HOUSE OF COMMONS

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The Myanmar crisis, HC 203

Tuesday 25 May 2021

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Alicia Kearns; Stewart Malcolm McDonald; Bob Seely; Henry Smith; Royston Smith.

Questions 1-51

Witnesses

I: Dr Sasa, Minister of International Co-operation for National Unity government of Myanmar, Naw K'nyaw Paw, General Secretary at Karen Peace Support Network, and Thinzar Shunlei Yi, Advocacy Co-ordinator at Action Committee for Democracy Development.

II: Tom Andrews, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Mark Farmaner, Director at Burma Campaign UK, and John Sifton, Asia Advocacy Director at Human Rights Watch.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Sasa, Naw K'nyaw Paw and Thinzar Shunlei Yi.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's sitting of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We are pleased to have with us today three citizens of Myanmar who have been very active in defending democracy in their country.

Naw K'nyaw Paw: Good afternoon. Thank you for having me here. I am General Secretary of the KWO and leader of the Karen Peace Support Network—the biggest network of the Karen community in Burma.

I have worked with the KWO for over 20 years. I appreciate the support of the UK Government and national community for the people of Burma. I must say, however, that I am from the conflict zone, and the international community and UK Government have not paid equal attention to the ethnic people. I want the UK Government to pay equal attention to the ethnic people and not just people in cities or the capital and to support human rights for all. I think—

Q2 **Chair:** I am sorry but I shall have to stop you as this was supposed to be an introduction of your name and who you are.

Dr Sasa: I am the Union Minister of the Ministry of International Cooperation and spokesperson of the National Unity Government of Myanmar and Former Myanmar Special Envoy to the United Nations. Thank you for having me.

Thinzar Shunlei Yi: I am Advocacy Co-ordinator at Action Committee for Democracy Development. I work also as a TV host on Under 30 Dialogue for Mizzima TV. I am here to talk about young people.

Q3 **Chair:** Thank you. Minister, what is being done to co-ordinate the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar?

Dr Sasa: It is a pivotal movement in our history. The darkest hour in our history which was heading to the great civil war and genocide. Some 54 million brave people of Myanmar are facing the cruellest military junta.

In the face of this cruel military oppression, we are supporting our brave people who have matched across of nations under the civil disobedience peaceful movement, which is more powerful than the military junta acts of terrorism.

We are seeking and co-ordinating humanitarian aid as more than 3 millions of my people face a great humanitarian catastrophe created by the military junta. We are engaging with the international community on behalf of the people of Myanmar as legitimate representatives of the people, elected by the people and for the people of Myanmar.

We have laid the groundwork for a post-junta Myanmar. We are forming a committee to draft a permanent constitution based on federal democratic principles that leave no one behind regardless of race, culture or ethnicity: we will all be equal under the constitution.

We are now increasing the participation of the National Unity Government and multi-ethnic organisations and leaders and civil society, with political parties and elected Members of Parliament, to eradicate the military dictatorship once and for all and to build a federal democratic union of Myanmar for all.

Chair: May I push you, Minister, and ask how the co-ordination is working? How are you bringing people together—not just what you are attempting to do but exactly how the process is working.

Dr Sasa: We have laid down a clear road map. Road map No.1 is: the total eradication of the military dictatorship. We invite everyone-stakeholders to come together under that umbrella.

The second is complete nullification of the 2008 constitution—created by military generals for military generals—and the replacing or repealing of any constitution, including the 1982 citizenship law. This is very important. We invite all stakeholders to come together to do that.

The third is the building of the federal democratic union of Myanmar for all the people of Myanmar, including our Rohingya brothers and sisters.

The fourth is the emergence of a people's Government. This is very important.

Those four main road maps are the backbone of the Government. We invite all stakeholders and countries to come together under the four pillars of the road map.

Chair: Who is organising that? Is it you, or others?

Dr Sasa: The NUG comprises of ethnic leaders, elected Members of Parliament, political parties and civil society organisations and leaders—all those stakeholders—and, most importantly, ethnic organisations. We are together organising with all main stakeholders in the country.

Chair: Excellent. What support from the international community do you need in order to do more?

Dr Sasa: We need the recognition of the voices of the people of Myanmar. All free and democratic world must uphold the will of the people of Myanmar, who have spoken loud and clear in the 2020 elections. That must be respected, promoted and recognised by the international community.

In doing so, we ask the international community to come together to put more pressure on the military junta and end its nightmare and reign of terror. Myanmar's people have been killed by the military junta. As we

speak, 824 civilians have been killed by the junta. More than 5,000 brave men and women have been arrested and 3 million-plus people will go hungry in the coming months. Half of the 54 million people of Myanmar will live below the poverty line within a year. Half a million people have been displaced.

We need international action now. More delay means more death. More delay means Myanmar is closer to a full-blown civil war that will end in genocide.

We ask for recognition, engagement, acknowledgement and the support of humanitarians and for co-ordinated, targeted and powerful sanctions against the military junta generals.

I would like to make it very clear that international companies paying hundreds of millions of dollars to the military generals is unacceptable. These companies must be stopped, bilaterally or by their home Governments, in giving incomes to the military generals. In a year, $2.3 billion will go into the hands of the military generals unless sanctions are not imposed on companies or state-owned enterprises.

We ask the international community for tougher sanctions and co-ordinated sanctions and to come together to bring not only economic but diplomatic pressure. The people of Myanmar need support in the areas of health, food security, education and shelters. Financial support is greatly needed as Myanmar is quickly becoming a failed state under the military regime.

Chair: Do you, Ms Shunlei, have a view on how the co-ordination of the pro-democracy movement is going? Could the international community do other things to help?

Thinzar Shunlei Yi: I must first make a confession. I have the privilege of internet access and of having a safe place and a language to express myself, and I will be thinking of all the country's fallen heroes.

As for what the international community is doing, I appreciate the exemplary leadership of the UK Government following the coup and their important sanctions on the State Administration Council and on the military junta and their businesses, but I want you and the international community to do more. The question that many young protestors on the ground and the ethnic people fleeing the conflict are asking is what the international community and the UN are doing. They wonder whether you could do more because they feel like they are the only ones who can protect themselves.

Today, two young men sacrificed themselves to destroy a tank. They knew that the tank would kill more people in their villages, so they destroyed it but were killed in doing that. They felt there was no one to help them and sacrificed their lives.

The UK Government should impose more sanctions not only on the leaders of the military junta but on the decision makers in joint ventures with the

military. We want you to enforce sanctions on those individuals—track them down and sanction all businesses related to that.

We need not only targeted sanctions but support plans for businesses that do not work with or are not related to the cronies in the military businesses. Our young people are now looking for alternatives in education, healthcare and business, so when you impose sanctions you need to think of support for them as well.

Q4 **Chair:** Thank you. Naw K'nyaw Paw, how do you see this unity from a Karen perspective? Do you see the same link to a democratic movement, or do you see differences?

Naw K'nyaw Paw: Yes, from our perspective, people all over Burma have protested against the military. My colleague mentioned civil servants and ordinary citizens taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Ethnic groups like the Karen National Union have provided safe shelter to those fleeing the regime and have worked with them to provide support to the CDM—the people's movement in Burma.

We have documented war crimes and crimes against humanity and have sent our reports to the UN human rights body. People throughout Burma have formed a civil defence force and fought against the regime. Ethnic people are fighting the regime and defending their territories. Activist journalists are providing real information from the ground to the outside world.

NUG-CRPH activists have been advocating the policies that the international community should have on the regime, including diplomatic pressure, economic pressure and military pressure to hold the Burmese army accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the genocide of the Rohingya.

Our collective efforts are hurting the regime, but we cannot do this alone and need the UK Government and the international community to support us.

Q5 **Chair:** Fantastic. How can that assistance be better tailored for you? You have a different perspective from many other communities, so how can the assistance be better tailored to the Karen community?

Naw K'nyaw Paw: The Karen people appreciate the humanitarian aid from the British Government to date, but there is an urgent need for increased aid for refugees, IDPs and people from the CDM who are not taking refuge in the Karen area. We would like the UK Government to prioritise cross-border aid through local grassroots organisations to the ethnic areas of Burma, including Karen state, and to put pressure on the Thai Government to stop forcing refugees back to the conflict zone and blocking aid to IDPs.

We need continued support for the ethnic people, who have suffered war crimes and crimes against humanity at the hands of the junta for over 70 years. We need justice and accountability to hold the Burmese regime

accountable for its actions so that atrocities will not again take place in our area.

Q6 **Chair:** Thank you. Ms Shunlei, what should the international community do to support refugees who have fled the violence? You quite rightly spoke of the heroes who are standing up to the dictatorship, and the whole Committee will agree with you in respecting their struggle and offering our moral support. What should we be doing, practically, to support the refugees?

Thinzar Shunlei Yi: We have more refugees in the Karenni state, a small state within the country. Within four days of conflict, more than 50,000 refugees are fleeing to different parts of the country to take refuge.

The Karenni people have opened the camps and many people inside the country are trying to donate money to those communities. They need almost everything because they had to flee the immediate conflict. They have nothing in the camps, so the first thing the international community must do is recognise that this is happening, follow up what is happening on the ground and increase pressure on the junta to stop using airstrikes on these areas, which have killed many civilians—there is no balance of power.

That is the first thing, and the second is humanitarian aid. Instead of giving humanitarian aid through the big NGOs or UN, why don't you support ethnic local groups inside communities? That would be a lot better than using the big NGOs.

