



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**Bangladesh, Burma and
the Rohingya crisis:
Government response
to the Committee's
Fourth Report**

**Sixth Special Report of
Session 2017–19**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 23 July 2018*

The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

[Stephen Twigg MP](#) (*Labour (Co-op), Liverpool, West Derby*) (Chair)

[Richard Burden MP](#) (*Labour, Birmingham, Northfield*)

[Mr Nigel Evans MP](#) (*Conservative, Ribble Valley*)

[Mrs Pauline Latham OBE MP](#) (*Conservative, Mid Derbyshire*)

[Chris Law MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Dundee West*)

[Mr Ivan Lewis MP](#) (*Independent, Bury South*)

[Mark Menzies MP](#) (*Conservative, Fylde*)

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP](#) (*Labour (Co-op), Brighton, Kemptown*)

[Paul Scully MP](#) (*Conservative, Sutton and Cheam*)

[Mr Virendra Sharma MP](#) (*Labour, Ealing Southall*)

[Henry Smith MP](#) (*Conservative, Crawley*)

The following Members were also members of the Committee during the Parliament:

[James Duddridge MP](#) (*Conservative, Rochford and Southend East*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the [Committee's website](#) and in print by Order of the House. Evidence relating to this Report is published on the relevant [inquiry page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Fergus Reid (Clerk), Rob Page (Second Clerk), Rachael Cox, Rebecca Usden and Louise Whitley (Committee Specialists), Alison Pickard (Senior Committee Assistant), Paul Hampson and Rowena MacDonald (Committee Assistants), Estelle Currie and Lucy Dargahi (Media Officers).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the International Development Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 1223; the Committee's email address is indcom@parliament.uk.

Sixth Special Report

On 20 March 2018, the International Development Committee published its Fourth Report of Session 2017–19, on Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis. The response from the Government was received on Wednesday 18 July 2018. The response is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

We welcome the scrutiny of the IDC in this final report, and we agree with all the concluding recommendations with one minor caveat. We outline DFID's continued work to positively address poverty reduction in Burma and Bangladesh, including a concerted and international response to the Rohingya crisis. We regret the refusal of visas for the IDC to enter Burma and subsequent inability to view of our programmes on the ground, and FCO and DFID officials have communicated this to the Government of Burma on a number of occasions.

The Rohingya Crisis

While the IDC report covers both the wider development programmes in both Burma and Bangladesh, the Rohingya crisis is rightly an issue in-itself and for these broader programmes.

The UK Government's priorities on the Rohingya crisis are to ensure that displaced people and those otherwise affected by violence and intimidation within Rakhine State and refugees in Bangladesh receive the support they need, and that conditions are put in place which will allow them, in time, to return home voluntarily, in safety, with dignity and with international oversight. A credible returns process will take time, and we will work with the Government of Bangladesh and international partners to ensure longer-term support to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh meets and goes beyond immediate humanitarian needs. In Burma we need to address discrimination against the remaining Rohingya, without this it is unlikely that those in Bangladesh will choose to return. In parallel, we will work to ensure that those responsible for the abuses are held to account, recognising this is likely to be a long process.

The Government will continue to use international pressure, co-operation with Burma's neighbours and other influential countries, and dialogue with the Burmese authorities to urge progress on these priorities.

In light of the appalling violence suffered by the Rohingya people, and ongoing conflict in other parts of the country, most notably in Kachin, northern Shan and Kayin States, as well as continued high levels of poverty throughout the country, DFID is making four shifts in the emphasis of its programmes to: (1) increase focus on inclusion; (2) working more in conflict-affected areas; (3) placing internally-displaced people and refugees at the centre of our programme; and (4) ensuring our engagement with the Burmese government is focused on enabling reforms that support inclusion, peace and accountability. Supporting transitions to peace, an inclusive democracy and a more open and fairer economy remain the UK's longer-term goals, and are essential if all of Burma's communities are to live

safely, with their dignity and rights respected and with opportunities to prosper. The four shifts in emphasis in the DFID programme will allow meet immediate needs to be met for the most vulnerable populations, while continuing to work towards these longer-term goals.

The UK remains a firm supporter of Burma's peace process. The number of parties involved in Burma makes this a hugely complex process, including by international comparisons. Although progress is currently slow, we believe it can succeed and offers the most likely long-term solution to Burma's internal conflicts. The UK welcomed the third Panglong peace conference that took place from 11 to 16 July, and will continue to urge all parties to work towards an end to violence throughout the country, and for all parties to abide by International Humanitarian Law.

