

JUNE
2008

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

2 June 2008

Cyclone Nargis

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he is taking to ensure that independent monitors are present in Burma to ensure that relief aid to Burma reaches its intended recipients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development's (DFID) emergency aid to Burma is going only to the UN, Red Cross and NGOs with experience working in humanitarian crises and in Burma. We have confidence in the monitoring mechanisms these partners have in place to ensure that DFID's emergency aid reaches its intended recipients. DFID maintains regular contact with the partners that it funds so that it is alerted as soon as possible to any problems they encounter with the delivery of aid. DFID is not channelling any assistance through the Government of Burma.

We have not had any confirmed reports of the diversion of aid. Our efforts are currently focussed on widening access for international aid workers which is a higher priority than getting access for monitors.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the Government have taken to provide aid relief to the victims of Cyclone Nargis.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: In the wake of Cyclone Nargis, the UK has already contributed £17 million for the humanitarian relief effort. This is being channelled through the UN, the Red Cross, and NGOs in Burma. We have logistics experts in Bangkok and Rangoon to help manage the delivery of relief supplies, as well as a six-person DFID emergency team deployed to Burma.

As part of this contribution, DFID has provided £5 million in logistical support and relief supplies and flat bottomed boats and engines to enable delivery of humanitarian assistance in the inland waters of the Irrawaddy Delta.

The Government have also had intensive diplomatic exchanges with key international partners, including Burma's regional friends such as China, India and Thailand, about what can be done to increase the delivery of international aid to victims of the cyclone and to persuade the Burmese authorities to allow greater access for humanitarian relief workers. We are strongly supportive of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) co-ordinating mechanism in Burma to distribute aid from the international community, agreed at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting on 19 May. We are encouraging the development of practical arrangements for ASEAN countries to deliver relief supplies directly to the affected areas.

United Nations

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 16 May 2008 to the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk, Official Report, column 1813W, on Burma: United Nations, what further steps he has taken to co-ordinate international pressure on the ruling authorities in Burma to permit the fullest possible assistance to reach those affected by Cyclone Nargis.

Meg Munn: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, and I, have continued lobbying regional leaders. My noble Friend, Lord Malloch-Brown, visited Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Burma for ministerial discussions recently. On 19 May the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Foreign Ministers agreed to create an aid co-ordination and delivery mechanism for Burma. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed Burma with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in New York on 20 May. The UN Secretary-General attended the International Conference on Aid to Burma, co-ordinated by the UN and ASEAN, held in Rangoon on 25 May. We will continue to encourage the ASEAN countries urgently to set up a supply chain which we, and other donors, can use. We will continue to press for unfettered access to all the affected areas.

3 June 2008

Cyclone Nargis

Lord Alton: What information they have about the level of fatalities and casualties following the Burmese cyclone; and what humanitarian aid they are sending to survivors and victims.

Baroness Crawley: The current estimate of the number of dead and missing following Cyclone Nargis is rising to in excess of 200,000 people. At least 1.5 million people are in need of immediate assistance.

The UK made an initial pledge of £5 million for the immediate relief effort following Cyclone Nargis and stands ready to contribute much more. These funds will be used to help meet urgent humanitarian needs and will be channelled through UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs delivering assistance on the ground. This contribution will be in addition to the UK's long-term humanitarian programme inside Burma.

We have readied our stockpile of emergency supplies including tents, water containers, blankets, and plastics sheets, and we have sourced additional logistic equipment and other relief items. The first airlift of these materials departed on 12 May.

A Department for International Development (DfID) team of emergency response experts arrived in Burma on the weekend of 10 and 11 May, to support the DfID Burma office and help to maximise the impact of DfID emergency funding.

Refugees

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government have taken to protect the safety of Burmese refugees in states neighbouring Burma.

Meg Munn: The Office of the UN high commissioner for refugees is leading assistance to refugees from Burma, with support from international donors. The Thai government is also engaged on the issue of Burmese refugees in Thailand.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development visited the Thailand-Burma border in January to see at first hand the plight of Burmese people who have been forced to flee from their country's repressive regime and the work being done by the international community to help them.

The Department for International Development is providing £1.8 million over three years to groups which provide assistance to Burmese refugees in Thailand as well as to internally displaced persons inside Burma.

4 June 2008

Overseas Trade

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform what steps his Department is taking to dissuade companies based in the UK from trading with Burma.

Mr. Thomas: The UK Government discourage trade and investment with Burma. We offer no commercial services or support to UK companies wishing to trade with or invest in Burma. British companies who inquire about trade with Burma are informed of the grave political situation, the regime's atrocious record on human rights and the country's dire economic prospects.

We have consistently supported measures that target those responsible for the regime's policies, rather than a blanket ban that would hurt the ordinary people of Burma. These include the EU's 'Common Position'

on Burma, which imposes sanctions on Burma, including a ban on EU companies investing in certain Burmese state-owned companies.

5 June 2008

Overseas Aid

Mrs. Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid his Department plans to provide to Burma in each year from 2008 until 2011.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) plans to spend £12 million in Burma in 2008-09, rising to £15 million in 2009-10 and £18 million in 2010-11. This allocation is additional to the £27.5 million we have committed to emergency relief in Burma following Cyclone Nargis.

