



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

10 October 2017

Tom Tugendhat MBE MP
Chair
Foreign Affairs Committee
Committee Office
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Tugendhat,

The FAC wrote to the Foreign Secretary on 19 September expressing concern about the situation in Rakhine State and seeking answers to a range of questions. Following the Foreign Secretary's response dated 26 September, the FAC requested further detail in the following areas:

- Requests for Access
- Violence by Non-Military Actors
- Meetings with Senior Burmese Government Figures
- Bilateral Discussions
- Educational Courses
- Peace Process
- Civil Society

Requests for Access

The FAC asked for information and an assessment of the ambassadors' visit to Rakhine State.

The visit to Northern Rakhine on 2 October was tightly controlled by the military but nevertheless the ambassadors were able to see evidence of destruction - most noticeably from burning. The Minister of Border Affairs and the Minister of Construction and Energy accompanied the group. After the visit the following statement was issued:

“At the invitation of the Myanmar Government, we visited Northern Rakhine today. We went to a number of villages in Maungdaw and Rathedaung districts and met a mixture of local communities.

This initiative by the Government of Myanmar allowed us to show support for the many people of all communities in northern Rakhine who have suffered and still feel great insecurity.

We reiterate our condemnation of the ARSA attacks of 25 August and our deep concern about violence and mass displacement since. This was not an investigation mission and could not be in the circumstances. Investigation of allegations of human rights violations needs to be carried out by experts. We welcome the commitment of the State Counsellor to address human rights violations in accordance with strict norms of justice and call again on the Myanmar authorities to fully investigate allegations of human rights violations and bring prosecutions against those responsible. We also urge them to allow the UN Fact-Finding Mission to visit Rakhine.

We saw villages which had been burned to the ground and emptied of inhabitants. The violence must stop. The security forces have an obligation to protect all people in Rakhine without discrimination and to take measures to prevent acts of arson. We welcome the State Counsellor's statement that the security forces have been instructed to adhere strictly to a code of conduct, to exercise all due restraint and to take full measures to avoid collateral damage and the harming of innocent civilians. We encourage the Myanmar Government to move quickly to enable the voluntary, dignified and safe return to their places of origin of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled to Bangladesh.

We saw on our visit the dire humanitarian need. We call once more for unimpeded humanitarian access to northern Rakhine and resumption of life-saving services without discrimination throughout the state. We welcome the media access that has already been allowed but call once more for journalists to be allowed full, unimpeded access to all parts of Rakhine.

We have stressed to the Union and State Government and to local authorities in Rakhine that the people we saw during this visit must not be subject to, and should be protected from, any reprisals, such as physical attacks or arbitrary arrest.

As friends of Myanmar we remain ready to work with the Myanmar Government to help Rakhine reach its potential. The Advisory Commission on Rakhine State has set out recommendations for a stable, peaceful and prosperous future for all communities in the state, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or citizenship status. We support full implementation of the report.

We sincerely hope that our visit is only the very first step in an urgently needed opening up of access for all, including the media, to all parts of Northern Rakhine.

Ambassador Nicholas Coppel, Australia; Ambassador Karen MacArthur, Canada; Ambassador Jaroslav Dolecek, Czech Republic; Ambassador Peter Lysholt Hansen, Denmark; Ambassador Olivier Richard, France; Ambassador Giorgio Aliberti, Italy; Ambassador Wouters Jurgens, the Netherlands; Ambassador Steve Marshall, New Zealand; Ambassador Tone Tinnes, Norway; Ambassador Miodrag Nikolin, Serbia; Ambassador Paul Seger, Switzerland; Ambassador Kerem Divanlioglu, Turkey; Ambassador Scot Marciel, the United States; Ambassador-designate Kristian Schmidt, the European Union; Ambassador-

designate Dorothee Janetzke-Wenzel, Germany; Ms. Bibian Zamora Giménez, Chargée d’Affaires a.i. Spain; Mr. Johan Hallenborg, Head of the Swedish Section Office; Mr. David Hall, Deputy Head of Mission, the United Kingdom; Ms. Silja Rajander, Deputy Head of Mission, Finland.”

Violence by Non-Military Actors

The FAC asked for an update on reports on intercommunal violence between non-military actors in Burma.