The UK is committed to pursuing accountability for human rights violations committed in Rakhine State, which will be an essential part of any sustainable resolution to the crisis. We will continue to examine various approaches for achieving accountability for the crimes committed but we are under no illusion about the length of time often needed to achieve justice. We continue to discuss this with our international partners as well as working with them to support those assisting victims and building evidence, including on sexual violence crimes. The UK is a staunch supporter of the ICC. While the Security Council has the ability to refer Burma to the ICC we know there is insufficient support in the Council at this time. A vetoed referral would do little to further the cause of accountability.

We welcome, in principle, recent developments since the last IDC report, including the Government of Burma's announcement that it is establishing a Commission of Inquiry. At the time of writing, many of the details about the Commission, including who the international head will be, are unknown. Since the announcement of its establishment on 31 May 2018 the UK has emphasised the need for this to be a transparent and independent investigation.

Similarly, the announcement of the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Burmese Government and UN agencies - recognising that the UNCHR should be the lead international agency on refugee returns - indicates greater willingness from the Burmese Government to engage with the international community on the Rohingya crisis. However, support by the Government for implementation of the MoU will be the test of seriousness for real change. They must also do their utmost to ensure the buy in of the security forces and the ethnic Rakhine population. The authorities must also do their utmost to ensure that life for the Rohingya still in Rakhine State is improved. A first step should be humanitarian access for UN agencies to northern Rakhine State to meet the needs of the estimated 200,000 Rohingya who remain and other communities displaced or otherwise affected by violence. The Government should ensure the safety and security of the Rohingya - including from the security forces that have been primarily responsible for the violence - as well as their basic rights and freedoms. Only then are the Rohingya currently in Bangladesh likely to return. Any return must be voluntary and ensure the safety and dignity of the returnees. The UK continues to push Burma to fully implement the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission to address the wider challenges in Rakhine State in a systematic way.

The UK continues to lead UN Security Council activity on Burma, ensuring that calls for the Burmese authorities to hold those responsible to account are consistently part of Council messaging. Following the UN Security Council's visit to Burma of 30 April-1 May 2018 the UK worked with partners to agree a joint Council press statement that called for Burma to fulfil its commitment to holding the perpetrators of violence to account. Burma's recognition that there needs to be a credible investigation is the first step in this process. If credible and adequate, a Burmese-led process may offer the best chance of convictions which are accepted by the population and change the narrative on Rakhine.

The UN Security Council visit and subsequent statement demonstrated to Burma that there is concern across the Council, including on accountability. The UK believes that messaging that comes from every member of the Council sends a powerful signal to the Burmese authorities. During the visit and in negotiations we had detailed discussions with all Council members on accountability. Discussions confirmed insufficient current support for an ICC referral but it remains an option for the Council to consider in the absence of domestic progress.

The UK remains one of the largest donors to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh and has committed £129 million since August 2017 to support the humanitarian response. Since the beginning of 2018, we have been working with the Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian partners to improve preparedness for the impending monsoon and cyclone season, which poses the risk of creating an emergency within an emergency. Our latest £70 million allocation to the Joint Response Plan for the crisis will provide up to 200,000 refugees with help to strengthen their shelters, 50,000 people with healthcare and up to 300,000 people with life-saving food assistance and clean water.

We are grateful to Bangladesh, to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and to the host communities around Cox's Bazar for welcoming over one million Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh is dealing with a major humanitarian crisis not of its making and it is vital the international community works with Bangladesh to step up support for the refugees and their host communities, especially during this monsoon season.

Bangladesh has a strong track record in disaster preparedness and protecting the vulnerable from the impacts of floods and cyclones, and we have asked them to extend to the Rohingya people the same level of protection. The Secretary of State for International Development and Foreign Secretary wrote a joint letter on 20 March to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, asking her to save as many lives as possible by allocating additional land at lower risk of flooding and landslides, reducing density in the existing camps, and having evacuation plans in place. Minister Field made the same request to Minister of State Shahriar Alam on 27 March, and to Foreign Minister Ali on 19 April. Minister Field also met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister Ali on 1 July in Dhaka, and reassured them of the UK's continuing commitment to supporting the Rohingya and host-communities over the longer-term. We welcome the Government of Bangladesh's subsequent announcement in May that it would allocate an additional 500 acres of land for the refugees.

Following a visit by the United Nations Security Council to Bangladesh and Burma from 28 April – 1 May, we supported a UNSC press statement encouraging the international community to increase support to the Government of Bangladesh for emergency preparedness measures.

But while preparedness for the monsoon season remains the immediate priority, we must not lose sight of the need to plan to support the Rohingya in the longer term, including through the provision of access to education and livelihoods. We must also continue to ensure that the needs of host communities impacted by the crisis are appropriately addressed

Burma

Transparency

- (1) **“DFID must clearly outline all of the UK’s on-going financial commitments in Burma, including those through multinational organisations, identifying in each case, the justification for continued engagement and the due diligence undertaken to reach that position—including results that have been achieved.”**
(Summary)

DFID Response: Agree

The planned bilateral budget for 2018/19 is £103.5 million – of which £87.5 million is managed by the country office and £16 million of which is projected budget for centrally managed programmes. In 2016, the most recent year for which aggregated multilateral spend data is available; the imputed share of DFID spending through multilateral agencies in Burma was £37 million.

