

# Foreign Affairs Committee

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## From the Chair

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

19 September 2017

### **Re: Violence in Rakhine State**

I am writing to express the deep concern of the Foreign Affairs Committee about the current situation in the Rakhine State of Burma, and to request more information from the FCO about the UK Government's response.

We note the reports of the UN, NGOs and monitoring groups, and numerous press reports. We have also considered Government statements on the matter in the House and elsewhere.

I attach a list of questions seeking more information about the Government's current understanding of the situation, its policy and diplomatic response. This information will assist the Committee in deciding what further action it may wish to take. I would be grateful if you could reply by Tuesday 26 September.

We will be placing this letter, and your response, in the public domain.

**Tom Tugendhat MBE MP**  
Chair

## Assessment of the situation in Rakhine State

1) The Minister of State Mark Field said in the House on 5 September that the Embassy had been monitoring the situation in northern Rakhine carefully in the days leading up to the recent outbreak of violence, including by travelling to the state capital, Sittwe.<sup>1</sup> Please provide:

- a) An account of the situation the Embassy observed in that visit;
- b) What the Government knows of the situation in northern Rakhine now, including the sources of information on which it relies;
- c) The Government's assessment of the statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, that "the current situation cannot yet be fully assessed, but the situation seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing";<sup>2</sup>
- d) An assessment of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, including its size, capability and threat level;
- e) Confirmation of whether the Embassy has a pending request for further access to the area.

2) International attention has understandably focused on the de-facto leader of the civilian government, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, though Ministers have noted that the military remains heavily involved in Burmese politics and political institutions, and controls the defence, border affairs and home affairs ministries.<sup>3</sup>

- a) Whom do you consider to be responsible for ordering and commanding the continuing military action?
- b) Have you identified non-military actors that are inciting or perpetrating violence against Rohingya?
- c) Mr Field told the House that some statements had been issued in Aung San Suu Kyi's name that did not reflect her views on the matter.<sup>4</sup> Which statements on this matter does the Government attribute directly to the State Counsellor and what is its assessment of these?
- d) Does the Government consider the State Counsellor's speech of 19 September to constitute an accurate reflection of her views on the matter, and what is its assessment of her remarks?

## The UK's diplomatic response

3) Please set out in detail the diplomatic action that has been taken by the UK Government to address this situation, including:

- a) Meetings held with senior government figures in Burma (*including meeting dates and interlocutors*)
- b) Meetings held with senior military figures in Burma (*including meeting dates and interlocutors*)
- c) Meetings with the Burmese Ambassador in the UK (*including meeting dates*)
- d) Discussions and joint action with multilateral partners in the UN and EU. Please include an account of the UN Security Council meeting of 30 August, which did not result in a statement, as well as that of 13 September.
- e) Bilateral discussions on this issue with other interested states, including other major donors such as the US and Japan, and with Burma's close neighbour, China.

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<sup>1</sup> 5 Sept 2017, HC Deb Col 25, Mark Field MP

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Council 36th session. [Opening Statement by Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), 11 September 2017

<sup>3</sup> 5 Sept 2017 HL Deb Col 1836, Baroness Goldie and HC Deb Col 30, Mark Field MP

<sup>4</sup> 5 Sept 2017, HC Deb Col 31, Mark Field MP

4) Mr Field stated that the UK Government provides the Burmese military with vocational courses, including on governance, ethics, human rights and international law.<sup>5</sup>

- a) What assessment has the Government made of the effectiveness of this training?
- b) Is any of this training assessed against Overseas Security and Justice Assistance guidance on human rights?
- c) Has the Government considered withdrawing this, or any other, aid and support programmes to the Burmese government in response to this outbreak of violence?

5) What sanctions, if any, remain in place on Burmese military figures, and will this be changed by the Government in light of this violence?

### Support for refugees

6) At the time of writing, the UN estimates that 389,000 people have sought refuge in Bangladesh since 25 August.<sup>6</sup>

- a) What humanitarian support is the UK providing to Bangladesh to help support the refugees from the area (and how, if at all, this has changed since 26 August 2017)?
- b) What representations has the UK made to the governments of Bangladesh and India about their responsibilities regarding hosting and returning refugees, and how have these been received?

### A long-term solution

7) Just before the latest outbreak of violence, the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, headed by Kofi Annan, had published its report with recommendations for the long-term improvement of the situation in Rakhine. The UK Government welcomes this report. Does the UK government still consider that this report provides a basis for a long-term solution in Rakhine State?

8) The Burmese government has been pursuing a nationwide peace process for several years.

- a) What is the UK Government's assessment of the peace process, and of the implications of the recent outbreak of violence for the peace process?
- b) What is the UK Government doing to support the peace process in Burma?
- c) What support is the UK Government delivering to help develop civil society in Burma?

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<sup>5</sup> 5 Sept 2017, HC Deb Col 28, Mark Field MP

<sup>6</sup> The Office for the Coordination of [Humanitarian Affairs](#)