There continue to be reports of ethnic Rakhine intimidating Muslim villages resulting in Rohingya villagers fleeing. There are unverified reports that ethnic Rakhine are perpetrating some of the arson attacks. Outside of northern Rakhine, intercommunal tensions are growing. A group of Rakhine civil society organisations has released statements condemning trade and other interactions with Muslim communities. Tensions in the state capital, Sittwe, are heightened, although there have been no incidents of intercommunal violence since 25 August. There has also been an increase in anti-UN and INGO sentiment as they are perceived to support the Rohingya. A shipment of ICRC aid was attacked by a group of approximately 200 ethnic Rakhine in Sittwe on 20 September. Nine Rakhine men were arrested in relation to the incident.

Meetings with Senior Burmese Government Figures

The FAC asked for an update on Minister Field’s visit to Burma and on whom he met during his visit.

Minister Field visited Burma from 25-27 September, the first western Minister since the crisis began. In Rangoon he met senior UN officials and local experts on Rakhine. He then travelled to Rakhine State and met the Rakhine Chief Minister and the State Executive Secretary, as well as Rakhine-based UN agencies and international NGOs. Minister Field also met displaced Rohingya, Rakhine and Hindu communities, hearing first-hand accounts of abuses and intercommunal tension. In Naypyidaw, he met the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. This was a timely visit which enabled Minister Field to make clear the UK’s top concerns and gain a better understanding of the issues underlying the current crisis.

Press statement:

[Minister Field held talks in Burma with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to press for an urgent resolution to the crisis in Rakhine - September 27, 2017](#)

Mark Field, Minister for Asia at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has become the first foreign minister from outside the region to visit Rakhine state in Burma since the crisis there escalated with hundreds of thousands fleeing to Bangladesh. He held talks in Burma with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to press for an urgent resolution to the crisis in Rakhine.

The meeting in Naypyidaw followed a visit by Mr Field to Rakhine State where he saw for himself the displacement of people caused by recent violence against the Rohingya Muslims that has seen more than 400,000 fleeing to neighbouring Bangladesh.

Mr Field made clear the violence needs to stop, with the security forces taking responsibility to protect all communities and the government allowing full humanitarian access for aid. He also emphasised Britain's call for the Burmese government to implement the recommendations of Kofi Annan's Rakhine Advisory Commission, to create the conditions in which Muslim, Buddhist and other communities can live along side each other peacefully and sustainably.

Mr Field also travelled to Rakhine and met the Rakhine Chief Minister Nyi Pu and State Executive Secretary U Tin Maung Swe, as well Rakhine-based UN agencies and international NGOs. He visited camps set up for Rohingya Muslims and other displaced communities who have remained in the country.

Last week Mr Field and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson took part in key talks on the Rakhine issue at the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

Mr Field said:

What we have seen in Rakhine in the past few weeks is an absolute and unacceptable tragedy. We need the violence to stop and all those who have fled to be able to return to their homes quickly and safely. The UK has taken a central role driving a clear international response, including securing a United Nations Security Council statement.

During my meetings with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and others, I strongly emphasised the need for Burma to heed the Security Council's call to end violence and allow humanitarian access to those in need of aid.

I have also seen for myself some of the communities which have been so badly damaged by what has happened here. Burma has taken great strides forward in recent years. But the ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis in Rakhine risks derailing that progress.

Mr Field and FCO-DFID Joint Minister Alistair Burt will tomorrow (Thursday 28) hold talks in Bangladesh with key Government officials and aid agencies to identify how best to provide lifesaving support to the large influx of refugees from Burma.

The UK has already announced an extra £30 million of funding to meet urgent humanitarian needs of those affected in Bangladesh and Burma, with the majority of the funding due to be spent in Bangladesh.

Notes to Editors:

A further £5.9 million was committed prior to this influx to meet the needs of the most vulnerable refugees and the host communities who support them.

Bilateral Discussions

The FAC asked for more details regarding bilateral discussions which have taken place with respect to the crisis in Burma.