Strategic decisions on resource allocations and due diligence of partners are conducted differently dependant on funding channel.

The shape of DFID Burma’s bilateral programme was set and agreed through the DFID Burma business plan 2016 – 2020. This set the context, vision, delivery methods and risks for the office and supported the overall UK objectives of supporting the triple transition to peace, inclusive democracy and a fairer and more open economy. This plan highlighted “new or intensified conflict” and “delays or reversals to the reform process due to the military or other vested interests” as the major risks. As a result of the Rakhine crisis the office has since reviewed this strategy and shifted the emphasis of the portfolio to reflect the new context.

As stated in the introductory remarks, DFID is making four shifts in the emphasis of its programmes to: (1) increase focus on inclusion; (2) working more in conflict-affected areas; (3) placing internally-displaced people and refugees at the centre of our programme; and (4) ensuring our engagement with the Burmese government is focused on enabling reforms that support inclusion, peace and accountability. Every programme in Burma has been assessed against the new strategy and many are being reshaped and redesigned as a result.

Strategy for centrally managed programmes is set by the home departments. Country selection and in-country activity is discussed and agreed with the DFID country team. Central programmes a planned to be consistent and complementary with and to country-office policies and approaches (e.g. avoidance of work in particular sectors or implementers). This approach makes sense where we can achieve economies of scale through multi-country programmes (e.g. improved access to specialist expertise). All centrally managed programmes have been instructed to review their engagement in Burma and reshape this engagement to fit with our new approach.

The strategy of multilateral organisations for expenditure of their core funds in Burma is set by their own governance structures and country strategies. Our ability to shape any institutional strategy will depend on the influence we have in that organisation. For

example, for the World Bank we have influence on strategy and new project approval through the UK executive director's office in Washington, whilst we also work closely with the Bank at regional and country level to shape their thinking and policies.

Due diligence is conducted by DFID staff for all our bilateral delivery partners. DFID Burma has an enhanced due diligence regime for work with the private sector. This is described more fully the response to recommendation 8 below. We have also conducted an enhanced due diligence assessment of our largest delivery partner – UNOPS – where we contracted external expertise and increased the focus on our exposure to political and reputational risk and more detailed coverage of downstream partners. Multilateral agencies apply their own regulations and compliance procedures for their core funded programmes. These are reviewed periodically through multilateral governance arrangements with inputs from DFID country offices that capture performance of multilateral country offices.

Refusal of IDC visas to visit Burma

- (1) “We also express appreciation for the efforts of DFID Burma, the UK Ambassador there, FCO Ministers and staff in London, and Mr Speaker, for their efforts and interventions in trying to persuade the Burmese government to authorise visas for members and staff of the Committee to visit Burma to see DFID’s work at first hand. Unfortunately, these efforts were in vain.” (Paragraph 7)

Taken with

- (2) “We were disappointed not to be allowed to visit Burma to see any UK aid projects in that country funded by the UK’s allocation of £100 million development assistance per year. Visas were refused at the last minute—and reportedly by decision taken at the highest level. The reasons given varied but were essentially spurious. **We can only assume that the Burmese government was reacting to the criticism contained in our first report on the Rohingya crisis and voiced by many other members of both Houses during questions and debates on the matter.**” (Paragraph 8)

Taken with

- (3) “As Mr Speaker, Rt Hon John Bercow MP, highlighted during the Urgent Question on the matter on 28 February: “In democracies, parliamentarians do criticise governments. That is a lesson that the Burmese Government will have to learn.”¹ The effect was to curtail our scrutiny of DFID’s work and sharpen our focus on whether UK aid for Burma was being channelled and focused in an appropriate way given the new circumstances, post-August 2017.” (Paragraph 9)

Taken with

- (4) *We recommend that DFID seek to agree with the authorities of any country in receipt of multiple millions of pounds worth of UK aid—whether any of that aid is channelled via government agencies or not—that there is a presumption of access to scrutinise the relevant projects on the ground for UK personnel engaged in audit or accountability, including the relevant parliamentary select committee. Indeed, the principle of diplomatic reciprocity indicates that the UK parliamentarians should have access to any country with whom the UK has diplomatic relations.*” (Paragraph 10)

DFID response: Agree

We were deeply disappointed at the refusal of the Burmese authorities to grant visas to the IDC. We agree that free and unfettered access into Burma, and all DFID’s bilateral partner countries, is vital for UK Parliamentary scrutiny. Representations have been made at ministerial level regarding the importance of such access.