Cyclone Nargis

Mrs. Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding his Department has provided to cross-border groups which have been providing humanitarian assistance in Burma since Cyclone Nargis.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) has so far pledged £27.5 million towards the humanitarian effort following Cyclone Nargis. This assistance is being channelled through the United Nations, the Red Cross and NGOs with the greatest capacity to operate effectively in the areas of Burma worst hit by the cyclone. We have no plans at present to channel funds through cross-border groups based in neighbouring countries.

Political Prisoners

Mrs. Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to seek to secure the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners in Burma.

Meg Munn: On 27 May, the Burmese regime decided to extend Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest for a further 12 months. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a public statement on 27 May expressing his sadness that the Burmese Government had extended Aung San Suu Kyi's detention. He also said that while our immediate focus is on relieving the suffering caused by the recent cyclone, restoration of democracy in Burma is still vital for that country's long-term future. He urged the Burmese Government to release Aung San Suu Kyi and allow her to play her rightful role in the process of genuine national reconciliation. On 29 May, the EU presidency issued a statement which "strongly deplored" the decision taken to renew Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest.

The member states of the EU continue to call for the release of opposition political figures. Measures adopted under the EU Common Position remain in place to underpin pressure on the regime to move to an inclusive democratic system of governance. In a President's Statement last month, the UN Security Council reaffirmed its call last October for the release of political prisoners in Burma.

6 June 2008

Overseas Aid

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of his Department's annual budget for aid to Burma for 2008-09 has been allocated to (a) the United Nations, (b) international non-governmental organisations and (c) Burmese aid organisations.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: Based on current commitments and projections, the £12 million budgeted by DFID for Burma in 2008-09, excluding cyclone assistance, will be channelled as follows:

United Nations: 35 per cent.

International non-governmental organisations: 43 per cent.

Burmese aid organisations: 22 per cent.

Where money is channelled through United Nations programmes, such as the Three Diseases Fund and UNICEF's multi-donor education support, for delivery by international and local non-governmental organisations, it is included in the percentages for the non-governmental organisations rather than for the

United Nations. Burma: Storms

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he has taken to seek to ensure that Government aid reaches those for whom it is intended in Burma.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: All the aid delivered to Burma via UK transport has been consigned directly to international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or to the United Nations (UN). On arrival, it is met by DFID staff and transferred directly to the UN or international NGOs for storage and onward distribution. No UK relief items have been given to the government or the armed forces. The organisations receiving UK relief supplies have their own logistical arrangements to deliver supplies to communities affected by the cyclone, and to monitor their use. DFID logistics staff assessed their logistical capacity, and continue to monitor progress with distribution. We have a monitoring strategy in place involving field visits by Burmese and UK-based DFID staff.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the territorial extent of the agreement with the Government of Burma on distribution of aid to alleviate the effects of Cyclone Nargis is.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: On 23 May, the Burmese Government told the United Nations Secretary General that it would lift barriers to access by international aid workers to areas of Burma affected by Cyclone Nargis. At the donor conference convened by United Nations and ASEAN on 25 May, the Burmese Government confirmed that all "genuine" international aid workers would be permitted necessary access to the affected region. The Burmese Government further agreed that aid delivered by civilian means would be accepted from all quarters "provided no strings are attached and no politicisation is involved".

Since the conference, there has been some improvement in access to the affected areas. The Burmese authorities have eased their visa regime and have granted some travel permits for international aid workers, including DFID staff, to visit the Irrawaddy Delta. However, much more still needs to be done by the Burmese Government to broaden access and accelerate the flow of aid.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he has taken to ensure that aid delivered to Burma via UK transport is not appropriated by Burmese armed forces.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: All the aid delivered to Burma via UK transport has been consigned directly to international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or to the United Nations (UN). On arrival, it is met by DFID staff and transferred directly to the UN or international NGOs for storage and onward distribution. No UK relief items have been given to the Burmese government or the armed forces. The organisations receiving UK relief supplies have their own logistical arrangements to deliver supplies to communities affected by the cyclone, and to monitor their use. DFID logistics staff assessed their logistical capacity, and continue to monitor progress with distribution. We have a monitoring strategy in place involving field visits by Burmese and UK-based DFID staff.

9 June 2008

Asian Tribal Ministries

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether his Department provides funding to Asian Tribal Ministries operations in Burma; and whether officials from his Department have met staff or volunteers from Asian Tribal Ministries.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) does not provide funding for Asian Tribal Ministries operations and has no plans to do so. DFID officials have met representatives from a very broad range of Thailand based Burmese organisations, including Asian Tribal Ministries.

Internally Displaced Persons

Mrs. Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding his Department has provided to Burmese people displaced by the military regime.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: In 2007-08 the Department for International Development (DFID) contributed £770,000 to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) which provides food and other support to Burmese refugees in Thailand and to displaced people inside Burma. We are discussing DFID's contribution for 2008-09 with TBBC and Christian Aid, through which this funding is channelled. DFID also provides support from within Burma to people living in and near conflict and ceasefire areas in the border regions, many of whom have been displaced. In all, about 20 per cent. of DFID's regular programme of assistance for Burma (which is doubling from £9 million in 2007-09 to £18 million in 2010-11) benefits people in areas affected by conflict. The £17 million which DFID has pledged so far in emergency assistance following Cyclone Nargis is additional to the regular programme.

Burma: International Red Cross

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the Government has taken to persuade the Burmese junta to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross into areas of conflict in Eastern Burma.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: In November 2006 the UK Government made two ministerial statements strongly condemning the Burmese Government's decision to order the closure of the field offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross. These statements were transmitted to the Burmese Ministers of Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Health, Labour, and National Economic Planning and Development. The Department for International Development (DFID) Office and British embassy in Rangoon continue to press the Burmese authorities to reverse their decision.

