



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

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

JAN
2013

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Rohingya / Rakhine State

08 January 2013 Baroness Uddin: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the most recent violence in Arakan State in Burma.

Baroness Warsi: The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), visited Burma, including Rakhine State, between 12 and 15 December. He was able to see conditions in five camps and settlements for internally displaced persons in Rakhine, including camps at Myebon and Pauktaw.

Our assessment is that the violence in Rakhine State has been driven primarily by decades-long inter-communal tensions between communities in western Burma. The estimate from the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs on 12 December was that 115,000 people have been displaced by violence during 2012; 36,000 of these from the incidents in October. An unverified number of people have been killed, with official figures from the Burmese Government in the region of 80 people, but it is not possible to confirm numbers precisely. The majority of killed and displaced were from the Rohingya community, though the Rakhine community has also been affected. Efforts to establish dialogue between community leaders have so far met with little success.

In meetings with the Burmese Government, both at national and local level, Hugo Swire pressed for increased humanitarian aid access to all communities in need, for those responsible for the violence to be brought to account, including where security forces had been implicated, and for a long-term solution to the issues affecting the Rohingya to include consideration of the issue of citizenship.

08 January 2013 Baroness Uddin: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the Government of Burma regarding the ongoing violence in Rakhine/Arakan State.

Baroness Warsi: From 12 to 15 December the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), visited Burma. In meetings with the Burmese Government, both at a national level and in Rakhine State itself, he pressed for increased humanitarian aid access to all communities in need, for those responsible for the violence to be brought to account, including where security forces had been implicated, and for a long-term solution to the issues affecting the Rohingya to include consideration of the issue of citizenship.

The UK remains one of the most vocal members of the international community on the issues in Rakhine State. We continue to seek every opportunity to raise our concerns directly with the Burmese Government not only in Burma-including during the visits of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) and the Prime Minister, my right honourable friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron), earlier this year-but also through international fora such as the UN in New York, the EU and at the Asia-Europe summit in Laos.

08 January 2013 Baroness Uddin: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the Government of Burma regarding the allegations of rape of women by Burmese military forces in Rohingya.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi): We have received many reports of human rights abuses in Rakhine State since the outbreak of violence in June, including reports that allege the involvement of government security forces in the rape of Rohingya women and girls.

During his recent visit to Burma, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), raised our concerns with the Burmese Foreign Minister, U Wunna Maung Lwin, and requested support for the Foreign Secretary's preventing sexual violence initiative. During his visit to Rakhine State, Mr Swire met local government officials and delivered strong messages on human rights including on ensuring that those accused of human rights abuses are held to account.

The publication of the report by the investigative commission that was set up to probe the causes of the violence in Rakhine State has been delayed so that the commission can incorporate its findings on the violence of late October. It will be important for investigations into alleged atrocities, including rape, to be transparent and thorough, ensuring that those who have committed crimes are held to account for their actions.

08 January 2013 Baroness Uddin: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the case for the establishment of a United Nations Commission of Enquiry in Burma to consider the ongoing violence in Rakhine/Arakan State; and whether they have taken steps to promote the establishment of such a body.

Baroness Warsi: During his recent visit to Rakhine State the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), discussed in detail the drivers of the recent violence in Rakhine State with the Burmese authorities and leaders of affected Rohingya and Rakhine communities. In the course of his visit the Minister welcomed the formation of an independent investigative commission by the Burmese Government into the causes of the violence. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), also made clear that, for the commission to be credible, it needed to involve a consultative process with all the affected communities, including the Rohingya, and that any investigations into alleged atrocities should be transparent and thorough, ensuring that those who have committed crimes are held to account for their actions. We are awaiting the initial findings of the Commission's report, due in March 2013.

In a statement on 17 November, the UN Secretary General welcomed the positive steps made by President Thein Sein, including the Burmese Government's intention to ensure that the perpetrators of violence are held to account. UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Baroness Amos, has recently returned from a visit to Rakhine State. The UN has not made the case for a commission of inquiry at this time. The UN is planning a roundtable discussion in Burma in early 2013, in order to address the issues in Rakhine State and the plight of the Rohingya community specifically. The UK will continue take an active role in this discussion and any further UN initiatives.

31 January 2013 Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to his Burmese counterpart on (a) promoting tolerance and peaceful co-existence between Arakan Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims and (b) creating an environment conducive to the safe return of displaced people.

Mr Swire: The British Government remains extremely concerned about the plight of internally displaced people from both the Rakhine Buddhist and Rohingya Muslim communities in Rakhine State.

During my recent visit to Burma in December 2012, I visited Rakhine State and raised our concerns with Burmese Ministers and local leaders, including the chief Minister of Rakhine State. I called for security for all affected populations to prevent future outbreaks of violence and to allow the safe return of displaced people to their former homes. I also called for improved coordination and an increase in the level of humanitarian aid to affected communities. The British Government is providing £2 million in humanitarian assistance to people displaced in Rakhine State, enabling non-governmental organisations to provide support to 58,000 people from both communities. Thirdly, I called on the Burmese Government to take

steps to bring those responsible for the violence to justice through a fair and transparent process in accordance with the rule of law. Finally, I urged the Burmese Government to address the longer term factors affecting the Rohingya community, including a review of their citizenship status.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage the Government of Burma to conduct a full review of the 1982 Citizenship Law, and to consider amending it in line with international human rights standards.

Mr Swire: I visited Burma, including Rakhine State, from 12 to 15 December 2012. During my discussions with the Burmese Government, both at the state and national level, I emphasised the British Government's position that, in the short term, the Burmese Government should ensure that humanitarian access and coordination are improved and that security is maintained. I also emphasised the British Government's position that, in the longer term, those responsible for the violence should be held accountable and that a solution should be found to the issue of Rohingya citizenship. These positions are also regularly made clear by the ambassador and British officials in Burma.

British officials in Burma have been liaising with the UN High Commission for Refugees, which is currently conducting a review into Burma's 1982 citizenship law and its conformity with international standards. We are also liaising with members of the Rakhine Investigative Commission set up by the Burmese Government, which is due to publish its final report in March 2013. We continue to urge the Burmese Government to reach a satisfactory solution to the issue of Rohingya citizenship through these efforts.

08 January 2013 Baroness Uddin: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the case for an International Peace Mission to Burma.

Baroness Warsi: The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), visited Rakhine on 14 and 15 December, where he met communities affected by the violence and urged the Burmese authorities to ensure both security and humanitarian access across Rakhine State. The Burmese Government have, to date, allowed 19 separate visits by independent observers from foreign Governments and international organisations to visit the areas affected by the violence. Officials from our embassy, including our ambassador, led the first independent diplomatic mission to Rakhine State in early October, and visited again in early November.

Given the levels of international access to the area, and the Burmese Government's establishment of an investigative commission to look into the events in Rakhine State, the British Government will await the Commission's recommendations, and will work with the Burmese authorities accordingly. We judge that to call for an International Peace Mission at this time would pre-empt the Burmese Government's own commission.

08 January 2013 Baroness Uddin: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the Government of Bangladesh regarding provision of assistance to Rohingya refugees.

Baroness Warsi: The Government raise regularly the issue of Rohingya refugees and the importance of continuing humanitarian aid with the Government of Bangladesh. Our high commissioner in Dhaka raised the issue on 11 November with senior interlocutors in the Bangladesh Government and wrote on the issue to the Bangladesh Prime Minister's office on 15 August. Officials from our high commission have previously visited the camps for displaced Rohingyas. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), raised this issue during a meeting with the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, on 28 July and the then Secretary of State for the Department for International Development (DfID), my right honourable friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), raised it in a meeting with the Prime Minister on 12 August. I also discussed our concerns with Dipu Moni, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, earlier this month.