Monitoring and evaluation remains a pre-requisite of countries in receipt of UK aid. However, the existence of diplomatic relations with recipient countries does not guarantee the recipient country will approve visas for members of parliamentary scrutiny committees

1 Hansard <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-02-28/debates/38C514F3-0169-4817-810D-1035CCA4F398/InternationalDevelopmentCommitteeBurmaVisas>

to visit. We will make explicit to recipient countries that we have a presumption that they will issue visas to parliamentary scrutiny delegations. We will seek to incorporate this in a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Burma for all DFID activity in the country, aiming to have this signed before the end of 2019.

Peace process and political settlement

- (5) “We believe there may be a fundamental problem with the peace process that the UK is supporting. The problem is that one side is unlikely to be sincerely engaged and probably has a completely different agenda. We think it highly likely that the process is just window-dressing for the Burmese Army.” (Paragraph 45).

Taken with

- (6) ***“We recommend that DFID commission and conduct an independent review of the peace process, evaluating its prospects for progress. There should be robust benchmarks set which, if not met, mean that the programme is suspended.”*** (Paragraph 46)

DFID response: Partially agree

We are concerned by the slow progress of the peace process. The third Panglong peace conference took place earlier this month, but only after repeated postponements. Nonetheless, peace processes are often slow and can take years to be agreed. We assess it remains critical to stay engaged and encourage all parties to the conflict – the Burmese military, the civil government and all ethnic armed organisations – to focus on ending violence and creating an inclusive peaceful future for all people of the country.

It is difficult to assess with confidence what different actors’ motivations are at this stage; the Burmese military’s objectives are particularly hard to discern. We will maintain channels of dialogue to the military to encourage it to play a constructive role in the peace process, and support activities that bring it together with ethnic armed organisations and the civilian government to identify ways to move towards a peace settlement that all parties can accept.

We agree that progress and our work to support the peace process should be regularly assessed. DFID’s peacebuilding programme is reviewed annually, as is all support to the peace process and peacebuilding funded through the cross-departmental Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). In addition, we are currently supporting an independent mid-term review of the Joint Peace Fund, together with the other 11 donors that contribute to the Joint Peace Fund. We will consider the effectiveness of continued UK support to the peace process once that review is complete in October 2018.

Achieving sustainable peace in Burma goes beyond the formal peace process itself. As part of DFID Burma’s four portfolio shifts, we will ensure an emphasis on conflict-affected areas and groups. This means continuing to support inter-communal engagement efforts across Burma at village and community levels, as well as formal peace process negotiations.

At no time has DFID support to peace, provision of humanitarian assistance or development programming been linked to a requirement that ethnic groups sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). On the contrary, while the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) has yet to sign the NCA, DFID remains the largest donor in areas that the KIO controls in Kachin State. Our assistance to Burmese refugees in camps in Thailand remains per capita very similar to the level in 2014.

DFID has not reduced its level of humanitarian funding in Burma. The great majority of this funding goes to the most affected ethnic communities in Rakhine, Kachin and northern Shan States and to refugees in Thailand. We have reprioritised some funding to meet the most urgent needs; we spend more in Kachin, northern Shan and Rakhine States, and less overall on the Thai border. At the same time DFID has increased broader development assistance into conflict-affected areas, including to displaced people.

At no time has DFID prioritised implementing partners solely on the strength of their accounting systems. Civil society support has not been deprioritised by DFID Burma; core elements of our Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme (HARP), our Civic Engagement programme and our programmes in health and education focus on strengthening Burmese civil society organisations to build up capability in financial and programme management. DFID is the only donor in Burma to have delivered on this World Humanitarian Summit commitment to date.

DFID agrees that support for more self-reliance for people displaced for protracted periods, and the protection of human capital through investing in education, health and nutrition, is vital. We are not the only donor, but we are regularly discussing with our partners how we can do more in these areas through our humanitarian and development assistance

DFID remains committed to value for money in the delivery of our aid. We assess the different options for designing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating our assistance. All our international humanitarian partners have a strong presence in Burma or Thailand, and strong understanding of the context. At the same time DFID continues to have a much stronger presence in Burma than most other donors. We maintain direct lines of communication with key civil society partners and visit affected areas as frequently as possible to monitor the context and the delivery of our assistance. We are committed to delivering an increased proportion of our assistance as directly as possible through local actors, and we work very closely with key local organisations for much of our assistance, including in Kachin State.