Overseas Aid

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether his Department has made an evaluation of the effectiveness of the 3 Diseases Fund for Burma.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) closely monitors the performance of the Three Diseases Fund and participated in the fund's first annual review meeting on 1-2 April 2008. This meeting reviewed the fund's overall performance and identified its achievements, areas where strengthening is required, and policy and programme priorities for the next year. The meeting was attended by 156 representatives of donors, United Nations agencies, international and local non-governmental organisations, and the Burmese Ministry of Health.

Further details of the fund board's conclusions and recommendations from the meeting are set out in an aide-mémoire which is available on the Three Diseases Fund website: www.3dfund.org.

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which organisations were the top 10 recipients of UK aid to Burma in 2007-08; and how much each received.

A further £100,000 was allocated to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium during the financial year, and has been disbursed, but will be accounted for in 2008-09.

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what his Department's aid budgets for Burma, excluding cyclone funding, are for (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10 and (c) 2010-11.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development's planned expenditure on Burma, excluding cyclone funding, is:

£ million

2008-09	12
2009-10	15
2010-11	18

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much British aid has reached internally displaced people in Karen state, Burma; and how many people have received such aid.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: In 2007-08, the Department for International Development (DFID) provided £400,000 for assistance to displaced people through community-based organisations inside Burma. This assistance reached around 106,000 displaced people, mostly in Karen communities, living near Burma's border with Thailand.

In 2007, DFID agreed that its funding to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) could be used to support cross-border relief programmes for displaced people inside Burma as well as Burmese refugees in Thailand. TBBC estimates that its cross-border support reached 80,420 people in 2007. DFID has agreed to provide £1 million to TBBC for 2008-09, an increase of 30 per cent. over our total allocation for 2007-08.

Thailand Burma Border Consortium

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the Government have agreed to increase funding for the Thailand Burma Border Consortium in 2008-09.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) has approved a grant of £1 million for the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) for 2008-09. This funding is being channelled through Christian Aid. It represents a 30 per cent. increase over last year's total allocation of £770,000. This is in response to the rapid rise in the cost of rice this year, as well as last year's decision by DFID to allow TBBC to use our money for cross-border support to internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside Burma as well as for refugees in Thailand.

Democracy

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions the British Ambassador to Thailand has had with representatives of Burma's democracy movement.

Meg Munn: Our ambassador in Bangkok has held discussions with Burmese political organisations and other civil society representatives six times in 2008. We continue to maintain a dialogue with groups campaigning for democracy in Burma, in the UK and in the region.

Ethnic Groups

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

(1) What meetings his Department's officials held with Karen National Union General Secretary Padoh Mahn Sha in the 12 months before he was assassinated in February 2008.

(2) What reports he has received on the alleged involvement of Col Htin Maung and Pastor Timothy Laklem of the KNU Peace Council in the assassination of Padoh Mahn Sha, General Secretary of the Karen National Union, Burma.

Meg Munn: To date, we have received no conclusive reports on which person or parties were involved in the assassination of Pado Mahn Sha on 14 February 2008. The case is still under investigation by the Thai police. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials had no meeting with Pado Mahn Sha in the 12 months prior to his assassination. I sent a message of condolence to his daughter, Zoya Phan.

Cyclone Nargis

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government issued warnings about Cyclone Nargis to British residents in Burma; and whether such warnings were also given to the regime ruling Burma.

Meg Munn: Based on data from the Meteorological Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel advice for Burma was updated on 30 April to inform British nationals that tropical Cyclone Nargis was forecast to make landfall on the Burmese coast between 2-3 May. This advice was again updated on 1 May to inform that the cyclone would make landfall on 2 May on the central Burmese coast. On 1 May, our embassy in Rangoon sent a notice to all registered British nationals and other nationals to whom we provide consular assistance. The notice warned of the cyclone and included links to websites with information on extreme weather.

The Burmese Department of Meteorology and Hydrology has said that it tracked the storm from 29 April 2008 and, in doing so, claims to have been in contact with Indian, Thai, UK and US meteorological authorities and agencies. The Burmese Government said that on 1 May and 2 May, local television and radio warned of the storm and specifically that the wind could be strong and destructive.

10 June 2008

Internally Displaced Persons

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate he has made of the number of internally displaced persons in eastern Burma in need of humanitarian assistance in areas where the Burmese government prohibits access by foreign aid agencies.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: It is estimated that about 100,000 internally displaced people are living in areas of eastern Burma which are not accessible to agencies working inside Burma. Others are living in areas where access by international staff is very difficult, but they can be reached by Burmese staff and local partners of foreign aid agencies.
Burma: Overseas Aid

Cross Border Aid

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what cross-border projects for aid to Burma his Department is funding.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) recently agreed an allocation of £1 million for the Thailand Burma Border Consortium for 2008-09. This money may be used for cross-border assistance to internally displaced people in Burma as well as to support Burmese refugees in Thailand.

DFID also recently agreed funding of £102,780 for the Shan Women's Action Network for its work to improve health, education, livelihoods and women's rights among displaced Shan people in camps in Burma and Thailand.