We have also raised the issue of Rohingya refugees with the Government of Bangladesh as part of a recent EU demarche. DfID continues to provide core contributions to the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department and UN agencies that directly support the Rohingya community. In October DfID allocated £2 million in humanitarian funding to communities affected by the unrest in Rakhine.

We also continue to seek every opportunity to raise our concerns about the treatment of the Rohingya directly with the Burmese Government not only in Burma but also in international fora such as the UN in New York, the EU and at the recent Asia-Europe summit in Laos.

The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), visited Burma from 12-15 December. In meetings with the Burmese Government, both at national and local level, he pressed for increased humanitarian aid access to all communities in need, for those responsible for the violence to be brought to account, and for a long-term solution to the issues affecting the Rohingya. He visited Rakhine State to see for himself the situation on the ground, speaking to victims of the violence in three camps for internally displaced people and to local political and religious leaders.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator following her visit to Rakhine State and Kachin State, Burma.

Mr Duncan: The Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) discussed Burma with the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator following the Secretary of State's visit to Rakhine State and Kachin State, Burma, on 10 December.

23 January 2013 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead : To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Co-ordinator following her recent visit to Rakhine State and Kachin State in Burma.

Baroness Northover: I refer the noble Lady to the answer given in the other place on 21 January by the Minister of State for International Development, right honourable Alan Duncan MP (Official Report, col. 79W)

08 January 2013 Baroness Cox: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will consider funding established local non-governmental organisations to provide aid to areas in Shan, Kachin, and Rakhine states in Burma which international non-governmental organisations cannot reach due to government restrictions.

Baroness Northover: The Department for International Development (DfID) selects delivery partners on a case-by-case basis according to whom we judge is best able to deliver what is required. The additional support for Kachin, agreed this month by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State, will be implemented by an international non-governmental organisation (NGO), Trocaire, working closely with a local organisation, Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS). In Rakhine State, DfID's humanitarian assistance will be delivered by a consortium of international NGOs, but we will continue to monitor the situation, in case opportunities to work with local NGOs arise. DfID also supports the Shan Women's Action Network who work in Thailand to support the needs of people displaced by conflict in Shan State.

Kachin State

31 January 2013 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead : To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they have taken in response to the Burmese army's escalation of attacks against the Kachin Independence Army and the use of aerial bombardment.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi): We continue to call for the cessation of violence in Kachin state at every opportunity.

Our ambassador in Rangoon raised these concerns again with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 and 19 January.

During his visit to Burma in December, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), made clear to the Burmese authorities the need to make progress on resolving the conflict in Kachin state and to move towards a lasting peaceful

political settlement.

In a public statement of 3 January, Mr Swire also expressed the Government's deep concern over reports emerging from Kachin state that there had been an escalation in hostilities.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Burma in response to the Burma Army's recent aerial bombardment of the Kachin Independence Army.

Mr Swire: We continue to call for the cessation of violence in Kachin State at every opportunity.

Our ambassador to Burma raised these concerns again with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 January.

During my visit to Burma in December, I made clear to the Burmese authorities the need to make progress on resolving the conflict in Kachin State and to move towards a lasting peaceful political settlement. In my public statement of 3 January, I expressed the British Government's deep concern over reports emerging from Kachin State that there had been an escalation in hostilities.

22 January 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken in response to the Burma Army's escalation of attacks against the Kachin Independence Army.

Mr Swire: We continue to call for the immediate cessation of hostilities in Kachin State at every opportunity. As I said in my press statement on 3 January 2013, we remain deeply concerned by the ongoing conflict in Kachin State, and urge the military to heed their President's calls for an end to the conflict.

I also raised our concerns with the Burmese Government during my visit to Burma in December 2012. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), repeated these calls during a House of Commons debate on 14 January. The British ambassador to Burma last raised our concerns with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 January. It is important that all sides return to the negotiating table and make renewed efforts to work towards lasting peace.

In response to the recent escalation of violence, the Department for International Development announced in December 2012 an additional £1.5 million of humanitarian support for people displaced by the conflict in Kachin State. UK humanitarian aid to people affected by the conflict in Kachin State now totals £3.5 million.

22 January 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to urge the Government of Burma to end its military offensive in Kachin State and engage in political dialogue and a peace process with the Kachin Independence Organisation.

Mr Swire: We continue to call for an immediate cessation to the conflict in Kachin State at every opportunity. In my statement of 3 January I called for an end to hostilities, for improved humanitarian access to the conflict areas, and for both sides to return to the negotiating table and make renewed efforts towards a lasting peace. The British ambassador to Burma raised our concerns with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 January, and met with an influential Kachin civil society leader on 14 January. During my visit to Burma in December, I made clear to the Burmese authorities the need to make progress on resolving the conflict in Kachin State and to move towards a lasting peaceful political settlement.

We are actively supporting the reconciliation process. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has funded visits to Burma by negotiators from both Northern Ireland and from the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN) region in order to share their experiences of peace processes and to give advice to all sides. The Department for International Development is now taking on and expanding the programme of support offered through UK negotiation and mediation experts.

08 January 2013 Baroness Cox: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Burma about the cessation of conflict in Kachin State and ensuring humanitarian

access to all internally displaced people.

Baroness Warsi: The Government are concerned by the ongoing conflict between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Burmese military. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), visited Burma from 12 to 15 December 2012. He raised the UK's concerns with the Burmese Minister of Defence, Lt General Wai Lwin, and Minister Aung Min, the lead government negotiator for the peace process. Mr Swire urged the Burmese Government to push for a ceasefire and begin constructive dialogue with the KIA. He also pressed the Burmese Government to ensure humanitarian access to all conflict-affected populations in Kachin State.

The Department for International Development has allocated £3.5 million to support humanitarian needs in Kachin, helping to meet the needs of internally displaced people, primarily in border camps not controlled by the Government. The aid will help meet their food security, shelter, water, sanitation, health and bedding needs.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will introduce measures to increase diplomatic and economic pressure on the government of Burma, if there is not an immediate cessation of the Burma Army's offensive in Kachin State.

Mr Swire: We continue to call for the cessation of violence in Kachin State at every opportunity. I raised these concerns with the Burmese authorities during my visit to Burma in December and our ambassador raised them again with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 January 2013.

The EU Foreign Affairs Council will next review sanctions on Burma in April. The outcome of this review will depend on the progress that the Burmese Government has made against the benchmarks that were set out in the conclusions of the Council in January 2012. These included the need to see meaningful progress in the process of reconciliation with armed ethnic groups.

We welcome the progress made by the Government and 10 of 11 armed groups in agreeing ceasefires. However, as I said on 3 January, we remain deeply concerned by the ongoing conflict between the Burmese Army and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Burma's Kachin State, including recent reports of air strikes in the state. An escalation in hostilities would put at risk the chance of a lasting peace in Burma. It is imperative that military commanders in Burma heed their President's calls for an end to hostilities. It is important that all sides, including the KIA, come to the negotiating table and make renewed efforts to work towards lasting peace.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to urge the Government of Burma to end its military offensive in Kachin and Northern Shan states and engage in a political dialogue and a peace process with the Kachin Independence Organisation.

Mr Swire: We continue to call for the cessation of violence in Kachin at every opportunity. In my public statement of 3 January, I expressed the British Government's deep concern over the situation in Kachin State.

Our ambassador to Burma raised these concerns with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 January. During my visit in December, I made clear to the Burmese authorities the need to make progress on resolving the conflict in Kachin State and to move towards a lasting peaceful political settlement.