UK support for Burma trade and military involvement

- (7) “Burma Campaign UK has found an example of why there needs to be policies ensuring no UK aid ends up directly or indirectly benefitting the military. Irrawaddy Green Towers in Burma was created from development aid loans from European countries, including CDC group, under the control of DFID. It is working for MYTEL, the new mobile phone company set up by the Burmese military in conjunction with the Vietnamese military, so it could be deemed that UK aid is helping the Burmese military make money. We have also been told of a UK part funded programme to build an overpass in Yangon, even though DFID acknowledges that the military businesses are heavily involved in transport and infrastructure.” (Paragraph 65)

Taken with

- (8) “We note that at the same time as we were denied visas to visit Burma, the UK government was hosting a trade delegation from Burma including members of the Burmese government.” (Paragraph 67)

Taken with

- (9) ***“In response to this report we would like the UK Government to set out how its support for UK/Burma trade takes into account concerns about the Burmese military’s involvement in the economy and human rights abuses. This should include information covering UK spending other than ODA or which is through funds and programmes outside of DFID’s control, for example the Prosperity Fund.”*** (Paragraph 67)

DFID Response: Agree

Inclusive democracy will not thrive in Burma if the economy collapses, if people have no jobs, or cannot afford to feed themselves.

Inclusive economic growth and education opportunities for all can help reduce ethnic tension. Consequently, we believe responsible British companies should trade with Burma, and we continue to support trade promotion – as does the United States and all of our European partners. Support for Burma’s transition from a closed, military-controlled economy to an open one is central to UK policy in Burma. HMG wants to reduce the military’s relative economic influence over Burma’s economy by supporting increased competition from companies that meet international standards.

DFID works on economic development in Burma to reduce poverty through strong inclusive growth. We focus on the poorest, including those who are marginalised and excluded from the benefits of growth due to their religion, ethnicity, gender, because they have a disability, or because they live in an area affected by conflict. In the past three years DFID support helped almost a quarter of a million people across Burma find jobs or increase their incomes.

In response to the Rakhine crisis we have reviewed our entire economic development portfolio and reshaped it to increase further its emphasis on inclusion, social cohesion and ethnic and border regions. Some of the results from these changes will be:

- provision of micro-finance to 50,000 Rohingya and Rakhine women
- providing financial services for 30,000 internally displaced people in Kachin, Shan and Kayin
- 459,000 people in marginalised ethnic states will benefit from jobs or increased incomes

Engagement with the private sector carries risks given the extensive Burmese military interests across the economy. But such engagement is vital if we are to support an economy that works for all the people of Burma, not just its elites. A new generation of young entrepreneurs provides an opportunity to promote better business practices across the country, many of whom aspire to be more transparent and responsible than their parents' generation.

We maximise our impacts and manage our risks at three levels:

- We invest to undermine military vested interests and improve the quality of business. Two examples of this work are: investing in the Extractive Industries Transparency Index to shine a light on what is going on in this opaque, but important sector; and investing in the Myanmar Centre for Responsible business to promote better corporate governance, including increasing transparency and standards.
- Secondly, we have designed our programmes to protect them from elite capture. We conducted extensive analysis on the role of the military in the economy before developing our private sector portfolio and deciding in which sectors to invest. Our focus is on sectors where long-term investment can create good quality jobs for the poor. This contrasts with the military's focus on short-term, quick profit sectors. It is important that we keep our analysis of military economic interests up to date. Consistent with the Committee's recommendation, we have taken steps to review independently and update this analysis on a regular basis.
- Finally, we have a thorough due diligence process for our work with the private sector. This process covers both funding relationships and companies with whom we collaborate. It identifies not only individuals and companies that have formerly been sanctioned, but also those run by or that have strong links to former government officials, cronies and the military.
- UK aid invested through CDC is not helping the Burmese military make money. CDC's loan to Irrawaddy Green Towers was committed prior to the market entrance of MyTel. Irrawaddy Green Towers provides services to all cellphone operators in the country on market based agreements. The commercial loan, which is currently being repaid, was made as on the basis of delivering substantial development impact by increasing access to and lowering the costs for telecoms services across Myanmar, including to rural populations. For every investment CDC carries out extensive due diligence on all of its investment partners. At the time of making this commitment substantial due diligence was conducted on both the company and the Burmese telecoms market.

- DevCo (a PIDG facility managed by the IFC) has been retained by the Burmese Ministry of Construction as lead transaction advisor for structuring and tendering a PPP for the Yangon Expressway project. They will be working with the government throughout the preparation phase up to and including the award of contract so will ensure that the procurement process is fair and transparent.