We need the right support for those ethnic organisations, but at the same time we need neighbouring countries to give shelter. Activist journalists face the danger of being detained, deported or transferred to the military junta. That is our main concern. Thailand and India need to increase the pressure but at the same time support the neighbouring countries in helping the refugees.

Q7 **Chair:** Minister, given your important role in the National Unity Government, what more could we do to support journalists? We in the UK have seen the protests at the attempted silencing of a Belarusian journalist in recent days. What should we do to support journalists in Myanmar?

Q8 ***Dr Sasa:*** It is very clear that, at the moment, journalists in Myanmar play a crucial and vital role as the voice of the people of Myanmar. When journalists' reporting stops, this democracy movement stops. We need to keep that voice coming. I believe that the UK has the capacity to help journalism in the country, particularly the journalists who are working inside the country with such great financial restrictions and without support. We also need the journalists who have fled the country to be protected. Our journalists must be protected and given safe shelter and asylum if they need it. It is so important that we keep our journalists strong, active and working in this very difficult time. I am afraid that, if we do not support journalism, the democracy movement will gradually die. When the pictures and videos stop coming, when the reporting stops

coming, that may be the end of the movement. It is very important to keep our journalists working in the face of this oppression and repression. They are brave journalists and they deserve support.

Chair: Thank you very much. You are preaching to the choir here. We have already done some work on freedom of the press around the world because we recognise that, without a free media, you can have no democracy and indeed no freedom. We are very interested to hear what can be done. Naw K'nyaw Paw, what would you say from a Karen perspective? Is there a different linguistic element that would suggest we should do something differently? Should we be asking the BBC World Service to help in different ways? What would you recommend?

Naw K'nyaw Paw: As an ethnic group from Burma, we would like to see the UK Government provide direct core support to independent ethnic media agencies such as the Karen Information Center which are the main source of news in ethnic areas. They broadcast in ethnic languages as well as in Burmese and English. At this time they need a lot of support to send out information.

Chair: Fantastic. Royston, you wanted to come in.

Q9 **Royston Smith:** Thank you, Chair, and thanks to our witnesses for giving up their time for us today. Minister Sasa, what pressure should the UK Government be applying to the military to secure the release of political prisoners?

Dr Sasa: It has to be both direct and indirect pressure. Direct pressure means that we believe there is a lot of leverage that the UK Government can still have on some level by engaging with the regional power players such as China, India and other countries. They have the power to do that. It is very important that the UK Government do everything they can to secure the release of political prisoners, including our leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the President, Win Myint. If those political prisoners are not released, there is no prospect of dialogue. You will remember that the ASEAN five points call for dialogue, but we can have no dialogue if they keep prisoners like that. It will not work.

Indirectly, I believe that the UK Government have leveraged the United Nations Security Council and also the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and also co-ordination and mediation between ASEAN, the UN and Geneva. We need the UK to continue its political and international co-ordination support and also its support for accountability. That means that we need the UK Government to continue to lead us in bringing these military generals to justice. Unless we bring those people to justice, there will never be a free Myanmar. We need justice to be served.

Royston Smith: You mentioned the external pressure that the UK Government can bring to bear. What about Russia and China? What could the UK do to line up those countries to help put pressure on the military in Myanmar?

Dr Sasa: China has the power to stop the generals. Let us make no mistake about that. India has the power to stop them. The UK can still

work behind the scenes talking to these big neighbours, so that together they can work out an agreement. At the end of the day, these military generals are no good for China and India. The chaos in Myanmar is not good for our neighbours and not good for Russia. Because of the history that the UK has with Myanmar/Burma, the UK is the only country that can lead from the front in international co-ordination, both politically and economically, with like-minded countries, such as Japan, South Korea and India, which are democratic countries in the region. We hope and believe that the UK Government will continue to work with all these like-minded countries to put more pressure, direct or indirect, on the generals. There is a lot of leverage if it is properly co-ordinated.

Royston Smith: You said that China or India could stop this straight away. Building alliances and consensus with other countries around the world to bring pressure on the military is one way of doing it, but equally, there could be pressure on China or India to end it. How would those two countries bring this crisis to an end?

Dr Sasa: If you look at the weapons that the military generals have, 52% are from China, 10% are from India and another 20% are from Russia. If they said, "We are not giving you any more weapons unless you stop killing the people of Myanmar", the killing and violence would stop that day. There must be a way in which the international community can build the pressures, under the leadership of the UK Government and Parliament, who know the people of Myanmar better than any country in the world because of our historical connections, they can do that. There are sanctions. There are bank accounts owned by the Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank. There are many banks doing business outside. If they stop international companies giving money to the military generals, their revenue and cash flow would be cut off and no money would go to the generals, so no money would go to China to buy weapons. It is very simple. The UK has the leverage to lead on that front.

Naw K'nyaw Paw: I believe that neither China, Russia nor India are happy with the current instability in Burma because if it worsens it will have a negative impact on their business investments. If China and Russia cannot show support for, or block, international community actions on Burma, at least they could be silent. They may not reproach the regime publicly, but if we could persuade them not to veto any resolutions and instead to be silent, we could go with that. They are not happy with the instability in Burma because it is hurting their business there.

Thinzar Shunlei Yi: You can influence Russia and China only after you have done everything you can as a Government. We want you to make the maximum effort to stop what is happening, such as tabling a resolution on an arms embargo and pressuring governments that are still co-operating with the military. There are 12 countries still working with the military. You can influence Russia and China only after you have done everything you can.

Q10 **Alicia Kearns:** Mingalaba to the witnesses. I begin by giving my sympathy to all the people of Myanmar for the violence we have seen. It

is such a beautiful country with such a warm and welcoming people. I have been very lucky to visit in the past and I hope to do so again when the violence has receded. My first question is about the 20 or more ethnic groups across the country. What is the likelihood, if the Tatmadaw was overthrown, that they would come together in support of democracy rather than wanting to splinter the country into their own fiefdoms or areas of control?

Dr Sasa: Thank you for the question. All the ethnic people in the country want only one thing: a federal democratic political system. When we got independence from Britain, in 1947 an agreement was signed by ethnic leaders with the independence leader, General Aung San. But our wishes of federal democracy were assassinated again and again by these same military institutions. What is the root cause of this problem? It is between a federal democratic political system that promised self-determination and a military dictatorship political system.

Once we defeat this military dictatorship, there will be a new Myanmar where the people of Myanmar will live under a federal democratic political system in which the rights of all will be respected, protected and promoted regardless of ethnicity or religious culture. That is what we look for in the future. What I can tell you is that behind the scenes, as a member of the Government of Myanmar, elected by the people of Myanmar, I spend a lot of time talking to all the ethnic leaders. We have been working very hard, including with our brother and sister Rohingya community leaders.

We are all looking to that future where we eradicate the military dictatorship and build a federal democratic union of Myanmar for everyone. I believe that this is the best and only opportunity for over 72 years to build a federal democratic union of Myanmar. If we lose this chance, it will not come again. If the military generals win, we might have to wait for another 72 years.

Alicia Kearns: That is very helpful. There is no question that the average person in Myanmar would want to support that, but my concern is that often, once the common enemy—the military—is overthrown, the disparate armed groups across the country find it difficult to relinquish control. Are you confident that there are sufficient relationships between the different armed groups and the government of unity that we would not see such splintering take place and the armed groups refusing to lay down their weapons in the future?

Dr Sasa: I can promise you that we are all united in our common goal and dream. The dream of the people of Myanmar is a federal democracy and freedom. It is justice and peace. That is what everyone wants, regardless of who we are. We are not united by guns, bullets, religion, culture or language. I can tell you that the greatest strength of Myanmar is our unity in diversity. Our Government is called the National Unity Government. This is the first time in the history of Myanmar that we have a National Unity Government. That is why this Government deserves not just the support of the international community but to be embraced and recognised. This is the only and best opportunity to build our future.

Alicia Kearns: What role do you see for Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar's future once the military junta is, hopefully, overthrown?

Dr Sasa: The party itself is a democratic party, so whether it is Aung San Suu Kyi, or me, or any one of the 54 million people of Myanmar, regardless of who we are, our background, our religion, or our ethnicity, we all want freedom, justice, peace and prosperity. That is our common value and goal. I am sure that she wants that to happen. She would be the happiest person in the world if Myanmar was freed from these murdering military generals.

Alicia Kearns: In terms of the UK Government's role, what can we do to empower civil society groups that are rising up and trying to do good within their communities to protect them and prevent mass atrocities? What can we do for them at grass roots?

Dr Sasa: My colleagues would be best placed to answer that because they have been working in civil society for many years.

Naw K'nyaw Paw: May I say something about the ethnic arm of our organisation? Ethnic groups come together when their voices are heard, they are respected and they are treated equally. The problem is that the Burmese military regime are the ones who create ethnic conflicts in order to divide and rule. They make peace with one group and attack others, or they favour one ethnic group and exclude others. What is happening in Burma is the fault of the military, which divides and rules and does not include everyone. The ethnic arm of our organisation wants an inclusive political space where we can sort out our issues and where we will all be treated equally and respected and have our voices heard. If they are given that space, people will come together and will not fight each other. As Dr Sasa said, we all want a federal union in the future in which ethnic diversity is respected and we are given equal opportunities.

As for civil society, I think that it has grown up so much in relation to the Thai-Burma border over the past 20 years. Because of the support we get from international communities, we are able to build up our capacities and we can document war crimes against humanity and human rights violations. We can lead ourselves and provide services directly to our communities. We have already built that capacity and we need resources to continue and strengthen our existing systems. We would like the international community to support us directly. From a civil society perspective, that is what we need from the Government.