28 January 2013 Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has held with the Burmese Government on ensuring that the recent ceasefire between rebels in Kachin and the Burmese army is maintained.

Mr Swire: As I set out during Foreign and Commonwealth Office oral questions on 22 January 2012, Official Report, columns 150-51, we continue to call for the cessation of violence in Kachin State at every opportunity. During my visit to Burma in December, I made clear to the Burmese Government the need to make progress on resolving the conflict in Kachin State and to move towards a lasting peaceful political settlement.

In my statement of 3 January, I expressed the British Government's deep concern at the escalation in hostilities in Kachin State, and the risk that continued violence poses to the chances of a lasting peace. I emphasised the need for military commanders in Burma to heed their President's calls for an end to hostilities.

Our ambassador to Burma reiterated these concerns with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 and 19 January.

29 January 2012 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ask the Government of Burma to end its military offensive in Kachin State and engage in political dialogue and a peace process with the Kachin Independence Organisation.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi): We continue to call for the cessation of violence in Kachin at every opportunity. In a public statement of 3 January, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), expressed the Government's deep concern over the situation in the Kachin state.

Mr Swire also raised our concerns with the Burmese Government during his visit to Burma in December 2012. He made clear to the Burmese authorities the need to make progress on resolving the conflict in Kachin state and to move towards a lasting peaceful political settlement.

Our ambassador in Rangoon raised our concerns with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 January and again on 19 January. It is important that all sides return to the negotiating table and make renewed effort to work towards lasting peace.

22 January 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage the government of Burma to allow unhindered access for international humanitarian assistance to displaced peoples in Kachin State and Northern Shan State.

Mr Swire: We continue to call for unhindered humanitarian access to Burma's conflict-affected areas at every opportunity. I raised our concerns about aid access to Kachin and Northern Shan States with the Burmese Government during my visit to Burma in December 2012. The British ambassador to Burma met with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 January to raise our concerns again.

In response to the increased need, the Department for International Development announced in December 2012 an additional £1.5 million of humanitarian support for people displaced by the conflict in Kachin, including in hard to reach areas and neighbouring states, bringing our total humanitarian aid contribution to the conflict in Kachin to £3.5 million.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage the Government of Burma to allow unhindered access for international humanitarian assistance to displaced peoples in all parts of Kachin State and Northern Shan State.

Mr Swire: We continue to call for unhindered humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas at every opportunity. During my visit to Burma in December, I urged the Burmese authorities to allow free and unhindered humanitarian access in Kachin and Northern Shan States. The British ambassador to Burma also met with senior members of the Burmese Government on Wednesday 16 January to raise our concerns about aid access.

In response to the increased need, the Department for International Development announced in December 2012 an additional £1.5 million of humanitarian support for people displaced by the conflict in Kachin, including in hard to reach areas and neighbouring states, bringing our total humanitarian aid contribution to the conflict in Kachin to £3.5 million.

23 January 2013 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead : To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to encourage the Government of Burma to allow unhindered access for international humanitarian

assistance to displaced peoples in all parts of Kachin State and Northern Shan State.

Baroness Northover: I refer the noble Lady to the answer given in the other place on 21 January by the Minister of State for International Development, right honourable Alan Duncan MP (Official Report, col. 80W)

08 January 2013 Baroness Cox: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the humanitarian needs of those displaced by conflict in Kachin State, Burma.

Baroness Northover: I refer the noble Baroness to the Answer that my honourable friend the Minister of State, Alan Duncan, gave to the honourable Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) on 22 November (Official Report, col. 607W). Negotiations between the Burmese Government and Kachin representatives for full international access to areas controlled by the Kachin Independence Army have continued since then, but remain difficult.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will consider providing further humanitarian assistance to internally-displaced people in Kachin state through local community organisations.

Mr Duncan: DFID announced in December 2012 an additional £1.5 million of humanitarian support for people displaced by the conflict in Kachin, including in hard to reach areas and neighbouring states, bringing our total humanitarian aid contribution to the conflict in Kachin to £3.5 million. This makes the UK the largest bilateral contributor. We are monitoring the situation in Kachin closely, including the work of others providing humanitarian support. This will help inform any consideration of further UK assistance.

28 January 2013 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will consider providing further humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people in Kachin State through local community organisations.

Baroness Northover: I refer the noble Baroness to the answer given in the other place on 21 January by the Minister of State for International Development, the right honourable Alan Duncan MP (Official Report, col. 79W).

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to encourage the government of Burma to allow unhindered access for international humanitarian assistance to displaced peoples in all parts of Kachin state and Northern Shan state. [137617]

Mr Duncan: We continue to call for unhindered humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas at all every opportunity. The British ambassador to Burma last met senior members of the Burmese Government on Wednesday 16 January to raise our concerns about aid access.

In response to increased need, the Department for International Development announced in December 2012 an additional £1.5 million of humanitarian support for people displaced by the conflict in Kachin, including in areas that are hard to reach and in neighbouring states, bringing our total humanitarian aid contribution to the conflict in Kachin to £3.5 million.

29 January 2012 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the Government of China regarding air strikes by the Burmese Army in Kachin State.

Baroness Warsi: I refer the noble Baroness to the Answer given by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), on 21 January (Official Report, col. 92).

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the government of the People's Republic of China on the Burma Army's air strikes in Kachin State.

Mr Swire: Our embassy in Rangoon discussed the situation in Kachin State with counterparts from the Chinese embassy on 16 January 2013. Our embassy emphasised our concern about the air strikes and urged a common message from the international community that the attacks should stop.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Director for Asia Pacific, raised the prospect of further discussion with the MFA concerning the situation in Burma, during a meeting with officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in Beijing on 15 January 2013.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in response to the escalating conflict in Kachin State, Burma.

Mr Swire: We welcome the UN Secretary-General's statement of 2 January which took serious note of the most recent reports indicating air strikes against targets in Kachin State. On 3 January, I expressed our deep concern over reports emerging from Kachin State that there had been an escalation in hostilities.

The Secretary-General's Special Adviser, Mr Vijay Nambiar, visited Burma during week commencing 14 January. During the visit he met the Burmese Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham and raised the situation in Kachin. We will request that Mr Nambiar brief the Security Council following his visit.

We have not had any recent discussion with the UN Secretary-General in respect of the escalating conflict in Kachin. On 28 September 2012 I attended a Friends of Burma meeting hosted by the UN Secretary General in New York in which the situation in Kachin was discussed.

30 January 2013 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead : To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in response to the escalating conflict in Kachin State in Burma.

The Senior Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Warsi): I refer the noble Baroness to the Answer given by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), on 21 January (Official Report, col. 93W).

30 January 2013 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with other member states of the European Union, the Government of the United States and the Association of South-East Asian Nations, to co-ordinate an international response to the conflict in Kachin State in Burma.

Baroness Warsi: I refer the noble Baroness to the Answer given by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), on 21 January (Official Report, col. 92W).

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with (a) his EU counterparts, (b) the US and (c) the Association of South-East Asian Nations, to co-ordinate an international response to the escalating conflict in Kachin State, Burma.

Mr Swire: The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), discussed the situation in Burma with Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretary-General Le Luong Minh on 13 December 2012. The situation in Kachin state was discussed on 15 January by UK, French, German, Italian and United States political directors, and representatives from the EU's External Action Service. This discussion included agreement on the importance of an enduring political solution to Burma's ethnic conflict. Official level discussions between the UK and US, and within the EU, cover the ethnic conflict in Burma on a regular basis.