Parliamentary strengthening in Burma

- (10) “All aid organisations need to keep under review their terms of engagement with state institutions in countries where there are substantial human rights concerns.” (Paragraph 73)

Taken with

- (11) *“We recommend that DFID, together with the WFD and the UK Parliament and other UK organisations supporting the ‘Pyidaungsu Hluttaw’—coordinate in securing an objective review of such programmes. This review needs to determine if any substantive progress has been made in equipping and/or inspiring the Burmese legislature to do more to hold the government to account, engage the public or other flexing of parliamentary muscle. If little or nothing tangible has been achieved, we recommend suspending these programmes.”* (Paragraph 74)

DFID Response – Agree

Burma’s parliamentary history is a short one. The current Hluttaw was only instituted in 2008. There remains great interest from Burmese parliamentarians and parliamentary staff in learning from international peers, with particular interest in ‘the Westminster system’. However, there is much work to do before the Hluttaw members can hold the government to account, particularly on an issue as serious as the military’s conduct in Rakhine. We are reviewing the performance of our current parliamentary support programmes. If they only show small achievements, then our preference would be to redesign these rather than disengage from parliamentary support altogether.

With this context in mind, DFID’s Programme for Democratic Change is reviewed annually to ensure its core components are delivering results. The next annual review will be published at the end of July 2018. It will include specific reference to milestones and achievements over the past year. If performance is not sufficient then the programme can be suspended or adapted.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) project working with the Burmese Parliament forms one element of the Programme for Democratic Change. The WFD component of the project is currently undergoing a mid-term review, due for completion by August 2018.

Since events in Rakhine, we have already worked closely with the WFD Board and agreed three shifts to our Parliamentary support. These are to:

- Work with parliament so that it is able to **react more effectively to internal conflicts**. This will include a specific focus on Rakhine state, including implementation of the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission. The work will be led by a group of independent international experts.
- Strengthen **engagement between the Parliament and the public**. This will include facilitating policy forums and engagement with multiple stakeholders (including Rohingya representatives and CSOs) with a wide range of policy priorities.

- Work for greater **parliamentary responsiveness to international parliamentary bodies** such as the IPU and Asian Parliamentary Assembly, and others that have all adopted Resolutions on the Rohingya.

Activities have been carefully targeted to underpin our approach to democratic transition by: enabling effective parliamentary scrutiny and enhancing parliamentary autonomy from government; driving forward an evidence-based approach to policymaking; and, enhancing MP and parliamentary staff exposure to international democratic ideals and best practice.

To date, UK support to the Burmese Parliament has established a research centre of international standard, established a learning centre for MP capacity building, improved committee functioning, developed legislative scrutiny processes for the first time in the country's history, and supported English-language training for 240 MPs and 128 Parliamentary staff.

The IDC's 2014 report on Democracy and Development in Burma recommended DFID engage in parliamentary strengthening work in both Burma and elsewhere, recognising that any potential change would be incremental, challenging and for the long-term. The 2015 General Elections in Burma – which DFID supported – was an important milestone, but events in the following years illustrate that consolidation of an inclusive political system is far from assured.

DFID's support for parliamentary strengthening has adapted and will continue to adapt to this changing context, targeting strategic points of engagement in support of the democratic transition.

Balance of spending in Burma

- (12) There is a difference between ending support to the government and ending engagement with it, and ending support to the government does not meet not supporting reform minded people via other means which we discuss in the next section on civil society.

Taken with

- (13) The UK is providing advice to government departments which although not classified as ‘direct aid to government’ it is British taxpayers’ money being used to engage with the Burmese government which DFID itself admits is significantly influenced by the military. However, as the Minister says to disengage is to lose any influence over the government. ***We ask DFID to re-evaluate its balance of spending between economic development, human development and on meeting urgent humanitarian needs.*** (Paragraph 80)

DFID response – Agree

As noted above, DFID is already making four shifts in its overall portfolio to focus on inclusion, programming in ethnic and conflict affected areas, putting displaced people and refugees at the centre of our programme, and driving governance and economic reforms. This allows us to address immediate needs, while supporting the long-term objectives of peace, inclusive democracy and an open and fairer economy.

The four shifts have been integrated within individual programmes in each sector and across the DFID Burma portfolio. Will continue to review and adapt programming across sectors to deliver against the four shifts and our long-term goals. For example, a large proportion of existing work classified as ‘economic development’ supports livelihoods, nutrition, safer (internal) migration and economic opportunities for poor people at a community level. This already includes work in Rakhine State and other conflict affected areas, and we will increase this focus. Other economic development programming will focus more on bringing investment, jobs and growth to ethnic and conflict affected areas and communities, and on reforms that can reduce the influence of elites in the economy.

Building better links across our programmes will help DFID Burma manage the risks and challenges of delivery, by drawing on the expertise and experience of different instruments and implementing partners to ensure we can deliver the new approach. DFID Burma will facilitate cross-office learning on the four shifts and concentrate the impact of our investments, including by bringing programmes together in the same area.