DFID is also providing £1.35 million over four years for cross-border health care work on the Burma/China border undertaken by Health Unlimited.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much has been allocated to cross-border aid to the poor and internally displaced in Karen state, Burma.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development's (DFID) funding for the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) may be used for cross-border assistance to internally displaced people in Karen and other states in eastern Burma, as well as for support to Burmese refugees in Thailand. DFID recently agreed an allocation to TBBC of £1 million for 2008-09. In 2007, TBBC spent about 11 per cent. of its budget on cross-border assistance.

Poor and internally displaced people in Karen State are also assisted through programmes inside Burma which are supported by DFID. These include the Three Diseases Fund, the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Initiative, International Development Enterprises, Save the Children, and local Burmese organisations.

Cyclone Nargis

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate he has made of the number of persons affected by Cyclone Nargis in Burma who had received humanitarian assistance as at 1 June 2008.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: At 1 June the UN estimated that one million of the 2.4 million people affected by Cyclone Nargis had received some humanitarian assistance; on 5 June the figure was revised to 1.3 million people. However, some of the people included in this figure have only received support on a one-off basis, so they will require further relief aid.

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what reports he has received of discrimination against ethnic Karen people in the distribution of aid in the Irrawaddy delta.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: We recognise that concerns have been expressed over possible discrimination against ethnic Karen in the distribution of aid in the Irrawaddy delta. We have, however, received no substantiated reports that this has taken place. Assistance provided by the

United Nations and international non-governmental organisations funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) is distributed according to the principles of impartiality and need, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

11 June 2008

Burma

Tony Baldry: What recent assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation in Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: Although access has improved, the situation remains extremely grave. The United Nations estimates that relief has reached 1.3 million of the 2.4 million people affected. Although there has been progress in access, more than 1 million people remain in need. Our priority therefore remains to get assistance to those who need it. We will continue to work with the UN to maintain pressure on the Burmese regime to meet its commitments.

Tony Baldry: If a Government, by wilful neglect, caused the loss of thousands of lives of a single ethnic group, that would be genocide. The loss of tens of thousands of lives caused by the Burmese Government hindering the international cyclone relief effort is seen by various members of the Security Council as simply an expression of Burma's national sovereignty. Does the Secretary of State agree that if Russia and China persist with that view of humanitarian relief, we will have an increasingly dysfunctional and fractured world?

Mr. Alexander: Of course, we want to see all Governments meet their obligations towards their people, not least in circumstances of a humanitarian crisis on that scale. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the United Kingdom Government have been at the forefront of efforts to raise the issue within the United Nations. I welcome the fact that the UN Secretary-General will be briefing the Security Council in the days ahead, following his visit to Burma. I can further confirm that we strongly urged the Secretary-General to take a personal interest in Burma and to visit Burma, not least given our concerns as to the importance of the crisis and on dealing with the crisis for the UN system more generally. Only yesterday, I spoke with the UN emergency co-ordinator, John Holmes. I also spoke to Dr. Surin, the secretary-general of the Association of South East Asian Nations, and urged both of them to continue their efforts through the UN-ASEAN bridge to ensure that, limited though it has been, we see significant uplifts in the level of access in the days ahead.

Mr. Jim Devine: Will my right hon. Friend tell me what agencies our Government are working with?

Mr. Alexander: We are working with long-established partners such as the Red Cross, Save the Children and Merlin, a range of organisations that have access to Burma. I assure my hon. Friend that we have worked hard to ensure that the aid that we are providing to those aid agencies is received by those aid agencies.

John Bercow: Given that anyone seeking to channel aid privately to cyclone victims in the Irrawaddy delta region is certain to face arrest, intimidation or at the very least obstruction, and that the Government of Burma preposterously are now claiming that they are ready to move from the relief phase to the reconstruction phase, what steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that British funds provided for the relief of suffering are not siphoned off by one of the most sadistic military dictatorships in the world in order to enrich itself rather than to help the people?

Mr. Alexander: I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that I hope he seeks; we are mindful of exactly that challenge. We have systems in place and are working continuously to ensure that the natural generosity of the British people is matched by the effectiveness of the aid that they are contributing through a range of organisations. As to whether we are now in the reconstruction rather than the relief phase, I have been categorical that, given the present level of unmet need, there is still an urgent requirement for international humanitarian agencies to provide emergency relief.

Mr. Gregory Campbell: The Secretary of State said that the UK is at the forefront of endeavours regarding Burma. Can he give us tangible expressions of the improvement in the situation since we came to the forefront between four weeks ago and today in terms of the level of humanitarian aid to the people of Burma?

Mr. Alexander: Let me give a couple of examples to the hon. Gentleman. We are the largest donor with contributions of £27.5 million, which manifests itself in 22 relief flights that have now landed in Burma thanks to the efforts that have been made. In terms of improvements, 10 World Food Programme helicopters are now operating within Burma, which we have been urging on and demanding of the Burmese Government for many days now. I hope that the fact that we now have airlift capability within the country will lead to a significant improvement in the effectiveness of the delivery of aid within the country.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the aid reaches those who need it within Burma, but that the aid workers are protected? At the same time, the big challenge is how we get a regime change by working with the likes of India and China. That is what we really need in Burma.