The British ambassador to Burma, to whom I spoke on 21 January, is in regular contact with his US counterpart on a range of issues. They last discussed the situation in Kachin on 16 January.

Human Rights

28 January 2013 Jonathan Ashworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Minister of State raised the use of rape against ethnic minorities by the Burmese army with the Government of Burma on his visit to that country in December 2012.

Mr Swire: During my visit to Burma in December, I met Defence Minister Lt Gen Wai Lwin and set out clearly our continued concerns about human rights, including allegations of abuses by troops.

I also met Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin. I pressed Burma to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and requested support for the Foreign Secretary's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative.

British officials continue to urge the Burmese Government to sign up to key international human rights instruments such as the ICCPR as part of Burma's ongoing commitment to reform.

22 January 2013 Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the human rights situation in Burma; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Swire: Government officials regularly monitor Burma's human rights situation. During my visit to Burma in December, I called on the Burmese Government to find a long-term solution to tensions in Rakhine State, to end conflict in Kachin State, to review remaining political prisoner cases, and to sign up to international human rights treaties.

21 January 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage the Government of Burma to sign, ratify and implement those core international human rights treaties to which Burma is not yet a party.

Mr Swire: The UK Government regularly raises human rights with our Burmese counterparts, making clear that progress on human rights is one of the key benchmarks for judging the depth of the reform process currently under way in Burma.

During my visit to Burma from 12 to 15 December 2012, I raised a number of human rights issues, including pressing the Burmese Government to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) requesting their support for the Foreign Secretary's initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict. Senior British officials, including our ambassador to Burma, continue to raise with the Burmese Government Burma's signature of the ICCPR, the Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol, and the UN Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

We continue to lobby the Burmese Government to fulfil the commitment it made in November 2012 to open an Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which would monitor and help Burmese's implementation of international human rights treaties.

Political Prisoners

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage the government of Burma to work with independent, international monitors to (a) undertake a systematic review of all detainees, to assess the number of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience still in detention and (b) release all remaining political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.

Mr Swire: The British Government has made clear that all remaining political prisoners in Burma should be released. This was one of the three key conditions underpinning the suspension of EU sanctions in April 2012. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), raised the issue of political prisoners in his meeting with the Burmese Foreign Minister at the UN General Assembly in September 2012, and I raised our concerns again with the Burmese Foreign Minister during my visit to Burma in December 2012.

The Burmese Government has made progress on this issue. Several hundred political prisoners from

Burma's jails were released in 2012, including prominent civil society and ethnic leaders, in a continuation of the trend from 2011. Independent reports indicate that around 200 political prisoners could remain in Burma's jails.

Following President Obama's visit to Burma in November 2012, the Burmese Government agreed to establish an independent political prisoner review mechanism to look at these remaining cases. We are in contact with them about this and are urging quick implementation. The Burmese Government also agreed with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that it would have access to Burmese jails, including full access to visit and assess prisoners, for the first time. British Government officials are in contact with the ICRC and with local prisoner networks to ascertain numbers of remaining political prisoner cases, most recently in January 2013, by meeting representatives of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma).

31 January 2013 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Burma on the number of political prisoners in Burma's jails and detention centres.

Mr Swire: The British Government recognises the progress made by the Burmese Government on releasing large numbers of political prisoners over the last two years, and granting the International Committee of the Red Cross access to Burmese prisons. We remain committed to ensuring that all remaining political prisoners are released, and their cases reviewed through a transparent and independent mechanism. During my visit to Burma from 12-15 December, I raised the issue of the prisoner review mechanism and addressed specific political prisoners' cases of concern to the UK Government including that of UNHCR employee Nandar Aung and her husband, following which both were released without charge. On 21 January, the British ambassador to Rangoon received assurances that the Burmese Government remains committed to the creation of an independent prisoner review mechanism. We will continue to follow up on progress made.

Arms Embargo

28 January 2013 Jonathan Ashworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had discussions with his EU counterparts on the discovery of the use of Swedish-made weapons in Burma.

Mr Swire: In December last year, Sweden's Agency for Non-Proliferation and Export Controls said an investigation had revealed that the Swedish-made weapons found by Kachin forces in early December were part of a larger shipment of arms Sweden sold to the Indian Government. It remains unclear how they ended up being used in Burma. Swedish Trade Minister, Ewa Bjorling, has requested clarification from Indian authorities on the matter.

Sanctions

21 January 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consider working with other EU member states to halt the relaxation of economic sanctions and new trade and investment in Burma if there is not an immediate cessation of the Burma Army's offensive in Kachin State.

Mr Swire: We continue to call the cessation of violence in Kachin State at every opportunity. I raised these concerns with the Burmese authorities during my visit to Burma in December and our ambassador raised them again with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 January.

The EU Foreign Affairs Council will review sanctions on Burma in April 2013. In January 2012 EU Foreign Ministers agreed to measure progress in line with a number of benchmarks set out in EU Council Conclusions. These included the need for a credible process of reconciliation with armed ethnic groups, unhindered humanitarian access to conflict areas, the free and fair conduct of by-elections in April 2012 and the unconditional release of all political prisoners.

As the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), said during a House of Commons debate on 15 January, any decision on sanctions will depend on the progress that has been made by Burma against these

benchmarks, including in Kachin State. We will be consulting our EU colleagues over the coming months ahead of the April review.

29 January 2012 Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking within the European Union to make the relaxation of economic sanctions and promotion of new trade and investment in Burma conditional on an immediate cessation of the Burmese Army's offensive in Kachin State.

Baroness Warsi: We continue to call for the cessation of violence in Kachin state at every opportunity. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right honourable friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), raised these concerns with the Burmese authorities during his visit to Burma in December 2012. Our ambassador in Rangoon raised them again with senior members of the Burmese Government on 16 January and 19 January.

The EU Foreign Affairs Council will next review sanctions on Burma in April. The outcome of this review will depend on the progress that the Burmese Government have made against the benchmarks that were set out in the council conclusions of January 2012. These included the need to see meaningful progress in the process of reconciliation with armed ethnic groups.

As the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my honourable friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Mr Burt), said during an Urgent Question on 14 January (Official Report, col. 599) any discussion on sanctions will depend on the progress that has been made by Burma against these benchmarks, including in Kachin state. We will be consulting with our EU colleagues over the coming months ahead of the April review.

Constitutional & Legislative Reform

24 January 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the prospects for constitutional reform in Burma; and what support the UK is offering to this process.

Mr Swire: Our embassy facilitated a visit by the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) in August 2012. The focus of the visit was, inter alia, to examine the functioning of the judicial system and analyse the international and domestic legal norms applicable to the judicial system, including the 2008 constitution.

The IBAHRI report of December 2012 produced as a result of that visit, "The Rule of Law in Myanmar: Challenges and Prospects", includes a number of recommendations, including those that relate to addressing provisions of the constitution.

Our embassy in Rangoon has undertaken to circulate a Burmese language version of the report in Burma, particularly to those Government interlocutors with whom the delegation met, with a view to supporting the IBAHRI's proposed next steps.

Ultimately any decision to revise the 2008 constitution is a decision for the people of Burma. We would consider any requests for support in that endeavour.

24 January 2013 Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of legislative reform in Burma; and what support the Government is offering to the process of legislative reform.

Mr Swire: The legislation reform seen over the last 18 months indicates the Burmese Government's willingness to reform in some areas. However, the last 18 months also reveal a gap between this willingness to reform and Burma's institutional capacity to do so.