DFID Burma has maintained its humanitarian funding and increased the degree to which development programming supports displaced people and those living in conflict affected areas. This approach is important to building opportunities beyond meeting immediate humanitarian needs. We stand ready to do more to meet humanitarian needs in Northern Rakhine if and when access and conditions are in place that allows such support to be provided in concordance with humanitarian principles. We welcome the recent announcement that UNDP/UNHCR and the Government of Burma have signed an MOU to work in Rakhine State. Humanitarian access to Northern Rakhine State must be an important first step in demonstrating commitment to implementation.

The Rohingya refugees

- (14) “We stand by our two previous reports and the conclusions and recommendations we set out there. Alongside many other members of both Houses, we are increasingly horrified as more and more evidence and testimony emerges about the violent expulsion of the Rohingya by Burmese military forces. In addition to these traumatic and horrific experiences, the Rohingya’s now face a fraught and fragile foothold in Bangladesh during the monsoon season. The international community must work together with the Governments of Bangladesh and Burma to address these immediate risks, while also addressing the longer-term future of the Rohingya.” (Paragraph 101)

Taken with

- (15) *The Bangladesh Prime Minister, government, other services, and the people and authorities of Cox’s Bazar, must be thanked and commended for the way sanctuary was provided to the Rohingya.*(Paragraph 104)

Taken with

- (16) *“While in Bangladesh (in March), we heard grave and convincing concerns from many quarters that a substantial proportion of the Rohingya refugees’ accommodation (and services) was extremely vulnerable to the heavy rainfall that the imminent monsoon season would bring. Without decisions and action being taken very quickly to enable relocation to begin -- and to facilitate other mitigations -- people were going to die.”* (Paragraph 104)

Conclusion

- (17) ***“The threat of monsoon or cyclone only reinforces the need to persuade the Bangladesh government to seize the nettle and start laying the foundations for a plan to provide for the longer term, including registration.”*** (Paragraph 104)

DFID response – Agree

We agree that the Government of Bangladesh should be commended for providing sanctuary for the Rohingya refugees, laying the foundations for a plan to provide for the longer term needs of the Rohingya and the host community, including ongoing efforts to register the refugees. We continue to work with the Government of Bangladesh and our partners to ensure both strong co-ordination around monsoon risk mitigation and that refugees receive the humanitarian assistance they need. This includes preparation of land for relocation of as many people most at risk as possible. In March 2018 work began on an additional land released by the Government of Bangladesh to de-congest the camps and relocate some of the 200,000 refugees identified as most at risk of floods and landslides. As of 10 June, an estimated 31,978 refugees had been relocated to newly developed sites.

Site Development and Management teams, co-funded by DFID, are supporting refugee households at risk of flooding and landslides. There are 14 teams ready to repair damage, and a hotline number for people to report damage repair needs. Repairs focus on bridges,

culverts and access roads to ensure rapid re-establishment of any services disrupted. Existing roads are being patched quickly and new roads are being built, although maintaining access remains a concern.

Population density in the camps remains a serious concern but in the 'stress test' of recent heavy rains, the current infrastructure stood up reasonably well. There are currently enough plastic sheets for every family and enough tie-down shelter kits for everyone. Our assessment is that DFID investment in shelter has been well targeted.

Since February 2018, more than 42,000 households have received upgrade shelter kits; almost 4,000 extremely vulnerable households have received support for material transportation and shelter construction, which has involved more than 10,000 cash-for-work labourers. Since May 2018, more than 31,800 households have received tie-down kits to strengthen their homes against rain and wind.

However, we know that water-logging due to persistent rains, or a cyclone, could make the situation in the camps far more dangerous, and we continue to advocate for and work on preparedness and refugee safety.

The UK will continue to work with the Government of Bangladesh and other stakeholders, including the development banks, to create medium and long-term solutions, supporting Bangladeshi host communities as well as the refugees. Making credible progress on conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return to Burma will take time, and we will continue to support Rohingya refugees and host communities beyond the meeting of immediate humanitarian needs, including through access to education and livelihoods.

Bangladesh

UCEP's programme for disadvantaged youth

- (18) *We acknowledge the principle of seed-funding, showcasing and consequent self-sufficiency but are grateful for the Minister's under-taking further to consider the funding of UCEP's programme for disadvantaged youth skills training. We look forward to a report of his conclusions as part of DFID's reply to this report. (Paragraph 113)*

DFID Bangladesh is in the 17th year of its partnership with UCEP. Current support to UCEP is due to end in 2020. Along with delivering education and skills to disadvantaged children, we are helping UCEP diversify its funding and reduce dependency on DFID funding. From 2008 to 2012 the UK provided 75% of UCEP's total budget; from 2012 to 2015 this was reduced to 50%, and DFID currently provides 39% of the total programme budget.