Mr. Alexander: When I met the UN Secretary-General when I attended the international conference at his request, I strongly urged him to visit Burma again this year, and I anticipate that he will return to Burma and maintain a close interest in this issue. If he does so, I hope that the focus of his visit will not be exclusively on humanitarian issues, but more broadly on the continuing political crisis afflicting the country.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Despite the junta's promise to the Secretary-General to grant full access to aid workers, it is clear that insufficient aid is getting through. Indeed, victims are being forced out of the makeshift camps. The Department's own website makes it clear that only 15 travel requests for internationals were accepted in the time between the Rangoon conference and 4 June. Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that the international community has not merely had the wool pulled over its eyes by the Burmese generals?

Mr. Alexander: I assure the House that we continue to focus on this issue. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern in terms of the level of access that the international community wants, but, as I say, I have held further discussions within the past 24 hours with the emergency co-ordinator of the UN, John Holmes, and I have also spoken directly to Dr. Surin, the secretary-general of ASEAN. We will continue to focus on this issue to get the relief aid to those who so desperately need it.

Constitutions

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has

received of the conditions under which the 10 May 2008 constitutional referendum in Burma was held; and if he will make a statement.

David Miliband: It is an indictment of the regime that they chose to go ahead with their flawed constitutional referendum at a time when hundreds of thousands of Burma's citizens were suffering without food, clean water or shelter in the Irrawaddy Delta. The political situation in Burma precludes a free and fair vote. Fundamental rights and freedoms are completely absent and the democratic opposition is persecuted — its leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, locked up and its supporters living in fear of detention and violence. The referendum itself was conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, where criticism of the process was punishable by long prison sentences. We also have serious doubts about the secrecy of voting. The results, a turnout of 98 per cent. (including those areas hit by the cyclone) and a 'yes' vote of over 92 per cent. lack all credibility.

The Government will continue its work towards an inclusive transition to democracy in Burma including engagement of EU member states and the UN.

Cyclone Nargis

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what (a) equipment and (b) supplies for those in Burma affected by Cyclone Nargis are on board HMS Westminster.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: As the closest British ship to the area, the HMS Westminster was initially sent to waters off the coast of Burma. She had on board a helicopter, rigid inflatable boats, water jerry cans and 6,000 litres of bottled water. She was replaced by HMS Edinburgh on 25 May. Both vessels have now returned to normal duties and remain in the region.

12 June 2008

Politics and Government

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received regarding the assassination of the Karen National Union leader from Burma, Padoh Mahn Sha; and whether he has discussed this matter with his Thai counterpart.

Meg Munn: To date, we have received no conclusive reports on which person or parties were involved in the assassination of Padoh Mahn Sha on 14 February 2008. The case is still under investigation by the Thai police.

I discussed the murder of Padoh Mahn Sha with Thai Interior Minister Chalerm Ubamrung during my last visit to Thailand in February, who confirmed that investigations continue.

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
(1) What reports he has received of the visit to the UK by representatives of the Karen National Union Peace Council; and what discussions he has held on this matter.

(2) What meetings he has had with representatives of the (a) Karen National Union Peace Council and (b) Karen National Union in the last 12 months.

Meg Munn: Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials held a meeting with a visiting delegation from the National Council of the Union of Burma on 23 April 2008 at which the Karen National Union (KNU) was represented. Discussion focused on the role of the exile community in the constitutional referendum in Burma. We have not met representatives of the KNU Peace Council or received any reports of a visit of that organisation to the UK.

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he or his officials have held with Pastor Timothy Laklem or other representatives of Asian Tribal Ministries.

Meg Munn: Our embassy in Rangoon, including staff of the Department for International Development,

meets representatives from a broad range of Thailand based Burmese organisations, including Asian Tribal Ministries. Officials have not had recent meetings with Pastor Timothy Laklem.

John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Burmese authorities to encourage them to permit the Red Cross into areas of conflict in eastern Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Meg Munn: In November 2006 the Government made two ministerial statements strongly condemning the Burmese government's decision to order the closure of the field offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). These statements were transmitted to the Burmese Ministers of Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Health, Labour, and National Economic Planning and Development.

13 June 2008

Cyclone Nargis

Lord Alton: What is the likely impact of Cyclone Nargis on the ability of Burma to produce sufficient food to feed its population over the next 12 months; what information they have about the flooding of paddy fields in Burma with salt water, following the cyclone; and whether salt-resistant strains of rice can be made available for planting.

Lord Tunncliffe: Cyclone Nargis has devastated an important rice growing area shortly before the rice-planting season begins. An estimated 200,000 acres are affected by salt water. Initial estimates suggest rice production in affected areas may fall by as much as 85 per cent.

The UN Food and Agricultural Organisation is working with the UN development programme on plans to quickly distribute salt-resistant rice strain seeds to affected communities to enable what rice planting may be possible and assist in the early recovery of livelihoods. We expect to see these proposals very soon.

Lord Alton: What discussions they have had with members of the Association of South East Asian Nations, in particular China, Indonesia and Thailand, to enlist their help in persuading the Burmese authorities to allow humanitarian agencies appropriate access, following Cyclone Nargis.

Lord Tunncliffe: Since Cyclone Nargis hit Burma, the UK Government have had intensive diplomatic exchanges at ministerial and senior official level with key international partners, including ASEAN members and China, about persuading the Burmese authorities to allow greater access to those in need.

As part of this effort, government Ministers have spoken to counterparts in China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei and Cambodia.

Lord Hylton: Whether they will hold urgent discussions with India, Japan and China about relief and reconstruction in Burma following Cyclone Nargis.