In response to a request from Aung San Suu Kyi, the British Government has been supporting capacity-building of the Burmese Parliament. In July 2012, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy carried out a scoping visit. The foundation plans to support the administration of public financial scrutiny by sharing good practice from the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee.

In December 2012, a cross-party delegation of three Burmese MPs from the Draft Bills Committee visited London to spend time in the House of Commons and House of Lords and learn about the drafting and debating of British law.

This work will be built upon in 2013 in conjunction with the Department for International Development and civil society partners, identifying areas which are priorities for the Burmese Parliament and its supporting institutions.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage the Government of Burma to undertake further legislative, constitutional, institutional and judicial reforms; and what recent assistance his Department has offered to this process.

Mr Swire: In response to a request from Aung San Suu Kyi, the UK Government has been supporting capacity building of the Burmese parliament. During 2012, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy carried out a scoping visit, and plans to support the administration of public financial scrutiny by sharing good practice from the UK Public Accounts Committee. In December 2012, a cross-party delegation of three Burmese MPs from the Draft Bills Committee visited London to spend time in the House of Commons and House of Lords and learn about the drafting and debating of UK law.

This work will be built upon in 2013 in conjunction with the Department for International Development and civil society partners, identifying areas which are priorities for the Burmese Parliament and its supporting institutions.

21 January 2013 Mr Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the judiciary in Burma; and what assessment he has made of the prospects for the creation and promotion of a genuine, independent judiciary in that country.

Mr Swire: The Burmese Government has emphasised that the establishment of rule of law is a priority in its reform process. Burma's problems with its judiciary are pronounced: partiality and inconsistency in sentencing is prevalent, as is corruption within the system. In addition, the institutions around the legal system and serving civil servants often lack the capacity to design and implement reform. The British Government remains committed to supporting the Burmese Government efforts to translate its commitment to reform into action.

The British Government has sought to utilise its experience and expertise in this area to help build the capacity of the Burmese legal system. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) organised a visit to Burma by the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute in July 2012, which produced a report prioritising areas of future support. The FCO has also provided funding this year to a British non-governmental organisation to provide a wide-ranging rule of law capacity building programme, as well as providing training for civil society advocacy groups and human rights defenders in effective policy and human rights advocacy.

The Department for International Development supports complementary rule of law programmes by non-government organisations, mobilising networks of legal professionals and legal aid practitioners within the Burmese legal system and supporting them with training.

31 January 2013 Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Burma on constitutional reform in that country; and what recent reports he has received on the role of the military in the Burmese Parliament.

Mr Swire: The British Government supports constitutional reform in Burma and is working with key Burmese institutions involved in the reform process. During my visit to Burma in December 2012 I raised with Burmese Ministers the prospects for Burma's transition towards democracy and offered support as Burma seeks to reform its laws and processes I repeated this offer of support to members of the Burmese Parliament, Nanda Kyaw Swo and Aung San Suu Kyi. British embassy officials are in regular contact with members of the Burmese Parliament who will be vital in developing Burma's constitutional framework. Three Burmese MPs from the Draft Bills Committee visited the UK from 11-16 December 2012 and met

with Government and Parliament officials who shared expertise on legislative and constitutional processes I repeated this after. The British Government is also funding efforts by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to support the Burmese Public Accounts Committee.

The military continues to exert considerable influence in the Burmese Parliament. The current constitution provides that 25% of the members of both Houses are nominated from the military. Given that changes to the constitution require a parliamentary majority of at least 75%, this gives the military an effective veto over constitutional change. Senior Burmese Government Ministers have suggested that this could be reformed when the time is right.

Aid

31 January 2013 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with Aung San Suu Kyi, on the Government's policy on aid to Burma.

Mr Swire: The UK has made the largest commitment of bilateral aid to Burma and currently provides aid through trusted partners including UN agencies and non-governmental organisations rather than directly to the Burmese Government. During my visit to Burma in December 2012, I discussed a range of issues relating to Britain's policy towards Burma with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Aung San Suu Kyi has praised the Department for International Development's approach to aid in Burma. The British embassy in Rangoon continues to discuss British Government policy and our aid programme with Aung San Suu Kyi.

31 January 2013 Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much funding his Department provides to the Women's League of Burma.

Mr Swire: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not provided funding to the Women's League of Burma fund.

ANSWERS TO SPOKEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Rohingya/ Rakhine State

22 January 2013

Jonathan Ashworth: What recent reports he has received on the security situation in Rakhine state, Burma; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I visited Rakhine state in December. I visited five camps for displaced people and spoke to local community and political leaders. The security situation appears to have stabilised, though I stressed to Burmese Ministers the importance of a long-term solution that will not leave communities permanently displaced.

Jonathan Ashworth: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer, and pleased that he has visited the camps in Rakhine state. I am sure that he will have seen reports in recent days that Rohingya refugees crossing the Andaman sea to Thailand have been captured by Thai officials and sold on to human traffickers. What urgent representations is he making to the Thai authorities on that matter, and will he give us an update on the situation?

Mr Swire: The hon. Gentleman follows these matters closely, and he is referring to the 949 Rohingya in southern Thailand who were allegedly waiting for their escort to smuggle them across the border. It is worth saying that the embassy in Bangkok has raised the issue of the Rohingya with the appropriate Thai authorities, both bilaterally and through the European Commission, and that it continues to follow the issue closely, including in close conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Stephen Phillips: My right hon. Friend is well aware of the plight of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Will he update the House on the specific steps that the Government are taking, with the Burmese and Bangladeshi Governments, to ensure a permanent, stable future for those people?

Mr Swire: My hon. and learned Friend makes a good point. My response can be divided quite neatly into two parts. First, in the short term, humanitarian access, co-ordination and security must be improved for the Rohingya people in Rakhine. I have seen that for myself and I am satisfied that that is happening.

Secondly, in the longer term, those responsible for the violence must be held publicly to account for what they have done. Ultimately, the Burmese have to deal with the issue of citizenship, and that matter is being reviewed at the moment. The Bangladeshis need to play a better part in helping out those Rohingya who are on that side of the border.

Meg Munn: The continued suppression of minority ethnic groups in Burma is clearly incompatible with the development of a proper democracy there. We all wish to see such a democracy developing, but what are the Government doing through their contact with the Burmese to stress that we cannot continue to support democratic development and the development of trade without the Burmese addressing those important issues?

Mr Swire: The situation in Burma is complex, as the hon. Lady will accept. The country is coming out of a period of military rule. We believe that the President has embarked on the right journey, although he could move more quickly to deliver some of the reforms. The solution to 10 out of the 11 outbreaks of violence has been a ceasefire, but we have not yet seen that happen in Kachin state. This Government are helping out, through the Department for International Development, by being the largest bilateral donor of aid. We have also had many exchanges involving Burmese parliamentarians coming here to Westminster. The more engagement that British parliamentarians have with the Burmese authorities to show them how we do things here, the better. Perhaps that might include you, Mr Speaker, if you were able to find time in your diary to show the Burmese what we do here at Westminster and show them what a true democracy can look like.

Valerie Vaz: Staying with Burma, is the Minister aware that the ceasefire in Kachin state has been breached, and that a village with 100 houses in it was burned today? Can he say what representations he is making to the Burmese Government to ask them to continue the ceasefire?

Mr Swire: Yes I can. Indeed, not too long ago I made a statement about the situation in Kachin. We welcome what the President said about Kachin when he reiterated the Burmese Government's stated commitment to a nationwide ceasefire and to peace building, although we do not recognise one or two other things he has said. It is important that there is a ceasefire in Kachin state and that the military in the area adheres to what the President is saying. It is also important, as I stressed when I was in Burma in December, that humanitarian aid gets to the people in Kachin.