Thinzar Shunlei Yi: I agree with my colleagues and I also want to comment on the ethnic issue. As the younger generation, we are so worried about this. Clearly, as the Minister said, we have a common goal to be a democratic nation, but the process of getting there is so important. We need checks and balances in the current situation. It is not that we are in a time of revolution and we can let the NUG or NLD do whatever they want. We are making sure, as a civil society organisation, that there are checks and balances on what the NUG is doing. The UK Government and the international community can help to support civil society with the

necessary financial and technical resources. We have never been in this situation before and we need institutional support.

So, with regard to civil society, I would like to highlight the need for support for rights-based civil societies at grass-roots level. Many civil society organisations have done charity work and provided humanitarian aid over the past few years. We need rights-based civil society organisations more than before. They are working everywhere and are interested in building their capacity and in performing rights-based actions. We are worried about human rights principles. We need a grassroots movement to respect human rights and to protect and to defend the rights of the other. That is a very basic thing that will be sustainable in the longer run as well.

Q11 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Thanks to our guests this afternoon. It has been extremely moving to listen to each of you.

May I ask specifically about the UK's response and start with you, Minister Sasa? What would you like to see the UK Government doing in institutions such as the United Nations? For example, what specific resolutions would you like to see the UK Government bring forward?

Dr Sasa: Thank you for your question. We believe that the UK is the best country in the world to help us when it comes to the crisis in Myanmar. We really appreciate its leadership in the G7 and in supporting the UNSC, UN mechanism on IIMM that collects evidence of human rights abuses. We believe that there is a lot more that the UK can lead on, particularly with like-minded countries at the UN. There need to be votes at the UN Security Council as resolutions are important when it comes to imposing an international arms embargo and a no-fly zone. We have asked R2P for protecting the people of Myanmar whose protectors have now become their attackers. That is the basis of the conflict.

We also believe that the UK can lead the international community to come together to impose co-ordinated, targeted and tougher sanctions. In the coming months, we do not think that the more than 400 thousand strong men with guns who back up the military generals will go away soon. That means the maximum pressure on them must remain and it will have to become tougher and tougher. It is only by doing that will helped to end the nightmare of this military junta's reign of terror. This will not end soon without strong action by the international community against the military generals. The more it is prolonged, the more people will die and the more people will be displaced and suffer. It is very simple.

I would like to add to my colleague's point about civil society organisations. They are saving people's lives by reporting on the ground, carrying out amazing humanitarian work and organising protests. We will not succeed if you do not support such grassroots organisations. They are vitally important. I hope that the international community and the UN will directly help grassroots civil society and community-based organisations and local NGOs.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I was going to ask specifically about this but can I just check whether you support a no-fly zone?

Dr Sasa: We need it. The military generals have a lot of fighter jets that are flying all over Karen state, Kachin state and Chin state. They have lots of helicopter gunships that they bought from Russia and from China and they are bombing civilians. That is utterly unacceptable. It has to stop.

As well as a no-fly zone, it is high time that the international community, including the UK leadership, put sanctions on jet fuel. We know that only one company keeps supplying the fuel for the fighter jets that the military are using against the people of Myanmar. I came from Chin state and the small township of Mindat of 40,000 people where seven helicopter gunships bombed the homes of civilians and killed many people. Only yesterday a church was bombed in Kayah state and four people, including children and women, were killed. Battlefield weapons that were bought from Russia and China were used to attack civilians and homes so people ran to the church. As Christians, we go to the church to pray, but why are battlefield weapons bought from Russia and China were to bomb a church?

The money that the military use to buy the weapons is given to them by companies such as Total, Chevron, Posco and PTTEP. It is very simple. The world must not turn a blind eye anymore. We must get to the bottom of who is giving the money to the generals. If there is civil war and genocide, all the companies and neighbours that are giving money and weapons to the military generals must be held accountable by the international community. They have contributed to genocide and great crimes against humanity. They should not be free from persecution and they should not be allowed to run away from the fact that they have given money and weapons to military generals who they know have killed 800-plus civilians. I say again and again that this is very clear. That is very is important and it is why a no-fly zone is so important.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I quite agree with you, Minister. You said that one company is supplying the jet fuel—did I understand you correctly?

Dr Sasa: We know that Puma is the only company in the country that is supplying jet fuel to the military's jets. The easiest way to prevent the supply to military jets is to sanction the Puma company and prevent it from operating in Myanmar and to stop the military generals transferring money from abroad. There would be no more transition agreement. We are not asking for a stop on all activities, but for the time being we are asking that the money that belongs to the people of Myanmar is not given to the military generals. That is an insult. It is not justifiable that the wealth of the people of Myanmar derived from our gas, our oil and our timber is used to kill the people of Myanmar. That is unacceptable. It is sinful and immoral and we should stop it. We should keep the money in the country and when the Federal Democratic Union comes to power, that will be the time to release the money to the people in Myanmar. It is time that all companies stopped giving money to the military generals.

Naw K'nyaw Paw: We are for a no-fly zone as that would greatly help the people who are suffering. Since the military coup in Burma, in my area of Karen state the regime has carried out multiple air attacks that have killed at least 16 people, injured 20 and displaced more than 70,000 people. Not enough attention has been given to the ethnic groups. Even though the military continues to attack, displace and kill people, we have not seen an international response. If the bombing had been taking place in Rangoon or Naypyitaw, we are sure that the international community would have paid attention. The no-fly zone is really important for the ethnic people—and not just the Karen, but the Chin, the Kachin and the Kayan people—because the Burmese army is using air attacks in ethnic areas.

Q12 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Can I ask you to tell the Committee why you think the international community is not paying attention to the places that you have just mentioned? Why do you believe that is?

Naw K'nyaw Paw: The Karen have been suffering at the hands of the Burmese army for over 70 years. When events took place in the towns and cities, such as the saffron revolution and the 1988 uprising, sanctions were imposed on the military regime but nothing happened in the ethnic areas. The international community has not responded or paid it enough attention. It is as though the life of people in the cities is more important. We really want the international community, including the UK Government, to pay equal attention to ethnic suffering.

Q13 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Ms Shunlei, do you want to add anything?

Thinzar Shunlei Yi: I agree with my colleague. With regard to the UK supporting the UN, the first thing I have been asking for is for a resolution to be tabled on the Global Arms Embargo. I think it is very important for all of us to cut the military's Arms. The second thing is to cut their cash. Sanctions is the least that you can do to cut the military's cash. Irrespective of what Governments are or are not doing, people inside the country are already sanctioning military businesses. The movement is strong and support is growing. Even though we have no options, we are sanctioning military businesses, so why is the international community failing to do that?

The third thing is to end the culture of impunity in the country. That has been the case for a long time and I do not want to see future generations suffer from this. To end that, you could join the ICJ case brought by The Gambia. Some countries have already joined it and the UK Government could easily do so. We could also require the UN to refer the case of Myanmar to the ICC to warn the military that they will be held accountable for their crimes.

Q14 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Minister, you have referred to India and China, but what other countries are active inside Myanmar either in support of or against the regime?

Dr Sasa: It is very difficult to answer that from afar, but history shows that the military generals have survived for at least the past 52 years. The

world should not just watch, you know, witnessing these generals surviving in power for the past 52 years. It is too long.

Chair: The generals are surviving, but we know that some businesses are connected to Chinese businesses and that some of the weapons come from Russia, for example. What other countries are connected to the generals?

Dr Sasa: Mainly China, as you say. Some 53% of the weapons come from China, and the whole world knows about that, and 23% come from Russia, and the whole world knows about that. Some 7% or 8% come from India, and other countries make the number up to 100%. It is clear. This is a very difficult time and it will continue to be so for the future leaders of the country.

There is room for the UK to talk to India, Japan and South Korea to co-ordinate their approach. That is very important. We know that Ukraine and other countries in Europe provide weapons so there has to be an international arms embargo. Once that happens, the killing will stop. We are not asking for there to be an embargo for ever, but just for the time being.

Some people say to me, "Dr Sasa, sanctions will hurt the people and not the military generals". Okay, that is an argument, but the people of Myanmar have said "Enough is enough". The hardships that sanctions will bring to the people is for the short term. I do not want my children and grandchildren to live under this murdering regime, so it is very simple. The people of Myanmar have imposed sanctions themselves. They refuse to work for the military. That is why they are striking; half a million people are now on strike. They do not want to work for the military Government and they refuse to buy any product—food or anything—that comes from a military business. The people of Myanmar are already using sanctions, so it is high time that the international community opened its eyes and came together to help the cause of the people of Myanmar. That includes China, because chaos in Myanmar is bad for China. It is bad for Thailand and bad for India. Instability is Myanmar is bad for everyone. China will benefit from stability and peace in Myanmar. That is what we are saying again and again.

Under the leadership of the UK, the international co-ordination team can come together and approach India and Thailand to open their borders so that humanitarian aid to the needy can go through peacefully. If not, the borders will be flooded with human traffickers, drug traffickers and refugees. That is the path that we are talking about and it is not good for China, Thailand or India. They have the power to stop it, so engage with and support and acknowledge the National Unity Government of Myanmar—that's us—to end the military regime once and for all. The end of this military regime is good for India, good for China and good for everyone.

Q15 **Chair:** Thank you very much. You also touched on refugees in Thailand and surrounding areas. Do you know what help leaders from the

Myanmar community would need to support those refugees?