Lord Tunncliffe: Since Cyclone Nargis hit Burma, the UK Government have had intensive diplomatic exchanges at ministerial and senior official level with key international partners about what they can do to increase the delivery of international aid and to persuade the Burmese authorities to allow greater access.

As part of this effort, the Prime Minister has spoken to the Indian Prime Minister and Lord Malloch-Brown has spoken to the Indian Foreign Secretary. The Foreign Secretary has written to his Chinese counterpart and the International Development Secretary has spoken to the Chinese ambassador. The British embassy in Tokyo has been in ongoing contact with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

17 June 2008

Democracy

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he has had with representatives of Burma's democracy movement in the last 12 months.

Meg Munn: As the Minister responsible for Burma, I have held a number of meetings with representatives of Burma's democratic movement over the last year, including Maung Maung, General Secretary of the Federation of Trade Unions Burma on 7 February; Dr. Sein Win of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma on 30 October; and Bo Kyi, Secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, Burma, on 15 November 2007.

I chaired two of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's four meetings over the past year with a range of stakeholders with an interest in Burma. These have involved UK-based non-governmental organisations and representatives of the Burmese exile community, Burma's ethnic groups and the Burmese Buddhist community.

During my visit to Thailand in February, I also met representatives of Burmese exile groups there.

Diplomatic Service

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the responsibilities of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy to Burma are; how many times he has visited the country; and what discussions he has had with the Burmese regime.

Meg Munn: Appointed in August 2007, the UK Special Representative on Middle East and Special Projects advises my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary on countries within this remit, including Burma. He undertakes specific missions and initiatives as designated by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and contributes to policy planning within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

In his current role, the UK Special Representative on Middle East and Special Projects has visited Burma once on 25 May 2008 when he accompanied my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development to the International Donors Conference, following Cyclone Nargis. Since taking up the Special Representative role, the only discussions he has had with the Burmese regime took place during this visit and focussed solely on humanitarian relief. He discussed Burma with the Governments of Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand in November 2007 and April 2008 and with the Government of India in April 2008.

HMS Westminster

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role HMS Westminster is playing in the international relief effort for Burma.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: At the request of DFID, on 15 May the MOD deployed the closest available vessel to international waters near Burma as a contingency to assist with the humanitarian response if needed. HMS Westminster's capabilities include fresh water production (up to 50 metric tonnes per day), two sea boats for the transport of personnel and equipment, communications liabilities and a Merlin helicopter which could be used for reconnaissance or to transport personnel and equipment. In addition, the ship's company of around 150 personnel are trained in disaster relief.

To minimise the disruption to the ship's planned tasks, on Sunday 25 May HMS Westminster was relieved by HMS Edinburgh, which has a similar capability for delivery of humanitarian assistance.

You will be aware that the Burmese authorities formally declined the offer of assistance from naval vessels so none of these capabilities have been utilised. Following discussions with the French and US, and in the light of the UN/ASEAN Cyclone Nargis International Pledging Conference on 25 May, the decision was taken on 28 May to withdraw HMS Edinburgh to allow her to return to other tasking. The MOD, DFID and FCO continue to keep under review how the UK may best contribute to relief efforts as the consequences of Cyclone Nargis become evident.

DFID has so far committed £17 million for emergency cyclone relief, in addition to its normal funding programmes in Burma. The International Development Secretary attended the 25 May donor conference in Rangoon and gave strong support to the UN Secretary-General's efforts to press the regime to give full co-operation to the international aid effort.

Entry Clearances

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria determine the inclusion of names on the visa ban list under the EU Common Position on Burma.

Meg Munn: The visa ban targets the military regime in Burma, those who benefit most from its misrule and those who actively frustrate the process of national reconciliation, respect for human rights and democracy.

The visa ban list, under Common Position 2006/318/CFSP, includes the names of members of the military regime, the military and security forces, significant individuals associated with the military regime who formulate, implement or benefit from policies that impede Burma's transition to democracy and their families and associates. Although certain measures imposed by this Common Position are directed at persons associated with the Burmese regime and members of their families, children under 18 are not, in principle, targeted.

19 June 2008

Cyclone Nargis

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions he has had with his ASEAN counterparts on the humanitarian response to the situation in Burma.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: Since the outset of the humanitarian crisis in Burma, the UK has engaged in intensive diplomatic exchanges with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries. In the weeks following the cyclone I have both spoken to and met with ASEAN Secretary General Dr. Surin Pitsuwan several times, and the Foreign Secretary liaised closely with his counterparts in the ASEAN region, speaking with his Malaysian, Thai, Indonesian and Singaporean counterparts. Lord Malloch-Brown and Shahid Malik pressed the need for access during their visit to the region on 17 May 2008. Foreign Minister Meg Munn spoke with her Vietnamese counterpart and has raised the issue with the Governments of Cambodia, Malaysia and the Philippines directly. In addition, all our embassies across South East Asia have been stressing the need for a concerted international humanitarian response to the crisis in their contacts with host Governments.

John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department has taken to ensure that aid for those affected by the Burmese cyclone has reached the most severely affected areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The main objective of the multi-agency humanitarian effort in response to Cyclone Nargis is to reach all affected populations as quickly as possible. The aid operation is scaling-up all the time. The UK is delivering its aid through United Nations, non-governmental organisation (NGO) and Red Cross partners, who have expanding coverage in the affected areas. More than £10 million of UK funds have been allocated to NGOs. They are working closely with local authorities to identify the worst affected populations and to reach them with clean fresh drinking water, sanitation facilities, basic health care and emergency shelter and agricultural assistance in the Delta.