Kerry McCarthy: Further to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), the Minister has noted the urgent and troubling situation in Kachin state, with the three civilian deaths reported last week and the military breaking a very short-lived ceasefire at the weekend. Will he tell us what discussions the Government have had not just with the Burmese authorities on the urgent need for peace talks but with the EU and the United Nations on his assessment of whether the resumed attacks bring into doubt the Burmese Government's commitment to a ceasefire and their control over the military?

Mr Swire: The hon. Lady raises a good point. There is a genuine question about control over the Burmese military; and until the Burmese military is brought under control, the peace process in Burma and the journey on which the President has embarked will be under serious question. We are anxious to help with what is going on in Kachin: we have increased our humanitarian aid, which now totals £3.5 million—as far as I am aware, the biggest donation in that area from any country. We are also one of the three bilateral members of the peace donor support group, which represents most of the major donors in Burma and is working closely with the Government to move from the ceasefire arrangements to political dialogue with all of Burma's ethnic groups.

Urgent Questions : Attacks on Civilians in Kachin State **14 Jan 2013**

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab) (Urgent Question): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Burmese army attacks on civilians in the Kachin state.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alistair Burt): I thank the hon. Lady for her question.

Conflict between the Kachin independence army and the Burmese military has been ongoing in northern Shan and Kachin states since the breakdown of the ceasefire agreement in June 2011. There was an upsurge in violence in November and December 2012. As the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), said on 3 January, the British Government are deeply concerned by reports emerging from Kachin state of an escalation in hostilities, including the use of Burmese military helicopters and aircraft against Kachin independence army positions, including in areas around the state capital and Laiza. These tactics represent a marked escalation and pose a significant risk of civilian casualties. Indeed, we received on 13 and 14 January unconfirmed reports that a small number of civilian casualties had resulted from the fighting.

The British Government have been encouraged by the reforms made by the Burmese Government of President Thein Sein over the past 18 months. We have therefore adopted a policy of constructive engagement, but we have been clear that progress on ethnic reconciliation must remain the highest priority. The situation in Kachin is increasingly serious and could present a threat to such wider reforms.

In the past hour and a half, I have spoken to our ambassador in Rangoon. Earlier today he met one of the key Kachin civil society leaders to discuss the situation on the ground.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State visited Burma from 12 to 15 December, raising our concerns over the situation in Kachin with the Burmese Minister of Defence and Minister Aung Min, the lead Government negotiator for the peace process. The Burmese Government reconfirmed their commitment to seeking a ceasefire with the Kachin independent army at that point.

During my right hon. Friend's visit, he made clear to the Burmese Government three points, which remain especially pertinent given recent events. First, the British Government call for an immediate cessation of hostilities. President Thein Sein has called for the fighting to stop, saying that the Burmese Government "does not want to pass on the conflict to the next generation."

It is imperative that military commanders in Burma heed their President's call for an end to hostilities.

Secondly, there must be unhindered humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas. In response to increased need, the Department for International Development announced in December 2012 an additional £1.5 million of humanitarian support for people displaced by fighting in Kachin and neighbouring states, bringing our total humanitarian aid contribution to the conflict in Kachin to £3.5 million and supporting 27,500 people to access food, shelter and clean water.

Thirdly, we call for both sides to return to the negotiating table and make renewed efforts towards a lasting peace. All sides, including the Kachin independence army, must come to the negotiating table and make renewed efforts to work towards lasting peace.

As I am sure the House would expect, we will continue our dialogue with both sides, and we stand ready to respond to any request for support in any mediation process between them.

Valerie Vaz: I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to ask the urgent question, as well as to the Minister for coming to the House.

The Minister referred to the fact that today, at 8.15 am Burmese time, a 15-year-old boy and a pastor were killed by a direct hit. Will he again raise with the Burmese Government the need to stop any firing on civilians, because BBC Asia has confirmed that these attacks are unprovoked? Will he also raise with the Burmese Government the fact that humanitarian aid is not getting through to 75,000 displaced people? He talked about DFID money, but will he ensure that any British aid is getting to the people who need it most? Given that the EU has suspended sanctions, will the Minister suggest to his EU counterparts that sanctions be reinstated if such direct action on civilians does not stop?

Has the Minister discussed the crisis with the Chinese Government? The planes are of Chinese origin and the gunships are Russian, so will he undertake to say to both Governments that the raids must stop?

Given that the Kachin state reached an agreement with the Burmese Government in 2011, and that other

minority groups have also formed agreements with them—that is all being put in jeopardy—will the Minister take steps to ensure that the United Nations calls all parties round the table for a proper constitutional settlement, and perhaps a second Panglong conference? Finally, will he ask the Prime Minister to put Burma on the agenda at the G8 summit, when we have the presidency, so that we can hear the voice of the peacemakers, and will he report to the House?

Alistair Burt: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions. I repeat again, I am sure on behalf of the whole House, our deep regret at any civilian deaths. Our determination is to seek contact with all sides and that the hostilities cease altogether, wherever they are directed. But, of course, it is particularly upsetting if civilians are involved, and we have indeed made that clear to the Burmese authorities.

It is very important that UK aid support is getting through. We work with aid agencies on the ground, and I understand that the International Committee of the Red Cross is able to operate and get there, but, naturally, when individual circumstances arise and difficulties are created on the ground, that will not always be the case. However, the hon. Lady is absolutely right, and we are equally determined to make sure that that aid gets through.

Our position on sanctions is very clear. The sanctions in relation to Burma have only been suspended; they have not been lifted. Could they be reimposed? Oh, yes, they could. Whether or not the Foreign Affairs Council in April moves to lift rather than suspend them will depend on the progress that Burma is making in relation to the challenges it has been set in dealing with ethnic conflict and the political process. I do not doubt for a moment that the Burmese Government are well aware of the conditions that are likely to attach to any further progress in relation to sanctions.

The Chinese Government have already been contacted by the United Kingdom in relation to how it deals with those who flee across the border, whom the Chinese tend to see as economic migrants as opposed to our own definition, which would be those seeking to escape the conflict. This gives us an opportunity to engage directly with the Chinese Government. I genuinely do not know whether their participation through types of arms has been raised, but I note what the hon. Lady says and will raise that with my right hon. Friend when I next speak to him.

On 2 January, the UN Secretary-General called for the fighting to stop and for access to be guaranteed to the delivery of aid to vulnerable communities, including those displaced by violence. The UN Secretary-General's special adviser, Vijay Nambiar, has recently returned from Burma. We hope that he will have the opportunity to brief the Security Council on his return very quickly and our concerns will be made known to him, but we will keep in regular contact.

I am afraid that it is rather too early for me to say what might or might not be on the agenda of the G8 summit. Let us hope that by that stage we will all have seen the progress in Burma that we wish to see.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I appreciate that the Minister had a telephone conversation this morning with the ambassador, but, as I asked in the House on Thursday, what specifically have the Government done to respond directly to the concerning reports coming from the Kachin border over the Christmas period? How will the Government make it crystal clear to President Sein that he cannot hold out the hand of peace and reform while allowing direct attacks on civilians?