Dr Sasa: It is very simple: food, medicine, shelters and finance. They are basic things, but the border has to be open for basic aid. Inside the country, the military generals have blocked everything and they have punished everyone who supports the people of Myanmar. For the generals, it is a crime to support your fellow citizens. They block everything, so the borders of Thailand and India should be open for humanitarian access to all those most in need. The numbers of the displaced and of refugees are growing. The number of people at risk is growing and those people must be supported. Otherwise there will be an unbelievably huge humanitarian catastrophe created by the military coup. Imagine more than 3 million people in Myanmar going hungry in the coming months. That is the assessment of the World Food Programme and it has been published. The UNDP has assessed that, of the 54 million people of Myanmar, more than half the population—35 million—will be living below the poverty line within the year. That will kill so many people; not only the weapons will kill them.

We need a great deal of humanitarian support and that is why we are asking the international community to act quickly. That also involves covid-19 vaccinations, because the number of infections in the region is on the rise. Everyone knows that many people have died of covid-19 in India and this region needs international attention.

Chair: Thank you very much to our three witnesses. Thank you, Minister, for your clarity, compassion and perspective. I am extremely grateful. Thank you very much, Ms Shunlei, for your advocacy. On behalf of the whole Committee may I say, through you, to the people you represent that we thank you for your courage? We certainly admire enormously your fight for democracy and you have our full support.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tom Andrews, Mark Farmaner and John Sifton.

Q16 **Chair:** We move straight on to the second panel of witnesses and I ask for the same brief introduction. Will you please give your name and then two or three words that you would like to describe you, as if you were being referred to in a newspaper? In no particular order, I ask Mr Andrews to start

Tom Andrews: Thank you, Chair. My name is Tom Andrews. I am the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. Thank you for holding this hearing, which in itself makes a great statement. I am honoured and pleased to be here.

Mark Farmaner: I am Mark Farmaner, director at Burma Campaign UK. We work for human rights, democracy and development in Burma.

John Sifton: My name is John Sifton. I am the Asia Advocacy Director at Human Rights Watch, which has conducted research and advocacy on Myanmar for a few decades now.

Q17 **Chair:** Thank you very much to all of you. May I start by asking how you would describe the UK's action on Myanmar through the multilateral system? Has it worked? Mr Andrews, would you start us off?

Tom Andrews: The UK is playing a very important role, both formally within the United Nations system and outside that system. I hope that the UK will continue to play that important role. Within the UN system, the UK is of course the penholder on the Security Council when it comes to Myanmar, and it is a very active Government member of the Human Rights Council and in the General Assembly. These are important roles, and the General Assembly is working on a resolution right now with respect to Myanmar.

Even outside the formal mechanisms of the United Nations, the UK has a role, for example, as a leader in the G7. When it convened last May, the G7 made a very clear statement that committed it to an arms embargo. The upcoming summit in June, which will be presided over by the UK, is another important opportunity for the UK to play a leadership role. Finally, as a dialogue partner with ASEAN, the UK plays and can continue to play an important role in engaging not just publicly but privately with ASEAN which arguably has the most at stake with what is going on in Myanmar. In all those ways, the UK plays a very important role and is in a pivotal position to do more.

Q18 **Chair:** Perhaps I could turn to you, Mr Sifton, for an alternative perspective.

John Sifton: I have to agree that the United Kingdom Government are doing a lot on Burma. The question for us today is whether they could do more. As well as the things that Mr Andrews has just listed, I would add that one of the key issues that Governments are trying to figure out—not just the UK Government, but other like-minded Governments—is how to intensify economic measures to get the Burmese military's attention. Only then can we hope for any kind of behavioural change. Yes, sanctions have been imposed by the UK Government, EU Governments, the US Government and others, but many of those sanctions have been on entities that do not have business operations outside Myanmar, or if they do, they are minimal. If we really want to inflict some economic pain on the Myanmar military, we have to look at sanctions that target gettable assets and revenues in US, UK and euro-denominated accounts and in banks that are outside Myanmar. That is the type of sanction that up until now has not got enough attention.

This morning Human Rights Watch issued new research on the massive payments on natural gas revenues that flow from the Thai state-owned enterprise, PTT, directly to the Myanmar Government and the SAC. Other revenues from the purchases of timber, gemstones, jade and other things go into foreign accounts that the Myanmar military hold in other

jurisdictions. Initially, you may think that the UK and the EU might not be able to get to those other jurisdictions, such as Singapore and Thailand, but any bank that does business in the UK in pounds will have corresponding accounts in London, so UK sanctions would very much have an impact on banks even if they are not UK banks. There is a lot to talk about and a lot that can be done to intensify the economic pain on the Burmese military. The question is whether the US, the UK and others can get together to make that happen. I agree that the G7 provides an opportunity for that to be discussed.

Q19 **Chair:** Mr Farmaner, how do you see things?

Mark Farmaner: What we saw is what we have seen with a lot of countries. The default response of the British Government to a crisis in any country around the world is to mobilise international condemnation through the United Nations and other international bodies and to impose visa bans and asset freezes. Such a general response was perhaps not the best prioritisation of what seemed to be scarce capacity for action from the British Government. The military would have been expecting international condemnation; they are soldiers, not diplomats, and that is water off a duck's back to them. They would have been expecting visa bans, because the only action that the British Government took in response to the genocide of the Rohingya was a visa ban and a holiday ban. It is not an effective response. Although diplomatic statements and condemnation are important, they are not necessarily the most effective immediate response. It was more than two months before we started sanctioning the economic interests of the members of the military and imposed the sort of sanctions that would start to cause them some pain. We are still a long way from imposing the whole range of sanctions that we could impose and that people in Burma are calling for to tighten the economic noose on the military.

Q20 **Chair:** Do you see Britain's status as an ASEAN dialogue partner changing any of this? Will it improve our ability to mediate effectively? How do you see that, Mr Andrews?

Tom Andrews: It has great potential. As I said before, no one has a greater stake in what is going on in Myanmar than ASEAN. A failed state in the middle of ASEAN would be a significant problem for all of Myanmar's neighbours. That is not to mention the refugee crisis that is inevitable if the trajectory continues in the way that it is now. We know that there was a summit several weeks ago and we are waiting to see the steps that will be needed following that summit, including the appointment of a special envoy. We are waiting to see what happens and when that happens.

The UK can play an important role in acting as a mover for as strong and as co-ordinated action by ASEAN as possible. ASEAN is in an incredibly important position and moving it publicly and privately in the direction of maximum pressure on the junta is in everyone's interest. The UK can play an important role in advocating that.

John Sifton: It is important to recognise that the individual members of ASEAN are an important component of dealing with the Burmese military down the line, but we do need to enter a few caveats about ASEAN as an entity. Contrary to some views, it is not a bloc. ASEAN members sometimes reach a supposed consensus on matters, but then split when the matter is put to the United Nations General Assembly or Human Rights Council. It is not a bloc in the sense that we use the term about bodies such as the European Union. It is important to recognise that when we think of why ASEAN would be useful. We need to recognise that it is not like the European Union and has very little leverage as an entity. It has leverage as a collection of individual states, because each of them has leverage. I just mentioned the Thai stated-owned enterprise that is basically the single largest source of the Tatmadaw's foreign currency reserves. There is leverage right there, so Thailand has leverage, as has Vietnam. They all have leverage in their own ways.

When it comes to the time for ASEAN to be useful, the role that it could best play is that of intermediary to deliver the message on behalf of like-minded Governments that are imposing sanctions to say, "Look. The US, the UK and others have imposed these major sanctions and banks in Singapore and Thailand, which are part of ASEAN, have been blocked from giving you your money in US dollars. If you want to get that money unlocked and look for a way out of this, we have to start talking." It can play a role as an intermediary, but ASEAN cannot in and of itself as a bloc act as a power that can effect change. It is a two-part process: leverage created by the international community at large—the G7 members are a big part of that—with the co-operation of ASEAN, and then ASEAN then serving as an intermediary.

Chair: Do you want to come in, Mr Farmaner. You don't have to.

Mark Farmaner: No. I think Tom and John have said it all.

Q21 **Chair:** Thank you. Mr Andrews, what more can the UK do through its specific role as the UN's penholder? You have already mentioned that, but does it or could it allow us to exert more diplomatic pressure or indeed legal pressure than we currently exert? Does it link to ICJ jurisdiction or other aspects?

Tom Andrews: I think so. More could be done. Obviously it would be ideal if the Security Council had a resolution before it that established co-ordinated sanctions, an arms embargo and reference to the International Criminal Court. That is the ideal; that is what we would like to be moving towards. The extent to which the UK is the penholder and can help to move the Security Council in that direction is all to the good, but no one expects that to happen immediately, so the question is what we do then. Do we just hold off and not put a resolution before the Security Council, for fear that if we did its defeat or a veto would be a setback? The other argument is that inaction and not even considering a resolution for action at the Security Council is in and of itself a setback. At least putting one forward would allow everyone to stand up and be counted, and if there is a veto, there is a provision in the UN system that would then allow for an

emergency special session to be established in the General Assembly to confer and engage on issues of great importance to national security, such as this.

Alternatively, if co-ordinated action cannot happen within the Security Council, it is important that countries like the UK co-ordinate their actions—economic sanctions primarily, and the strongest set of economic sanctions possible. To co-ordinate with all other like-minded countries, such as the United States, Canada and others, so that the collective weight of those sanctions has the strongest possible impact on the regime. That will take leadership and will need an active role outside the formal mechanism. But the formal mechanism will benefit from the fact that countries such as the UK and the US are willing to work together in a co-ordinated fashion to exert maximum pressure on the regime.

Q22 **Chair:** Do you think that a no-fly zone would be of any use?