The UK has given £5 million to the United Nations for their logistics operation to ensure that the UN has adequate helicopters, boats, ships and trucks to transport aid into and around Burma, to the most hard-hit areas of the country. Additionally we have directly provided 14 flat-bottomed boats which are operating to good effect to deliver supplies to remote parts of the Delta.

The UK is also working closely with the UN and ASEAN countries to press the Burmese Government to open better access to the Delta. Whilst access is still not good enough, increasing numbers of international staff and assistance are beginning to reach those in the worst affected areas. Progress however remains fragile and could be reversed.

23 June 2008

Human Rights

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the Thai government's influence over the government of Burma on human rights; and what plans he has to make progress on alternative means of persuading the Burmese regime to take account of

human rights.

Meg Munn: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I both met Thai Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama on 2 June and encouraged the Thai government to bring its influence to bear to support democracy, human rights and an improved quality of life for the people of Burma. Thailand and Burma share a 2,400 kilometre border and strong economic links and Thailand is home to an estimated 2 million Burmese migrants and 140,000 refugees. Both countries are members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Thailand is therefore in a key position to influence the government of Burma.

The human rights situation in Burma is of grave concern to both the UK and the wider international community. We have consistently used all available channels to highlight the dire situation in Burma. This has included engagement with civil society, bilateral action, multilateral action in the UN (including its Human Rights Council) and sustained dialogue and lobbying of all those who may have influence over the Burmese government. In discussions with ASEAN member countries, we have emphasised the leading role they have to play in supporting reform in their fellow member state.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what reports he has received on the additional guidelines for seeking travel permission and aid distribution clearance put in place by the Burmese authorities on 9 June; and what representations his Department has made to the Burmese authorities on this matter.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: On 9 June the Ministry of Planning issued a new set of “Guiding Principles” to be followed by the UN, INGOs and NGOs in carrying out cyclone relief. The new guidance stated that all visas and permissions for internal travel and for the import and distribution of relief supplies were to be obtained through relevant line ministries, rather than centrally through the Ministry of Social Welfare. On 20 June the Government of Burma retracted the “Guiding Principles” and reverted to the previous system where all visas are processed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all travel permits by the Ministry of Social Welfare. We hope that this will be a positive move in facilitating access.

24 June 2008

Burma

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

Meg Munn: The recent referendum lacks any credibility and the new constitution cannot provide a sound basis for Burma’s future. The renewal of Aung San Suu Kyi’s house arrest on 27 May demonstrates the regime’s determination to exclude legitimate political actors from the political process.

Only a process that includes all ethnic groups and political parties can lead to genuine national reconciliation. We will continue to work with regional and other international partners, including at the EU and UN, to encourage genuine democratic change.

John Bercow: What recent representations he has made to the Government of Burma on the renewed detention of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Meg Munn: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Sarkozy of France jointly called for Aung San Suu Kyi’s immediate release on 19 June, her birthday. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary deplored the extension of her house arrest on 27 May. We worked to ensure that the European Council and the United Nations Human Rights Council issued calls for her release in the past week.

John Bercow: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary for that informative reply. Given that the illegal, immoral and intolerable detention under house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi for more than 12 years is but one example of the Burmese Government’s egregious human rights abuses, which include rape as a weapon of war, extra-judicial killings and the active denial of aid to hundreds of thousands of people following Cyclone Nargis, will she work with her international counterparts to press the United Nations Security Council to refer the Burma Government’s conduct to the International Criminal Court?

Meg Munn: I am sure that all hon. Members agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiments. He will appreciate the difficulties of getting a resolution through the Security Council on those matters. At the moment, we are concentrating on seeking an authoritative assessment of the situation on the ground. The UN Human Rights Council agreed a resolution by consensus, which calls for the regime to give full access to all parts of Burma.

Mr. Barry Sheerman: Does my hon. Friend appreciate the amount of frustration felt in this country at our inability to effect any change in this wicked regime and its attitude to that fine woman?

Does she realise that even moderate Members of Parliament such as me would change their minds about a boycott of the Beijing Olympics if we found that, in Burma, as in Zimbabwe, China is the block on anything being done by the international community?

Meg Munn: Of course, I appreciate the frustrations that many people feel in this country about the lack of change in Burma. We have succeeded in getting aid into Burma, especially with the help of the Association of South East Asian Nations countries in the region. China agreed with the consensus on the UN Human Rights Council declaration. On that basis, we believe that we can continue to work with China to put pressure on the Burmese regime.

Mr. David Burrowes: Will the Government ensure that sanctions are tougher, more targeted and hit the military junta where it hurts, not least on arms? Will they also ensure that international aid from taxes and charities does not unwittingly get into the despicable junta's hands?

Meg Munn: On the latter point, I reassure the hon. Gentleman that aid in Burma goes through the UN and non-governmental organisations on the ground. On the first point, our sanctions in the European Union are designed to do exactly what he said: to be targeted on the regime, through, for example, timber, precious gems and so on. We are also doing further work to ascertain whether any financial sanctions could have the same effect.

Julie Morgan: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that, in Cardiff on Saturday, nearly 200 people attended an event to mark Aung San Suu Kyi's 63rd birthday. Does my hon. Friend agree that, following the referendum, which many people consider rigged, Burma's new constitution will effectively debar Aung San Suu Kyi and her party from taking part in the democratic process? What can she do about that?