Alistair Burt: As I sought to make clear, we have been very disturbed at the increasing violence in the state. We know that there is frustration on all sides with progress on the issues affecting the Kachin people and the Burmese Government. But a degree of patience has been called for, and whatever difficulties there are cannot be resolved by resort to physical violence. I can assure my hon. Friend that the ambassador, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State in his recent visit, made very clear the UK's concerns. He can also be assured, from my conversation with the ambassador this morning, that these conversations are taking place at the highest level and with great urgency. My hon. Friend is right: continuing progress in Burma on the relief of sanctions and the normalisation of relations is entirely dependent on how Burma handles its present responsibilities, and the world is indeed watching.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): The Minister will accept that we welcome the reforms in Burma—I am sure we all agree on that—but does he agree that we must send the strongest message to

Burma that it has to recognise the diversity of its people, whether that is minorities in Kachin or granting citizenship to the Rohingya in Rakhine? Will he give us more details of the work the UK Government can do at a UN level to support ethnic reconciliation in Burma?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Ethnic reconciliation is a key factor in the return of normalisation of relationships between Burma and the rest of the world. We are engaged bilaterally and through the UN and others in doing whatever we can to provide support, encouragement and, where possible, examples of reconciliation within the United Kingdom to assist efforts being made in Burma. The hon. Gentleman rightly mentions the Rohingya people. As he may know, the latest position is that the commission of investigation set up by the Burmese Government is hoping to report in March. There have been no further flare-ups since the violence in October. That might suggest that the political process is being taken seriously and has some opportunity to succeed, but it will not do so unless it tackles the question of citizenship, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned and on which the whole House is agreed.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): As the Minister has stated that the International Committee of the Red Cross can apparently get through, are personnel and staff from our own Department for International Development able to work either alongside it or under the aegis of the ICRC on the ground?

Alistair Burt: I specifically asked this morning about the engagement of international aid agencies. As my hon. Friend will know only too well, the circumstances of engagement on the ground depend very much on security and everything else, but I was assured that international agencies are still working there. I am not currently in a position to say whether that includes our colleagues in DFID working alongside the ICRC or working to provide support, but as a result of my hon. Friend's question I will make sure that the question is asked again. Ensuring that this aid is delivered directly is absolutely crucial in the circumstances.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) highlighted, Labour Members have been deeply concerned by the escalation of tensions in Kachin state over the past month and by the reports overnight that three civilians have been killed and at least four wounded—attacks that must be condemned. Despite how far Burma has come over the past year, the violence in Kachin state serves as a reminder to the international community of the further progress that it must make. Does the Minister think that the UK has put sufficient pressure on the Burmese Government over the past year to bring an end to the conflict?

I thank the Minister for his report on the discussions held by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), but will he tell us in a bit more detail what contacts the Foreign Office has had with colleagues in the EU and the UN to concert international action?

There are disputed reports about the Government's convoy to Kachin in December, which the rebels claimed contained ammunition. Has the Foreign Office been able to verify these claims and whether its destination was the army base? There are also reports that Laiza residents are having to dig trenches and build shelters to try to protect themselves from the military's attacks. Has the Foreign Office discussed with DFID and with international counterparts what immediate assistance can be provided to protect civilians? As the Minister will be aware, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has called on the Burmese Government and the Kachin independence army to resume negotiations, and their spokesman has confirmed that "China has already taken measures necessary to step up control over the border area and protects the lives and property of the border people".

Has the UK made contact with China to discuss these more recent developments and the plight of Kachin civilians fleeing the violence? Does the Minister have an indication of what these "measures" constitute? Human Rights Watch has reported that China has in fact forced Kachin refugees back to Burma and was denying international humanitarian agencies access to the refugees in Yunnan province. What assessment has the FCO made of the treatment of the displaced and the options for those now escaping the violence? Will the Government work with the international community to ensure that Kachin civilians can access humanitarian support?

The immediate priority must be the welfare of those civilians and an end to the attacks, so what, in the Minister's assessment, are the prospects for a ceasefire? Will the Government make it categorically clear that we will not tolerate air strikes and helicopter gunship attacks and that we will support the call on 2

January from the UN Secretary-General to the Burmese authorities to desist from any action that could endanger the lives of civilians living in the area?

Alistair Burt: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his questions, which covered a range of areas that obviously concern the House significantly. We share with him and the House a sense of condemnation following the deaths of civilians, as well as their concern about the resurgence of hostilities. We have indeed made it clear to the Burmese authorities that there should be an immediate ceasefire and that hostilities should stop. There is no possibility of the political reconciliation process being able to take place until that happens. We therefore continue to make representations to both sides, because this is a complex issue that has many sides and we want to make representations to ensure that they play their part and that, when hostilities cease, there is a proper opportunity for the necessary political dialogue.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether there had been sufficient political persuasion by the United Kingdom over the past year. My sense of the evidence of the progress that has been made comes from the visit of the Minister of State and the contacts that he has, as well as from the obvious progress that has been made in Burma in a variety of ways to ease the situation in different areas. However, as soon as one situation flares up again, we have to question that progress, and the House can be assured that we will continue to exert pressure.

It is obvious that progress must continue to be made if Burma is to resume its place among the rest of the nations. It understands that very well, and the forthcoming Foreign Affairs Council in April will accordingly be of huge significance. We will certainly expect to see further progress by then. In relation to that, contact is of course constantly maintained with partners in the European Union and the United Nations, and we certainly supported the calls made by the Secretary-General at the beginning of the year for a rapid end to hostilities. The right hon. Gentleman referred to the claims made by the KIA. I have received no details of their verification at this stage. He also asked about the preparations for a military attack, and that does indeed form a vital part of the consideration about humanitarian relief and assistance in those circumstances. That matter has indeed been raised.

As I said in answer to a previous question, we are well aware that China has been returning refugees because it classes them as economic migrants, rather than as people fleeing conflict, which would appear to the United Kingdom to be the more obvious way of classing those who are fleeing across the borders. We do indeed make representations to China that it should act responsibly and provide proper humanitarian care to those who are seeking relief from the violence and conflict. None of that will have any impact, however, unless work is done between the KIA and the Burmese Government to settle the issue. We will continue to make representations to the Chinese, but settling the issue is very much the most important thing.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the prospects for a ceasefire. We would hope that, following the international pressure that has been brought to bear as a result of the incidents of recent weeks, and particularly those that took place over the weekend, the Burmese Government will take note of how seriously those incidents are being seen in foreign capitals around the world, notwithstanding the fact that the greatest tragedy is that being inflicted on those who are suffering the violence. That violence must cease so that a proper political process can take place.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): European sanctions on Burma remain in place, but it is welcome that reconsideration of the suspension in April will take into account these worrying reports from Kachin state. The arms embargo also remains in place. Does the Minister agree that, for the foreseeable future, that should remain the case?

Alistair Burt: Yes.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the Minister and to colleagues.

**Petition : Rohingya Community
09 January 2013**

The Petition of Mr Ali and residents of Coldhurst and other parts of Oldham,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that as a result of a recent attack on the Rohingya ethnic minority in June 2012 there is now a humanitarian crisis in Burma and that more than 90,000 Rohingya have been displaced; further that the Petitioners believe that since 1962 no Rohingya have been issued with birth certificates which renders them aliens to their own country and means they have no citizen's rights and that innocent civilians are being targeted because of their ethnic background; further that the Petitioners believe that this is a modern ethnic cleansing and that it has been described as such by many independent journalists and NGO's and that the Rohingya require relief and aid.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to cease its economic ties with Burma and to assist in providing aid for the displaced Rohingya of the region.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr Michael Meacher , Official Report, 22 November 2012; Vol. 553, c. 834.] [P001138]

Observations from the Secretary of State for the Department for International Development: UK Ministers and officials in the DFID office and British Embassy in Rangoon continue to lobby the Government of Burma for a long-term solution to the plight of the Rohingya in Rakhine, including their right to citizenship. Her Majesty's Ambassador to Burma visited Rakhine State after the violence in October, as one of the first representatives of a foreign Government to do so. Foreign Office Minister of State for Asia, Hugo Swire, visited Rakhine State on 15 and 16 December. He discussed the situation with Government Ministers, the UN Resident Coordinator, Rohingya leaders and members from the Rakhine Investigative Commission. He also pushed for greater humanitarian co-ordination on the ground.