Tom Andrews: We have many more options that need to be engaged before we go to any form of military action. I once served in the US Congress and was a member of the Armed Services Committee. I can assure you that I know from experience that the law of unintended consequences is never more in force than in any kind of military action. A no-fly zone would be considered an act of war. There is a variety of no-fly zone options of engagement, all of them fraught with danger. I personally believe that the strongest thing we could be doing now is every course of action possible, including tough co-ordinated and focused sanctions and an arms embargo, in order to eliminate the assets and revenue that the junta needs to supply the military. This is one of the largest militaries in the world and their only enemies are within the country. The junta boasts about how strong and powerful it is. It may be a source of strength in its eyes, but it is also a source of vulnerability, because you have to supply, feed and equip those troops. All that requires revenue, and we have yet to take the steps necessary to cut off that revenue and stop the machinery continuing its onslaught of terror against the people.

Q23 **Chair:** Mr Sifton, what is your view on how we can go further, perhaps through the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly?

John Sifton: Before getting to the UN, I would reinforce this point about assets and focus in particular on a facet of this discussion that does not get enough attention. Many times when we talk about sanctions we are talking about a list of designated entities with which you cannot do business if you are under the jurisdiction in question. That is usually what sanctions are about, but in the case of Burma, it is more. It is about identifying the financial institutions—the banks—that receive or hold revenues on behalf of the sanctioned entities and entities that are controlled by sanctioned entities. There are dozens of bank accounts all over the world—mostly in Asia—that hold the Burmese junta's money. Those accounts are with banks that have corresponding accounts to resolve their foreign currency transactions in London, France and New York. Because of that, those banks have to do whatever those financial authorities say.

The British and Singaporean financial authorities, as well as the US Treasury, have the capacity to tell these banks to hold money, even if it is not in their own currency. The simple fact is that most of the money for the biggest transactions is in US dollars, but British banks can still instruct their corresponding accounts not to do business with this entity or they will be unable to resolve their British pound accounts. There is so much leverage that can be brought to bear and I really think that, as Human Rights Watch have been saying for a while now, banks are the way to executing this. British and American officials meeting in the lead-up to the G7 can talk about how to execute that, and make an announcement in Cornwall that they are taking new action that will get to these revenues.

I second what Mr Andrews said. The next step for the UK is to push through a UNGA resolution or, if that does not work, go back to the UN Security Council and say, "Enough is enough; we are going to bring a resolution and start talking about an arms embargo." The amount of opposition to an arms embargo by China is overstated. They have never come out forcefully against an arms embargo. They have come out against other things, but not that. There are other members that the UK Government sometimes assumes would be against it—Vietnam, for example—which could be convinced to vote for a resolution that at least mentions the possibility of an arms embargo. That is how these things start in other countries—you start with a threat and later execute. I very much believe that Boris Johnson, Joe Biden and the rest of the G7 could reach a common position on returning to the Security Council with their fellow permanent representative from France and make an announcement at the G7—or in Brussels when they are all meeting for NATO. The occasion of the Heads of State coming together is a focus for us and we think it is the time for Prime Minister Johnson to reach a common understanding on this with other Heads of State.

Q24 **Chair:** Mr Farmaner, may I push you a little on the aspects where you think we could do more? You are based in the UK. What more could the UK do, either through the UN, or directly through the financial system that Mr Sifton mentioned?

Mark Farmaner: The organisations with which we work in the country, and the panel we heard from today, are clear on three main priorities—maximising economic pressure on the military; cutting off their supply of arms; and ending impunity, thereby pushing on justice and accountability. Those are the three areas in which the international community, including the British Government, need to move. The British Government still has a huge amount to do in this area. We are now seeing, quite some time after the coup, the British Government finally starting a process of identifying enterprises, companies and economic assets of the military and sanctioning those. We need to expand that massively and speed it up. They are sharing the packages they have developed on these entities with other Governments and trying to co-ordinate, which is very positive.

On an arms embargo, what we and many parliamentarians have been pushing for, faced with a potential veto of a UN Security Council resolution, is to build a coalition of countries around the world who will

unilaterally impose their own arms embargoes and then go back to the Security Council with a lot more countries behind us to put pressure on China, Russia and other countries that might be opposed to an embargo. We have seen the British Government using the G7 Foreign Ministers meeting to start to adopt and push that policy. They are listening to what campaigners and Parliament are saying. They succeeded in getting Japan to impose an arms embargo, which was a real coup because they have been close to the military and are still working with the military in other ways.

Russia and China are in almost a comfort zone at the moment. Theirs is a traditional role in which they portray everything as Western countries bullying a developing nation and they being the defenders. We need to turn the tables on them by building a coalition, by getting Asian, African and South American countries to join us in imposing arms embargoes. Forty-three countries have imposed arms embargoes so far, and the two new countries that have imposed arms embargoes since the coup are Japan and South Korea, which is not what one would expect. There is potential for the British Government to lead here and try to get more countries on board a coalition of countries imposing arms embargoes, and then taking that coalition back to the UN Security Council.

The third and important issue is justice and accountability. I have been at Burma Campaign UK for more than 20 years and this entire time people have been talking about the importance of ending impunity—of ensuring justice and accountability for the military's crimes. No significant action has been taken on that. Over and over again during those 20 years we have approached Foreign Office Ministers and officials asking them to take action on justice and accountability, and there is always a reason why now is not the right time, or why we have to wait and see how this or that process works out.

We have an endless cycle of atrocities and impunity—against the Karen, then the Shan, then the Chin, then the Rakhine, then the Rohingya—and no action is ever taken. The only real game in town now where the military face being held to account for their crimes is at the International Criminal Court—and it is The Gambia, not the British Government, that led on that. The Gambia took the military of Myanmar to the ICC on the genocide case. The British Government is watching from the sidelines saying, "We support you," but for a year and a half they have refused to join. Dominic Raab will not even say that he supports in principle referring Burma to the International Criminal Court. We know that it is not achievable through a resolution at the moment, but he should at least be able to say that he supports it in principle.

While we have a situation where even the British Government, who are supposed to be leading on these issues, will not say that they support a referral, it enhances that sense of impunity that the military have—that they can keep getting away with the crimes. Our response to genocide was banning a handful of soldiers from taking holidays in the UK. That is not a proportionate response. That would have been a factor when the

military were calculating holding a coup. They would be thinking, "What are the consequences domestically and internationally?" Having literally been allowed to get away with genocide, they would not be anticipating a strong international response.

Q25 **Chair:** Thank you. Those are challenging points. Is there any follow-up? Mr Sifton, you were nodding vigorously there.

John Sifton: Accountability plays an important role in seconding the effect of the sanctions. Sanctions on revenue will sow discord in the leadership of the Burmese junta because money will be short and that often makes people grumpy. Accountability is another thing that will sow discord as individual commanders recognise that there is a possibility that one day they may face justice if the junta continues down this path. Discord is good, because that will get us to a place where the behavioural change occurs.

Q26 **Chair:** May I follow that up with two quick questions, and I would be grateful for bullet-point answers. We know that we are not going to be holding the Tatmadaw to account today, so would a worthwhile project for the UK Government or other international bodies be to simply collect evidence for a future trial, should one be possible? Would that be a sensible thing to do?

John Sifton: There already is a UN initiative to do that, with the Special Rapporteur's office—*[Inaudible.]*

Chair: Sorry, but I could not hear you. Will you say that again?

John Sifton: I will let Mr Andrews explain how the UN procedures are working.

Tom Andrews: There is a mechanism in place. You are right that lots of evidence needs to be collected, but not simply the video and anecdotal evidence about which we hear. We need actual evidence that could be used in a court of law. That is under way. The UK and others are supporting this international independent mechanism on Myanmar which is collecting the information, verifying it and putting it into a form that can be used in a court of law. The point is exactly right. The generals, and everyone right down the line of command, need to know that the evidence is being collected and that they will be held accountable. We have to be committed to doing that.

Mark Farmaner: The British Government are now doing that side of it. They can do something more practical by joining the genocide case. That is what parliamentarians and the Rohingya themselves are asking for. But when it comes to collecting the evidence, another issue is that the British Government have been a generous donor towards the UN mechanism. They are not a generous donor to the rights-based civil society in the country who are on the ground collecting the evidence that the IIMM, the international media, the UN and the British Government use. As far back as 2006, the International Development Committee challenged DfID on its failure to support rights-based civil society, especially in ethnic areas,

which document those human rights violations. That is still a failure today, as Ms Shunlei brought up earlier. There needs to be much more financial support to civil society groups that are working to document and highlight human rights violations.

Tom Andrews: That is exactly right.

Q27 **Chair:** Thank you. I have a second follow-up question. What are the chances of the UK—or any other—Government convincing the ASEAN members to sanction the Tatmadaw?

John Sifton: Sanctions are the listing of people with whom you are prohibited from doing business. Because so much of the foreign revenue is in dollars and euros, it is not necessary to go down the path of convincing them to sanction anyone. All you need do is convince them to join you in having your financial authorities or financial intelligence units issue advisories and guidance to financial institutions on the ground in Thailand and Singapore, telling them to block transactions to the junta. Then you have sanctions without sanctions. What I am saying is that you do not need legal sanctions in these jurisdictions. The EU, UK and US sanctions are sufficient.

Q28 **Royston Smith:** We have touched on this already, and Mr Sifton talked about banks and banking. What interventions, pressure or persuasion should the UK Government use on businesses, and on which industries are the military more dependent?