The UK has been playing a leading role in the international response to the Rakhine crisis. We are working to create an international consensus around five priorities: an end to the violence; full humanitarian access; rapid progress on returns; access for the UN Fact-Finding Mission; and implementation of the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission. We have focussed our lobbying in particular on regional countries and others which have influence in Naypyitaw, including China. We have also had frequent bilateral contact with the Burmese authorities to urge them urgently to implement our five priorities.

To this end, the Foreign Secretary, Ministers and FCO officials have engaged in a series of bilateral discussions. The Foreign Secretary has spoken directly with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. He has had exchanges with a number of regional foreign ministers, including those of China, Australia, Indonesia and Thailand. He made use of the UN General Assembly to host a roundtable with key countries including Burma, Bangladesh, China, USA, Malaysia, UN Sweden, Canada, Russia, France, Thailand, Australia, Indonesia, France, Turkey, Denmark and Italy

Mr Field also made good use of the UN General Assembly, addressing a meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the only Western minister to do so. He has spoken to ministers from Bangladesh Thailand Sweden. During his visit to Burma he met key officials in Rakhine State and with Aung San Suu Kyi to call for an end to the violence. He subsequently visited Bangladesh (with Mr Burt) where he met Bangladeshi ministers. He has also spoken to the Burmese ambassador to the UK to express our deep concern about Burmese military actions in Rakhine. Mr Burt has met the Thai Deputy Foreign Minister to discuss humanitarian assistance and the security forces actions. Lord Ahmad has met Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to discuss the humanitarian situation in Bangladesh and the UK's provision of humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees.

The British Ambassador to Burma has frequent meetings with other ambassadors in Burma, including those from the EU and other Western countries, Thailand, Bangladesh and Indonesia and China.

We have also been using our diplomatic network to lobby and coordinate with other key countries on Rakhine. This has included meetings with senior ministers in Indonesia and Australia. Officials in the FCO have had regular exchanges with the Burmese ambassador and counterparts in EU and other countries.

The UK continues bilateral discussions with representatives from these and other countries, the UN Security Council and the EU.

Educational Courses

The FAC asked about the content of the courses the UK Government were offering Burmese military officials. This is a list of the courses that were on offer – with a short explanation of their content.

The UK's defence engagement strategy recognises that completing Burma's transition to democracy will require change in military attitudes and behaviour. International engagement can help promote change. We ensure that all engagement complies with the UK's obligations under the EU Arms Embargo. The focus of our engagement has been on securing long term change in the military through education. In consultation with the civilian government, we offered a range of courses focused on governance, accountability, ethics, human rights and international law.

The educational courses listed below were on offer for this FY; all had students lined up to participate. The large majority of students attend courses in country; only a few attend courses in the UK. For example, we had 69 students signed up for educational courses before the suspension of engagement on 19 September, of whom 40 were due to receive English language training in Naypyidaw and 16 to attend the psychology of leadership course, also in Naypyidaw.

- **BISL – Building Integrity:** a week long course delivered at the UK Defence Academy. Aimed at 1* and 2* level, senior military and civilian officials, this multi-national course focuses on the role of senior leadership in implementing and maintaining anti-corruption measures, improved accountability and transparency across the defence and security sectors. It seeks to examine the key aspects of leadership and change management in analysing and addressing the risk of corruption within the defence and security sector including, in finance, acquisition and procurement, human resource management and, its effect on instability, overall capability and operational output.
- **MDWSC – Managing Defence In the Wider Security Context:** an increased understanding of the issues associated with the governance and management of defence. The term governance refers to the overall, ethical direction of defence resources in accordance with the constitution and national law and to the control of military organisations by the political authorities of the state. The management of defence addresses the efficient and effective use of human, financial and material resources to meet defence and wider national security objectives. Governance and management are interdependent: poor governance and a lack of accountability open up possibilities for corruption and other abuses of human and physical resources.
- **SSLP – Senior Strategic Leadership Programme:** These courses are aimed at military officers and civilian officials from the across the defence and security sector. They seek to provide students with the framework to enhance their strategic leadership performance and understand the challenges of leadership at the strategic level. Study includes leadership models and ethics, managing major organisational changes and decision making at the corporate and strategic level. There are 2 levels of course: The Senior Leadership Programme is a week long course delivered overseas to a host country by the UK Defence Academy, and the Senior Strategic Leadership Programme

is a week long, multi-national, residential course delivered at the UK Defence Academy and aimed at senior military and civilian officials at the 1* and 2* level (Brigadier and Major General equivalent) from the across the defence and security sector.