The UK is providing humanitarian assistance. Through the Department for International Development (DFID), the UK has allocated £2 million of bilateral support to provide water, sanitation and nutrition to more than 58,000 people affected by the violence in Rakhine. The UK also provides essential humanitarian assistance through core contributions made to multilaterals such as the EU and the UN.

Human Rights remain at the heart of the UK's policy on Burma. We have not forgotten the many challenging and complex issues facing Burma, including the need to resolve ethnic conflict. It was only after very careful consideration that the British Government lifted their policy of discouraging trade with Burma. This was both in recognition of progress in Burma and because we think right kind of responsible trade and investment will aid Burma's transition. Additionally we have put responsible investment at the centre of our future commercial relationship with Burma. We want to encourage investment that will benefit local communities and respect the local environment.

DFID has an extensive development programme in Burma. None of the UK's bilateral aid is provided through central Government, only through United Nations organisations, trusted international and local NGOs and, where circumstances allow, at the township level.

Burma Discussed in Syria Debates

10 January 2013

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): With your generosity, Mr Speaker, and that of the Foreign Secretary, may I ask that we ensure that the resolve not to abandon the civilians on the borders of Syria is matched by similar resolve in respect of civilians on the borders of another country, Burma? I have just received an e-mail from a source in Kachin state that says:

“Five or six fighter jets and helicopter gunships are attacking the areas around Laiza every day. . . IDPs and innocent civilians are terrified . . . they have totally destroyed the peace building process.”

Mr Hague: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing us to go a little wide of the situation in Syria—thousands of miles away. Of course we are deeply concerned about continuing conflicts in Burma, which are at the top of the list of what we raise with the Burmese Government; the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), who is sitting next to me, was there recently having those discussions. I will look at the report that my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) brings up and we will continue to communicate our views very clearly to the Burmese Government.

All Party Parliamentary Group for Democracy in Burma

On 8th January 2013, the APPG Burma organised a meeting with Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Hugo Swire MP. In the meeting, he presented his view of the trade delegation he led to Burma and discussed various issues of the recent situation in Burma.

On 16th January 2013, the APPG Burma organised a meeting with Shadow Secretary of State for International Development Ivan Lewis MP. In the meeting, Ivan Lewis MP presented his opinion of his recent trip to Burma and the Thailand-Burma border. During his trip, he met with various organisations and politicians, including Aung San Suu Kyi, representatives from the Burmese government, political activists, former political prisoners, representatives from ethnic political organisations, including Rohingya, Kachin and Karen, civil society organisations and refugees.

Based on his experience of meetings and observations, he discussed the human rights, political prisoners, ethnic reconciliations and political reforms in Burma.

EARLY DAY MOTIONS

AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND VISIT TO PARLIAMENT 21 JUNE 2012

23. 05. 2012

That this House welcomes Aung San Suu Kyi's election into Pyithu Hluttaw, the Lower House of the Burmese Parliament, as an indication of change in the country; congratulates the National League for Democracy on its success in the by-election; welcomes change in the Burmese government; notes that Burma still holds a considerable number of political prisoners, who should be released immediately; welcomes Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to speak to both Houses of Parliament on 21 June 2012; and calls on the Government to continue actively to promote the transition to free democratic government in Burma.

Total number of signatures: 44

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN BURMA

16.07.2012

That this House sends condolences to the families and friends of all those killed and affected by recent communal violence in Arakan (Rakhine) State in Burma; expresses concern that the government of Burma and local community leaders have not taken sufficient action to stop continuing sporadic violence; is deeply concerned by reports of widespread rape and of mass arrests, predominantly against the ethnic Rohingya minority; calls on the government of Burma to stop obstructing international agencies from delivering desperately needed humanitarian assistance to around 90,000 displaced people; further calls on the government of Burma to stop obstructing ethnic Rohingya from returning to their homes and villages; further calls on all parties in Burma to reform the 1982 citizenship law, which discriminates against ethnic minorities in Burma; and requests that the Government ensures the swift delivery of aid to the region.

Total number of signatures: 33

HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

06.09.2012

That this House calls on the Government to work with the international community to encourage the Burmese government to use this period of political transition to take action to improve the human rights situation in that country; and congratulates the excellent work being done by Aung San Suu Kyi and other Burmese human rights campaigners to bring to the world's attention the greatly troubling situation that has persisted for many decades, and tragically still continues, in Burma.

Total number of signatures: 44

IDENTIFICATION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BURMA

15.10.2012

That this House recognises the importance of identifying all the remaining political prisoners in Burma and recommends that a review mechanism should be initiated, with assistance from the United Nations and civil society; and believes that upon identification an individual should either be charged with an internationally recognised offence and tried by proceedings recognisable with international fair trial standards, or released without charge.

Total number of signatures: 38

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN KACHIN STATE, BURMA

22.11.12

That this House is alarmed that whilst the world is celebrating the political reforms made in Burma, ethnic violence and persecution carried out by the Burmese military persists, largely unacknowledged, in Kachin State; notes that this includes the targeted killings of civilians, torture and the burning of 1,000 villages, illustrating the severe human rights violations the Kachin people are being subjected to by the Burmese Army; and urges hon. Members to ask the Government to put pressure on the international community to provide much needed humanitarian aid for the Kachin people, to put pressure on the Burmese government to stop attacking Kachin civilians and to allow international humanitarian organisations access in Burma to provide aid and to urge the United Nations to instate a UN envoy in Kachin to monitor and improve this worsening situation.

Total number of signatures: 21

ATTACKS AGAINST ROHINGYA IN BURMA

11.12.2012

That this House is concerned by the ongoing attacks against the Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority in Burma; notes that attacks have now begun against the Kaman Muslim ethnic minority; further notes that police, state security and national Burmese Army soldiers are reported to be taking part in some of the attacks; is further concerned by President Thein Sein's request for international assistance in deporting all Rohingya from Burma which gives encouragement to alleged mobs carrying out the attacks; calls on the Government to support the placement of UN-mandated international observers in Rakhine State; further calls on the Government to work to ensure unrestricted humanitarian access is granted to all Rohingya areas, to support a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into the violence, and to encourage the government of Burma to repeal or amend the 1982 citizenship law which deprives the Rohingya of citizenship.

Total number of signatures: 57

WAR IN KACHIN STATE, BURMA

14.01.2013

That this House condemns the Burma Army's military offensive against the ethnic Kachin; expresses grave concern over the recent use of aerial bombardment in the offensive; notes with serious concern the significant escalation in the conflict, including a major increase in Burma Army troops and use of landmines on the frontlines; further condemns the continuing use of rape as a weapon of war; expresses serious concern about the displacement of over 100,000 people and the humanitarian crisis developing as a result of restrictions imposed by the government of Burma on international aid to the affected areas; calls on the government of Burma to stop attacks immediately and to engage in a meaningful political dialogue with the Kachin Independence Organisation to establish a peace process; further calls on the Government to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs arising from the conflict by increasing humanitarian assistance to internally-displaced people in Kachin State via local community organisations on the ground; and further calls on the Government to work within the EU to halt relaxation of economic sanctions and new trade and investments in Burma if there is not an immediate cessation of attacks.

Total Signatures: 20

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www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



**for Human Rights, Democracy
& Development in Burma**