John Sifton: I will start, and Mark may want to add to this. Just to put it into perspective, the single biggest source of foreign revenue is natural gas. The majority of it is purchased by Thailand and a smaller amount is purchased by China. It is not purchased on the open market; it is transported through a pipeline pursuant to a set contract. Payments are made every month like clockwork. Hundreds of millions of dollars go into accounts that are controlled by the Burmese junta. That is the biggest single source of revenue. After that, it gets a little more difficult to trace, but there are massive gemstone interests, jade and timber—in particular, valuable teak. These things are exported and purchased often by intermediaries, who pay euros and pounds into accounts similar to the ones used for gas revenues. It is trickier to track them. They are not set pursuant to contracts so one cannot predict where and when the payments are. That is where the UK could be useful—co-operating with the Treasury Department in Washington and using not just sanctions authority but financial intelligence capacities to inquire of banks about transactions, uncover them and see where the money is going, and detecting where there is evasion.

That is an important point. We cannot just have sanctions whack-a-mole where you sanction an entity and then they move the money somewhere else. Banks have to be told that if they move the money somewhere else, they could face repercussions, too. All this work is what we are talking about when we say that sanctions are not the only thing. It is also enforcement. The UK, US and EU could play an important role in

exercising their financial authorities' muscle to go after these revenue flows.

The Burmese military exports teak, which is used to make outdoor furniture and the decking for luxury yachts. British companies import that teak, but often it comes through intermediaries, who purchase it in Malaysia or Singapore. It is difficult to track those transactions and prove that the benefits go to the junta, but if the authorities do their homework they can do that, and they can stop this revenue. It is just a question of exercising the will to do so. A lot needs to be done and you need to ask the banking sector to come along with you.

Mark Farmaner: May I add something? The British Government now seems to be moving in the right direction and is in a positive place. They have sanctioned the two main economic entities that are directly owned by the military, which have dozens of subsidiaries that operate right the way across the Burmese economy across a whole range of areas. That is a positive step. They have now sanctioned Myanmar Gems Enterprise and they are looking at timber sanctions. The important thing we have been saying is that this process needs to be ongoing. What we saw under the previous direct military dictatorship in the decades up to 2010 was that the military would commit an atrocity, there would be a wave of sanctions, the atrocity would stop and it was considered that the job was done. Nothing would happen for two or three years, then there would be another atrocity and another wave of sanctions. Strategically, it is not just about what we do straightaway by identifying economic interests, but we have to make sure that the military understand that this is not going to stop.

Again, part of their calculations would have been that, if there is a response, it will happen in the few months after the coup, things will settle down and they can find ways around the sanctions and try to adjust to the new situation. If they know that is not going to happen, that will again change the calculations and internal tensions within the military. We need to ensure that the sanctions John has been talking about—on banking, timber and gems—are enforced better than last time.

There is a range of other options. The military can use standard aviation jet fuel because they use Russian and Chinese military jets, but Burmese companies are being asked to truck it in from China. We can sanction the Burmese companies involved in supplying the military with essential equipment linked to the human rights violations and the economy supporting the military. They are big conglomerates that are involved in international trade, whether it is raw materials for imports or exports.

We can go after other parts of the military—the different sections involved in purchasing military supplies from overseas, from bringing in the raw materials to manufacturing their own weapons. A Myanmar war veterans organisation is used by the military for internal propaganda protests, with its own economic interests. The military's political party has its own economic interest as well.

We can keep systematically identifying new targets and sanction them—we just don't stop the process: it carries on and it carries on. The British Government will co-ordinate it with other like-minded countries. They are doing a lot of the research, so they can give the package on a plate for other countries to implement as our sanctions regime is quite burdensome in the evidence required. It meets the criteria of the European Union, the US, Canada and other countries.

It is really important that we take that approach and keep going and keep going, but we need greater capacity in the Foreign Office to speed up the process, because at the moment it is, every few weeks, another one and every few weeks another one. Even the low hanging fruit has taken months to be sanctioned, and we need more resources to speed up and increase the scale of sanctions.

Tom Andrews: That is exactly right, and it is why co-ordination of this effort is so important, providing the knowledge, the research and the capacity required to identify the targets and establish the sanctions.

I was very impressed to hear in the past week a co-ordinated announcement from the UK, US, Canada and others of new sanctions against Myanmar Gems Enterprise; for the UK, that was a very important step forward. The United States has sanctioned the SAC itself—the junta itself—which is another important step forward.

It is crucial to link these and use the collective weight of nations and their research capacities and bring everybody on board in a co-ordinated way—ideally with the Security Council, but if not, to do it together. The UK and US are in important positions in providing co-ordination and leadership, and I hope that they do.

Q29 **Royston Smith:** That is very comprehensive; there is little left for me to ask. Do any British companies have a strong presence in Myanmar? Are there any that we should or would know?

Mark Farmaner: The last company that we knew to be directly linked to the military ended its operations last year, but 83% of UK exports to Burma are services. There is no transparency there. It is consultancies, legal affairs, financial, insurance, reinsurance. We do not know what those British companies have been doing and who they are working for—military companies or other companies that are involved in industries that are helping the military to get revenue.

There is an ongoing issue with transparency. At the moment we are not aware of any British companies being involved, but it does not mean that they are not, because of the nature of the investment. We are assured by the Foreign Office that the UK's sanctions cover services, so when an entity is sanctioned any British company will be prevented from providing services, not just sanctioning financial transactions.

John Sifton: I have a few things to add.

If you look beyond direct services to sanctioned entities and think about complicity in the abstract, a few things pop out. I mentioned that an often-overlooked aspect is that a Thai state-owned gas company supplies the biggest foreign currency revenue that the military has—PTT. It is state owned, that is true, but of the top five shareholders underneath the Thai Government two are British, on Canary Wharf. They are major shareholders and vote in the directors meetings. In that sense, they are part of PTT's leadership. They are complicit in this, one way or another—maybe not legally yet—but those firms could be instructed by the British Government to use their leverage to get PTT and the Thai Government to a better place.

Incidentally, that is another role that the UK could play: helping with the hard diplomacy that will need to happen with Governments in Thailand and Singapore when the time comes to make the sanctions sting.

Canary Wharf and London finance are pretty major shareholders in corporations that do business. I have talked about PTT, but there are others.

On imports, middlemen were set up to purchase things like gemstones, timber and jade. It is difficult to say that a British firm is complicit in evading sanctions unless you really do your homework and investigate. In the absence of that homework, the British Government could play a useful role in issuing advisories or even regulations restricting the import of certain items, even if they do not come directly from Myanmar. That is how it works: things come not from Myanmar but from Malaysia, Singapore, another third country or even inside the European Union in the case of timber. Any British yacht company that imports teak—from Malaysia or Italy—should ask, "Is this Myanmar teak?" You need regulations to compel British companies to do that: reputational risk alone will not get us to a point where it inflicts pain on the junta.

Q30 **Royston Smith:** The Government may or may not instruct or persuade businesses to do business with particular regimes. At the moment, we are looking at the Uyghur in Xinjiang. The public and the media do not have the bandwidth to be talking about the Rohingya because they are talking about something else—it is the nature of the game. Are Governments guilty of that, to some degree, as well? Who is looking closely at who is dealing with the regime in Myanmar, given we are all looking the other way at what China is doing? Is that a fair reflection of how things are?

Mark Farmaner: Quite a lot of advocacy organisations, including Burma Campaign UK, and an enormous number of parliamentarians have been holding the British Government's feet to the fire over British companies doing business with the military since the genocide of the Rohingya, even if the issue has not been making it into the media very often. It is certainly one of the main issues that parliamentarians and human rights organisations have been doing advocacy on since 2017.

What was disappointing is that although we have been calling for sanctions on military-owned and controlled companies, which have now been

implemented, the UN fact-finding mission on the genocide of the Rohingya also called for those sanctions, but the British Government ignored those recommendations as well.

We have a long track record of not responding to atrocity crimes. An approach that I talked about when I gave evidence to the Rohingya inquiry is that for the greater good we are going to look the other way when atrocities are committed against ethnic minorities in the country, with policy making being very much about what happens in central Burma and not the whole country. Naw K'nyaw Paw referred to that problem, and it really is a serious problem. During the entire reform process that took place before the coup, human rights violations against ethnic minorities were increasing—violations of international law were increasing—but our whole policy was based on what was happening in central Burma, where things were improving for many people in the cities.

We do not have a policy that looks at the whole of the country. You cannot have that approach and expect that you will be able to support a reform process when you allow impunity and the military is allowed to get away with slaughtering ethnic people in this state and that state, time after time and not face any consequences. Of course, it emboldens them to go further, and they went as far as genocide. They got away with that, and now they have gone as far as a coup and reinstating direct military law.

Tom Andrews: I think it is clear that the junta is doing everything possible to stop the truth getting outside Myanmar. They arrested a number of journalists, who are now in detention—70 were arrested and 30 are in detention. They are doing everything possible to stop the wider public knowing what is going on, but make no mistake: the terrorism, the assaults and the brutality continue apace throughout the country.

What does that mean for those of us who are in direct contact with those on the ground, who have the courage and tenacity to provide us with important information, for those who are in key positions of Government authority and for others in the UN system and throughout the world when the Klieg lights of public attention are off a crisis like the mass atrocities in Myanmar, either by design by the junta or because there are other things to look at? It makes it so much more imperative that we listen to those on the ground who have a first-person perspective on the truth and act regardless of where those Klieg lights happen to be focused.

Q31 **Alicia Kearns:** The people of Myanmar are asking for the responsibility to protect. What more could the UK be doing in its policies towards Myanmar to respect R2P?