- RCDS – Royal College of Defence Studies: This is the premier educational establishment of the UK Defence Academy, providing a post-graduate level education in strategic studies for officers and cross-government civilian officials with the potential for high rank in the UK and overseas. The RCDS aim is to provide graduates, who understand the international strategic context, are skilled in analysis and able to work intuitively across national, cultural and ideological boundaries and to lead or contribute to developing strategy at the highest level.
- BMEC – Basic Military English Course: This course teaches basic English language skills and knowledge with the addition of extra Military specialist vocabulary to allow students to communicate more effectively in an international professional military environment. It is 12 weeks long, is delivered at the UK Defence Academy and it also includes a cultural element including visits to UK cities, to learn more about life and culture in the UK.
- ELT – English Language Training
- IHL – International Humanitarian Law: course designed for officers, military lawyers and other military personnel who have a direct professional interest in, or obligation related to, the application of Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC).
- SLP (Export) – Strategic Leadership Programme: Strategic Leadership Programme (Residential) is designed to address both the competence and ethics of leaders. The course will also expose participants to cultural difference in leadership with students drawn from a geographically diverse area. Leaders are required to operate in an increasingly complex, joined-up and rapidly changing world; this requires them to think, work and lead in different, innovative ways.
- ODSSC – Overseas Directors Staff Course: This course is for international officers and is delivered at the UK Defence Academy. The aim of the course is to introduce foreign defence personnel in a training or education role, to methods used by the Defence Academy to educate UK service personnel. The course focuses on the organisation and delivery of command and staff courses, equipping students with the knowledge and skills to enable them to deliver such courses effectively and, provides an insight into how the Defence Academy is organised and delivers training, providing a benchmark for their own colleges and courses.
- EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zone course: Since UNCLOS 82, most countries increased their claimed waters from the previous 3 nautical miles territorial sea. The course looks at environmental, humanitarian and enforcement issues as well as international laws and requirements and also at how the UK addresses the issues.

- POL – Psychology of Leadership: The Psychology of Leadership course is based on the Sandhurst syllabus and pushes students to examine their own leadership style and how they can improve command in their respective organisations.
- IIDC – International Intelligence Directors Course: The aim of the course is to provide a programme of lectures, and a forum for high level collegial discussion on current issues pertinent to the management of strategic intelligence in the modern world. The course runs once per year, and is designed for 30 Senior Officers and lasts for 2 weeks.
- SSLP – Senior Strategic Leadership Programme: Strategic Leadership Programme (Residential) is designed to address both the competence and ethics of leaders. The course will also expose participants to cultural difference in leadership with students drawn from a geographically diverse area. Leaders are required to operate in an increasingly complex, joined-up and rapidly changing world; this requires them to think, work and lead in different, innovative ways.

Peace Process

The FAC asked for further information to aid their understanding about what projects are supporting the peace process in Burma.

The British Government together with ten other donors provide support for the Peace Process through a joint funding mechanism called the Joint Peace Fund (JPF). Funding so far has supported the civilian Government's first peace conference, the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference. Funding through the JPF has been approved to support the joint ceasefire monitoring mechanism as part of the Government's 2015 National Ceasefire Agreement. The UK also supports an NGO to provide advice to all actors involved in the peace process. We reiterate the comments made in the Foreign Secretary's response that the peace process represents the best opportunity to resolve these conflicts and that military engagement in the peace process is critical for its success.

Civil Society

The FAC asked for some examples of projects that intend to support civil society in Burma.

As the Foreign Secretary stated in his response, the UK Government supports a range of projects providing direct support to civil society groups. For example, DFID has been supporting civil society to play a positive role in reforms in Burma since 2007. We have supported the formation of 31 coalitions or networks, reaching over 700 organisations, working on diverse issues including transparency in extractive industries, legal aid, ethnic education, gender, HIV and sex workers, fisheries and forestry, and land reform. Over 6 million people have benefited from these reforms. We also engage with local NGOs to ensure that economic development, humanitarian aid and basic services reach people that the state cannot access.

John Virgoe

Head of South East Asia Department