Meg Munn: I congratulate my hon. Friend and the people of Cardiff, who keep the issue in the public eye, which is essential. She is right that the constitution has no legitimacy. Indeed, it is incredible that anyone could believe that the referendum was fair. The constitution is flawed and would debar Aung San Suu Kyi, and we continue to call for a proper process, which includes all those in Burma who have an interest in the development of democracy—Aung San Suu Kyi and all the leaders of the different ethnic groupings.

Mr. Keith Simpson: I see that the Foreign Office has a special representative, whose responsibilities cover the wider middle east, including Iraq and Iran, as well as the middle east peace process. He is also responsible—rather bizarrely—for Burma. Has that representative been involved in any negotiations with the Burmese Government on the issue that we are considering and others? When did he last visit Burma?

Meg Munn: The hon. Gentleman refers to Michael Williams, who has been very involved in our work on Burma. He has spent a great deal of time travelling in the region and speaking to countries there about the pressure that they can bring to bear. He also attended the donors conference in Burma at the end of May with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle: My hon. Friend would recognise that Aung San Suu Kyi has been completely failed by the international community. Whichever way we look at it, we see that there have been 12 years of imprisonment and a lot of fine words, but absolutely no movement and an evil regime still in place. What can we do, other than just having fine words from all the different nations? What sanctions can we put in place to overthrow the Government in that country?

Meg Munn: The truth is that neither sanctions by the international community nor engagement by countries

in the region has brought about the result that we would desire. In the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, we have seen something of a change in the neighbouring ASEAN countries, which are now indicating more vocally that they believe that things need to change in Burma. We will continue to work with those countries and with the United Nations. Ban Ki-moon has said that he will return to Burma later this year, following up his visit after the cyclone. We are hopeful that that will enable us to move the political process forward in the right direction.

Cyclone Nargis

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment has been made of reconstruction needs in Burma following Cyclone Nargis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Alexander: A 250-strong Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-United Nations (UN) assessment team is currently in country working alongside the UN, INGOs and government to carry out needs assessments in cyclone-affected areas. Their first report is expected on 24 June, and this will provide us with information about reconstruction requirements. We are aware that there are likely to be significant longer-term reconstruction needs and will consider options for assisting with reconstruction. But our current focus is on responding to the immediate humanitarian effects and needs for relief and early recovery.

26 June 2008

Cyclone Nargis

Lord Hylton: Whether they are able to provide or locate small boats available for relief and rescue work in the Burmese delta following Cyclone Nargis; and what measures they will take to ensure that their £5 million of emergency aid and £18 million of poverty assistance is not misapplied or misappropriated by the Government of Burma.

Lord Tunncliffe: On 3 June, the International Development Secretary announced an additional £10.5 million for the humanitarian response to Cyclone Nargis. This brings the UK's overall support to £27.5 million, the largest contribution from any single country so far. This is additional to the UK's long-term humanitarian programme in Burma on which we plan to spend £12 million this year, rising to £18 million in 2010-11.

As part of its contribution to the humanitarian relief effort, DfID has provided £5 million in logistical and relief supplies, including emergency water containers, shelter materials for 30,000 families, and 14 flat-bottomed boats and engines designed to make bulk distributions of relief items in the inland waters of the Irrawaddy delta. The boats have been given to Save the Children Fund. All DfID-donated shelter materials have been distributed through UN and NGOs on the ground.

The Department for International Development (DfID) does not channel any funds through the Government of Burma. DfID's aid is provided through the UN, NGOs and the Red Cross. We have confidence in the stringent monitoring mechanisms these partners have in place to ensure that DfID's aid reaches its intended recipients.

Politics and Government

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

Meg Munn: We remain deeply concerned at the political situation in Burma. The regime continues to ignore the calls of the UN Security Council for a genuine and inclusive dialogue with the opposition and ethnic groups. Such a dialogue is the only way the country will achieve the national reconciliation, prosperity and stability it needs now more than ever. The renewal of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest on 27 May, and the regime's decision to undertake its flawed referendum in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, underline the urgency of making progress. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on 19 June 2008, the recent referendum lacks all credibility and the new constitution cannot provide a sound basis for Burma's future.

Working in support of the UN Secretary-General's Good Offices Mission and encouraging Burma's

neighbours to play a more active role, we will continue to do all we can to promote democracy and respect for human rights in Burma.

Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council

19/20 June 2008

The European Union expresses its continuing deep concern about the humanitarian situation in Burma/Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis. It welcomes the efforts of the UN and ASEAN and the resulting increase in aid reaching the 2.4 million people affected by the Cyclone, but calls on the authorities of Burma/Myanmar to remove all remaining restrictions on the distribution of international aid. The European Council underlines that while the immediate priority is humanitarian relief, the need for a genuine transition to democracy in Burma/Myanmar is stronger than ever. It deeply regrets the decision of the authorities of Burma/Myanmar to renew Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest and reiterates its call for the release of all political prisoners. The European Council regrets that the way the referendum was conducted did not contribute to an inclusive and transparent process of national reconciliation, which is the only path to prosperity and stability in the country. The European Council calls on the authorities to ensure that the elections announced for 2010 will be prepared and conducted in a way that contributes to a credible and fully participative transition to democracy. In this regard, the European Council welcomes the UN Secretary-General's personal engagement and underlines its full support for his good offices mission.

**Published by The Burma Campaign UK, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT
www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



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