Mark Farmaner: There were huge expectations that R2P would be applied when the military started to crack down on the peaceful protestors, and real shock when the huge amounts of statements of support and solidarity from Ministers and others were not translated into any practical action. Many people in the country thought that R2P would mean military intervention. They wanted military intervention. People were protesting with signs calling on the British and American military to come

and save them because they were being shot on the streets. Obviously, that is never going to happen.

R2P is not just about military intervention. There is a range of measures that the international community can and should take but did not: economic sanctions, moving on arms embargoes and all the things we keep talking about are part of the R2P package but have not been delivered. We had a very slow response.

I talked earlier about how our default response is holiday bans, visa bans and mobilising diplomatic support, but we need to look more at country-specific, appropriate responses. If there are limited Foreign Office resources, as increasingly there seems to be—it is a long time since I have seen the basement in the Foreign Office full with 100 people working on a crisis as used to happen—there need to be targeted responses to individual countries on what will be effective. That seems to be lacking at the moment.

We did not seem to have the tools we needed to impose the right kind of sanctions. Change in the regulations now means we have more capacity to do those kinds of sanctions. Part of it is a lack of tools—a lack of a strategy and overall approach to the issues—and part of it is a problem of political will and leadership.

Q32 **Alicia Kearns:** You talk about capacity and expertise. Since my election I have been calling for the creation of an atrocity prevention department across government to bring together in one place experts on everything from open source analysis to sanctions and CSSF—you name it—so that any desk team does not suddenly have to become an expert in atrocity prevention and can call on these experts.

The conflict centre was announced in the integrated review. What would be your advice to those running it? What lessons can be learned from what happened in Myanmar for that centre? Do you back the Committee's call for a national strategy on atrocity prevention?

Mark Farmaner: We absolutely need a strategy. It is strange even to be talking about not having a strategy, especially when we keep having to respond to crisis after crisis and scramble to find the tools and what approach it should be.

There is clearly a lack of expertise. There is a lack of financial resources being put into this area. Expertise needs to be on the ground where there are obvious dangers. There needs to be more central Government support in the Foreign Office in London. People in the Foreign Office have been working on Burma and have been concerned about it for a long time, but there does not seem to be the clout, political support or capacity behind them to deliver any change.

There is a more systematic problem. I could not tell you whether there is still a human rights office in the FCDO because it is not relevant to my work as a human rights organiser. They had no influence on policy making: it was all the country teams. I was meeting the human rights

office to discuss policy on Burma but it had no say. It was lucky if it was sent a document by the country team. For the last 15 or 16 years we have had no contact with it; it may exist still, it may not—I don't know.

The issues of human rights and atrocity prevention are just not in the DNA of the FCDO, and it all depends on the constant rotation of Ministers. Randomly, one might be interested in these issues but then move on. Individual staff members in key positions—an Asia director—might have an interest but after two years they move on. It is about trying to integrate it into the DNA. Yes, we need the strategies, the offices and the capacity, but how do we get the approach of country-specific policy making into that as well? We need to address that.

Q33 **Alicia Kearns:** So you might agree that a specific Minister needs to be given responsibility for overseeing the conflict centre, rather than it sitting opaquely across Government Departments in the Cabinet Office.

Mark Farmaner: It would be essential to have a specific Minister constantly driving that, covering these areas and not being spread out on a whole range of other areas. That might be one way of addressing the issue. Things can travel horizontally and not just vertically in the FCDO.

Q34 **Alicia Kearns:** My next question is about in-country activities—CSSF-funded or otherwise. Will the witnesses comment on gaps in in-country activity to support the people of Myanmar?

Mark Farmaner: As well as being at Burma Campaign UK I am involved in charities that provide support to civil society and humanitarian support in the country. The British Government have been doing a lot of good, life-saving work. We have not always agreed with the priorities. We don't think that there has been enough focus on humanitarian needs—the victims of human rights violations, internally displaced people and refugees have never been prioritised for receiving aid. The Rohingya who were displaced in 2012 are still living in squalid prison camps, as are ethnic Kachin and internally displaced people in Shan state. They include children who know nothing other than growing up in IDP camps with barely enough food or access to education, medication and housing. At the same time, we were assisting in projects such as the development of a new highway from the airport, so there was always an imbalance between development assistance and humanitarian assistance.

Development assistance is now obviously out of the question if it involves working with the Government, but there is a danger that the British Government will use that inability to deliver development support to and through the Government as a way of cutting the budget instead of diverting it to civil society and the most vulnerable in the country. There has always been a problem of the British Government wanting to deliver one large grant to INGOs or the UN and that money may or may not trickle down to civil society organisations. There has been a long-term aversion to supporting rights-based civil society organisations and it has been harder for grassroots ethnic civil society organisations to access support from DfID. The military and Aung San Suu Kyi's Government and

others also used the registration of civil society organisations as a means of controlling which of them could get money. The British Government and other donors have a tendency to want to give money to registered organisations and if their Government withhold registration, it is harder for civil society organisations to access funds. There have been a whole range of issues. International development has been the subject of more than one inquiry into the problems of DfID's delivery and prioritisation of aid and the way in which it has not supported human rights and rights-based organisations.

Q35 **Chair:** Does the engagement that we have with the junta legitimise it or should we have no engagement with it at all? What are your views on that?

Mark Farmaner: When he was on his trip to Asia, Dominic Raab quietly had a business-as-usual meeting with ASEAN Foreign Ministers that included the Foreign Minister appointed by the military. That is a departure from the previous approach, which was that meetings would be held with the military but only when the meeting was to discuss human rights and humanitarian and democratisation issues. We would not have business-as-usual diplomatic meetings, but meetings with the military that focused only on those issues. We only found out that Dominic Raab had had this meeting from a Cambodian newspaper; it was not in any of the information that the FCDO released about the trip. It might be because 10 years had passed that the FCDO did not know what the policy used to be, but that is the approach we should take. We want diplomatic pressure on the military but that does not mean business-as-usual meetings as part of ASEAN or any other international forum.

Q36 **Chair:** Mr Sifton and Mr Andrews, do you agree with that? I will then come back to you, Alicia. Forgive me.

John Sifton: The question can be discussed and debated but ultimately it only really matters if something substantive is going on behind the scenes that makes meeting useful. More important than whether the British Government meet the Myanmar military is whether there is a unified position of like-minded countries on this matter so that there are no splits and Australia meets but the US does not or South Korea sends someone to an ASEAN ministerial but France does not. Those types of division cost us a lot whereas if the UK, along with the US and other like-minded countries, made an effort in the G7 and then worldwide to foster a common position on this issue and many others, those who do talk to the military, such as the Indonesian Foreign Minister or the UN Special Envoy, could say that the whole world is united against you right now. You need to start looking for an off-ramp.

Tom Andrews: I agree. It is important that the international community sends clear signals. Every source of leverage that is available and that we exercise—whether that is cutting off weapons or revenue or diplomatic recognition—means doing part of what you as a Committee has done today. That means listening to the people of Myanmar and to a Minister from the National Unity Government of Myanmar and engaging with them.

That is important not only substantively in learning what is going on and needs to be done but in terms of engagement and recognition of an important entity. Let us face it. As any law enforcement person might inform you, if you are dealing with a hostage situation, you need to talk to the hostage taker or takers in order to free the hostages. The entire country has been taken hostage and its leaders have literally taken hostages. There is an important role for some to play in a co-ordinated and focused way for the specific purpose of addressing this nightmare and finding a way out of it. In general, however, the degree to which the international community does not provide this illegal regime with recognition and does not treat it as a legitimate regime is extremely important. The extent to which the National Unity Government can be engaged in that is also important.

Chair: Fantastic. I thank all three of you. I apologise for my interruption and now hand back to Alicia.

Q37 **Alicia Kearns:** Not at all. Thank you, Chair.

I have three final questions for all the panel, but I will try to keep them brief. I raised with the earlier panel, who some of you may have heard, the issue of ethnic armed groups. If a peaceful settlement is reached, the previous panel was optimistic that ethnic armed groups would put down their weapons and work together, but I am concerned that peace might not come immediately after a settlement, particularly if there is a federal model. It would be difficult for people to relinquish their power, and armed groups often want to maintain their influence. Do you believe that those ethnic armed groups are truly aligned with the Federal Unity Government and will put down their arms or are you concerned with how they transition away from the way they are operating now to genuinely embracing democracy and a federal approach?

Mark Farmaner: I have made many trips over the years to areas that are under the control of armed ethnic groups—to Karenni, Shan, Karen and Kachin states—by crossing the border from Thailand and I have met many of the leaders of the armed organisations. You can perhaps divide the armed ethnic organisations into three different categories. Some such as the Karen National Union and others are committed to democracy, human rights and federalism. Some are pretty much like the United Wa State Army and have been involved in criminal activity and drugs. They have no interest in human rights and democracy and want to hold on to their territory. Others are extensions of the military, which has co-opted and split forces. They are basically part of the Burmese military.

The main ethnic armed organisations that we are talking about and that the NUG have been in dialogue with are all committed in principle to federalism and they want a federal, democratic Burma. However, let us not kid anyone. There is a huge lack of trust. The NUG have reached out to some of the groups in a way that Aung San Suu Kyi's Government did not and the military never has, and successive central Governments—whether democratic or the different military regimes—have perpetrated the most appalling repression and human rights abuses against different

ethnic groups. Will they want to co-operate with a new NUG Government, a central democratic Government? Absolutely yes. The majority of them will want to co-operate and want to negotiate a new constitution. They will engage in that.