The following approaches have been developed with UCEP as part of a responsible exit by the UK from the current phase of funding:

- In 2016, DFID helped UCEP develop a 10 year strategy towards long-term sustainable financing. The strategy has nine different approaches to fundraising, including cost recovery models involving benefiting private sector employers.
- Under the current programme DFID funding has been front loaded to allow UCEP time to build a more sustainable funding base, and to reduce the risk of a sudden ending of funds which would put children at risk.
- A midterm review is planned by December 2018 to take stock of progress, and to further develop practical risk mitigation. This review will consider whether the 2020 target date for the ending of direct DFID grant funding remains appropriate.
- DFID has also been actively promoting UCEP's merits and successes with other donor organisations, with some showing serious interest as they migrate their focus to skills development.
- A new DFID education programme to educate the most disadvantaged children is under design. If approved, it will begin in early 2019. This will include a challenge fund to which UCEP will be able to apply on a competitive basis.

Chittagong Hill Tracts

- (19) *We were grateful to the Minister for undertaking to investigate reports of Bangladeshi military violence and consequent unrest in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). We look forward to a response on this point when the Government replies to this report. (Paragraph 123)*

DFID response – Agree

At the 30th Session of the Human Rights Universal Periodic Review on the 14th May 2018, in his closing statement Minister for Human Rights Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon noted the pressures on freedom of expression and assembly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), and called on the Government of Bangladesh to address these issues.

The region has been difficult to access due to HMG security concerns and Government of Bangladesh policy on access. DFID officials were able to visit Rangamati from 20 -23 April 2018 and met CHT representatives, including DFID beneficiaries, NGOs, political leaders and officials.

DFID, FCO and MOD officials attended a roundtable discussion on CHT convened by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights on the 09 May 2018. Officials heard from CHT representatives and NGOs working in the area. Officials were able to explain the UK approach to CHT in the context of our wider political, human rights, and development work in Bangladesh. We committed to continue to raise CHT issues with the Bangladesh Government and in the UN. A further meeting with CHT representatives in Dhaka on 20 June agreed areas of follow up. We have investigated and discussed individual cases with CHT representatives (details cannot be provided in this public document due to concerns for the safety and privacy of the victims).

Despite the 1997 Peace Accord, the CHT can still be a volatile part of the country. The region is highly securitised, with ongoing tension between the military, indigenous groups, ethnic Bengali settlers and between indigenous political factions. Gender based violence is widespread and very few perpetrators ever face justice. There are complicating factors making security and justice more political in CHT than elsewhere in the country. Control over policing is a part of the Accord that has not been implemented. Incidents take on a regional political dimension as the indigenous population see them as failings of an externally imposed justice system. Indigenous peoples' displacement from land continues. Land contestation may drive intimidation and human rights abuses, including sexual violence. Contestation between 'settlers' and indigenous populations adds a political dimension to disputes. There is a grey area between state human rights abuses and criminal acts motivated by purely criminal, commercial or political interests. The lines between these acts are frequently blurred and rarely transparently investigated.

DFID's support to the Women's Active Voice and Empowerment (WAVE) programme in CHT is helping women gain greater prominence and voice in local politics. Women who have taken on representative roles report that they can be influential and women have better outcomes from justice processes as a result of their representation. DFID's Community Legal Services programme (2013–2017), worked in CHT ethnic Bengali, indigenous and mixed communities to address barriers to justice for women. Since 2005, DFID has supported the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) to help the CHT population access services and advocate for rights and entitlements. MJF works with partners across the three hill districts of Banadarban, Khagrachari and Rangamati. A new phase of support to CHT is now underway with local organisations submitting bids.

DFID, the FCO and MOD will continue to raise concerns about human rights through diplomatic channels and we will make sure that DFID programmes are responsive to needs on the ground in CHT. We will also continue to seek access to review programmes and monitor the overall context.

Learning lessons from BRAC

- (20) **Whatever BRAC is doing, or not doing, in the background to reach and surpass its objectives while seeming to steer clear of political interference and the other challenges we have identified above, DFID should take note and put in place a process to capture, and consider, the lessons that can be learned. (Paragraph 138)**

DFID response – Agree

DFID agrees with the IDC on learning from BRAC's ability to deliver at scale in a political environment that is not always conducive to civil society activity and on sharing that knowledge within DFID. DFID has a Strategic Partnership (SPA) with BRAC in Bangladesh, one of the core pillars of which is a knowledge partnership under which we share lessons and learn from each other.

A recent Annual Review of the SPA noted the value of more regular interaction between wider DFID teams and BRAC - through our existing consortia meetings between BRAC and DFID technical leads, and through taking opportunities to share knowledge more widely across DFID (for example, BRAC's founder and Chairperson, Sir Fazle Abed, spoke to DFID staff in the UK and other country offices in June during a visit to London). In the context of the Rohingya crisis, there are potentially lessons to be learned from BRAC and others on how to address the longer-term development support required for both host communities and refugee populations.