Are they about to hand over their arms? No. That is going to take time. It will take a process of building trust, or perhaps even building a system that is not based on trust—a bit like the American constitution, which is not based on trust at all—in order to create a system whereby they feel safe and secure enough that they have some of the autonomy, control, rights and protection, before any kind of disarming process would take place. I think that would take a very long time indeed.

But it is also important to remember that, before independence, there was the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry that the British Government established, which was going to give independence to central Burma but was recognising the huge differences—culturally, economically, politically and development-wise—in different ethnic states. Many ethnic people were asking for independence; they did not want to be part of an independent Burma. There was an agreement—the Panglong agreement—whereby some of these ethnic groups agreed a 10-year trial period to see whether they could stay together, with an option of then having more autonomy afterwards. The Government at the time went back on that.

The military coup was triggered by moves by central Government to even discuss with a couple of the ethnic groups a bit more autonomy. So, this issue comes back to the root of why there has been conflict and dictatorship since independence. It is absolutely critical, and certainly the importance of this has not been understood by the international community in addressing this issue. The peace process that took place in the past 10 years was never a genuine process. The voices on the ground from conflict areas were being ignored, in terms of people saying that this is not the way a peace process will work or should work. Let's hope that this time it is done differently and that when there is an NUG, they will engage in a different way with ethnic people—not just the ethnic armed organisations, because some of them can be said to represent ethnic people, but others certainly cannot. There is not always harmony that the ethnic organisations represent the ethnic people they claim to.

John Sifton: If we can put it this way, the good news is that some of the groups have governance structures and are serious about coming to an understanding with the central Government. The good news is also that, if it came to it, a lot of these autonomous groups, or the armed groups and the political parties that are under them, would be satisfied with autonomy at the local level. They are not seeking to be the leaders of the nation by any stretch of the imagination. But the bad news is that we have to recognise that whatever future Burma has, it will be extraordinarily complicated, because it is not going to be a country like the United Kingdom or France. It is going to be a country with a whole bunch of almost fully autonomous regions in it. That is just a reality that is going to have be negotiated and dealt with, and it is going to trigger potential

conflicts down the line, but it has to be dealt with. We cannot wish it away.

Tom Andrews: One of the very encouraging things that is happening right now is the National Unity Government and their efforts to reach out to these communities, to engage with them and to incorporate them. A Ministry of Human Rights was established and is just getting organised right now. Dr Sasa, who was on a previous panel, has spoken about, "My brothers and sisters from the Rohingya community—we look froward to sitting down with you and working together." The steps that are being taken by the National Unity Government are important steps, and they should be encouraged. As Dr Sasa has testified, that is their intention.

Q38 **Alicia Kearns:** I will ask my final two questions together, to allow you the option of which ones you would like to answer. First, going back to the first panel, we have just talked about the National Unity Government and all they have been doing to reach out to ethnic minorities. That is so important and ultimately pivotal to achieving some sort of peace settlement within Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi did not achieve that. On whether it was her goal or not, or whether she put in sufficient effort or not, I cannot comment, but what role is there for her in Myanmar's future under the Unity Government? Surely there will be concerns about rolling back those commitments should she come forward. I am very aware that, for the average person in the western world, she is the main figure they know of. They don't know about the Unity Government. They would not necessarily know more about it, and obviously there are concerns that people would want to see a figurehead such as her come forward again. What do you think the future role for her is, and what do you think it should be? Finally, if you could make one ask of the British Government, what would it be?

Mark Farmaner: On Aung San Suu Kyi, it is up to the people of Burma, not to us, what her role should be. She has just won a landslide election. My organisation has been very critical of her record on human rights regarding the Rohingya and keeping political prisoners in jail and continuing the peace process in the way that she did. Our role is to promote human rights and democracy, regardless of who is in power, whether it is the military or Aung San Suu Kyi, but the people have chosen her.

You are right: there is concern that the NUG has gone a long way further and made a lot more positive outreach to ethnic groups and Rohingyas than she was willing to do. There is concern about whether she will accept and go along with that or whether she will want to change it. That is something that the people in the country are going to have to resolve; it is not something that we outside the country can resolve, but whatever does happen, we need to keep pushing for the principles of human rights and democratisation that the people want, and be the voice for people who have been marginalised, such as the Rohingya and other ethnic groups.

Q39 **Alicia Kearns:** And what would be your ask of the British Government?

Mark Farmaner: I cannot do just one. We have to represent what the people on the ground are telling us, and that is economic pressure, arms embargo and justice and accountability. They go hand in hand because there is no magic bullet, and that is what they keep telling us: there is no one thing. What they are very scared of is that the British Government will do one thing, say "Job done," and sit back, allowing the military to consolidate power.

John Sifton: I will go next so Tom can have the last word. As far as Aung San Suu Kyi goes, we have not really been talking about her very much since the coup, because the singular focus of our organisation is human rights abuses against the whole of the civilian population by the Government. We are not a political organisation—we are non-partisan—so we would never opine on a matter like that. I would second what Mark said: it is up to the Burmese people. Yes, we have criticised her Government many times, particularly for the atrocious decision to go to The Hague and defend Myanmar before the International Court of Justice, but again, it is up to the people of Burma to decide who they want as their leader. That is what this is all about.

On the one ask of the UK Government, I am going to get more specific about it: to make it more operationalised in the near term. I am not familiar with these technical problems with the FCDO, its weaknesses and structural weaknesses and the dynamics of that. We have to deal with the FCDO we have, not the one we hope to have in the future, and while we are in this situation, I think MPs can ask 10 Downing Street to make Burma one of the priority agenda items for the G7.

What I worry about is that Dominic Raab has determined that the United Kingdom has pretty much got all that it can get from the G7 on Burma, and that they reached a joint statement ahead of the meeting and that is basically all we are ever going to get from the G7 as a bloc. If that is the case, neither he nor Prime Minister Johnson will go into the G7 trying to make something happen.

What I would like to do is basically to urge them to regroup and say, "Well, we may not be able to reach full consensus with the G7, especially Japan, which is a difficult partner, but let's go in and wrangle up as many members of the G7 as possible and get a unified position on new actions", such as the ones Mark mentioned—from sanctions that target foreign currency revenues by focusing on the banks that hold and receive the money, to returning to the UN Security Council and really getting a conversation started about an arms embargo and putting China on the back foot on that matter.

Thirdly, there is really vocally talking about international justice and about the threat of future criminal liability that hangs over the Burmese military, and making that part of the joint communication in Cornwall. If you can't bring Japan on to that, then at least have a unified front of the G6, some collection of the countries, and in particular France. We haven't talked about it today because this is UK-focused, but the operator that operates Thailand's gas sources is a French company, Total. It is no secret that the

French Government have been lukewarm about strong sanctions that would target the revenues. But if Joe Biden, Angela Merkel, Boris Johnson and Justin Trudeau all sort of strong-arm them at the G7, you might be able to get them to concede, because it is not really that much money for them. It is more a question of precedent and pride. So, there is a lot that Boris Johnson can do, but he needs to be urged to do it and that is where I think that Parliament could come in and make itself very useful in the next few weeks and days.

Tom Andrews: It is a very good but difficult question. I'll echo what John and Mark said about Aung San Suu Kyi. It really is up to the people of Myanmar, obviously, but let's not forget that she is in detention, along with the President of the country and thousands and thousands of others. We don't know where many of them are or what they have been charged with. Their families are left in the dark, but, from what we know, they are not being treated well, as we have seen from those who have emerged either dead or alive, having suffered enormously in detention. So, I think we need to keep our focus there.

The UK is in a very important position not only with respect to the G7 and the Security Council, but in terms of its capacity for leadership it is pivotal in all of those capacities. If we can't get a formal mechanism such as the UN Security Council resolution, then, as I mentioned before, we need to have co-ordinated action among those who are willing to take co-ordinated action, and the UK is in a critically important position to do that. The UK and the US are pivotal.

As far as the people of Myanmar are concerned, their country is in their hands, so we need to listen to them. When it comes to things like sanctions and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, for example, over 400 organisations in Myanmar sent a letter to the international community saying, "We need you to impose sanctions on Myanmar Oil and Gas. We need you to cut off the single largest source of revenue to this junta. After all, that is what we are doing. We have a civil disobedience movement here. We are boycotting anything and everything that has anything to do with the junta. We are going to save this country, but we need your help to do so." So, I think that listening to the people of Myanmar and then exerting every source of leverage that we have and using that leadership position that the UK is in are all critical.

Alicia Kearns: If I may, I want to place on record my thanks to all the international organisations that have been working on the ground, but particularly our FCDO staff who have been working in the most difficult circumstances, not least because of the pandemic. I also thank our outgoing Ambassador Dan Chugg, who will be leaving post soon. He has done a phenomenal job. So, a big thank you to all those staff. We understand how trying it has been for them all.

Chair: Thank you, Alicia, for those words. We are all enormously grateful to the staff of the FCDO and the other international organisations who have been working in Myanmar in this extraordinarily difficult time. We all hope very much that the situation is settled at least enough to start

getting vaccines to people and medical care restarted, as the amount of human suffering is now growing by the day.

I thank our three witnesses, who gave us an extraordinary insight into the challenges that we all face, particularly the insight into the level of contact that the British Government currently have with the Tatmadaw, which I don't think many of us were aware of before, so I am very grateful for that. This is clearly a situation that is going to endure and lead to significant human suffering unless a resolution can be found. We look forward to hearing from you and other witnesses again, if people have views and ideas before we report on this inquiry. My thanks to all three of you and our earlier panel.