



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Violence in Rakhine State, HC 435

Tuesday 10 October 2017

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Ian Austin; Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Ms Nusrat Ghani; Andrew Rosindell; Royston Smith; and Nadhim Zahawi.

Questions 1-67

Witnesses

I: Mark Farmaner, Director, Burma Campaign UK, and Tun Khin, Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK.

II: Dr Champa Patel, Head of Asia Programme for Chatham House, and Dr Lee Jones, Associate Professor in International Politics, Queen Mary, University of London.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mark Farmaner and Tun Khin.

Chair: I will very briefly ask Mr Farmaner and Mr Khin to introduce themselves, but may I first welcome these very many people for coming? I also thank Stephen Twigg, Chair of the International Development Committee, for gracing us with his presence, which demonstrates the interest that this subject has across the whole House. Mr Khin, would you like to start by very briefly introducing yourself?

Tun Khin: My name is Maung Tun Khin, from the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK. I was born and brought up in Arakan State in the western part of Burma. I came to the UK in 2004, graduated in London and I have been working on the plight of the Rohingya in Burma for more than 10 years now.

Mark Farmaner: My name is Mark Farmaner. I am a director at Burma Campaign UK, where I started nearly 20 years ago as a volunteer. I have made numerous visits to Burma, although I am banned by the Government from visiting Burma at the present time. Our organisation works to promote human rights, democracy and development in Burma, and we have been working on the Rohingya issue since 1992.

Q1 **Chair:** Thank you very much to both of you for coming. Forgive me, but we have a very short space of time, so I will ask you to be very brief with your answers, and we will try to be very brief with our questions. May I quickly start off by saying thank you very much for coming? I understand that you recently returned from Bangladesh, Mr Khin, and it is very good of you to come here so quickly. Could you tell us a little bit about the situation in Bangladesh and how you see it today?

Tun Khin: The refugee situation in Bangladesh is seriously bad. They are in squalid conditions. First, I should say thank you to the Bangladesh Government, because they have given generosity and hospitality; in a short time period, it is not easy to handle a half a million population. Still, they are handling it, as far as I see.

I think much more co-ordination is still needed between the aid groups and others who are working there. I think it might be okay later on, but I don't know; some people from an organisation told me that they are trying to co-ordinate in a better way. It is taking time, anyhow. The point is that many people are fleeing day by day. We are seeing people on the sides of the bank of the Naf river—the other side and here. Pregnant women and vulnerable people, especially, are not getting much aid.

Chair: Mr Farmaner, do you have anything to add?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mark Farmaner: Not significantly. What we have heard from the same is that aid agencies and the UN are desperately trying to scale up to meet the need that is there, but it does not seem to be effective.

Q2 **Chair:** Is it a question of supply or of organisation?

Mark Farmaner: As far as we understand, it is both. The UN has now made an appeal for almost half a billion dollars just for the next six months to provide support to the Rohingya.

Q3 **Chair:** Does the unprecedented number of people seeking refuge suggest that the military operations are on a larger scale than was thought previously?

Tun Khin: Larger scale?

Q4 **Chair:** The number of people coming across into Bangladesh: does that suggest that the military operations are larger than was previously thought?

Tun Khin: Yes it is clear, because of the way that people are measuring the refugees that came from there. They have seen whole villages burned down and hundreds of people being killed in front of them. That is what the eye witnesses and refugees told me when I met them. In one village called Tula Toli, they have seen hundreds of people killed and there is no one left, not in one single village. That is what they told me. It is on quite a larger scale I should say. Even when the people are fleeing to the border, they set up landmines. I have seen that it is on a larger scale, the way the Burmese Government did that deliberately.

Mark Farmaner: The Burmese army started increasing its troops weeks before the attacks by ARSA on the border guards and police force, so it does appear as if they were waiting for these attacks and to use that as a pretext and an excuse to pursue this military operation. We are still trying to confirm the exact details, but it does also appear that light infantry divisions were brought into Rakhine State from eastern Burma, where they conduct similar operations but on a smaller scale against the Shan, Kachin and other minorities. Also, they are deliberately targeting civilians, burning villages, and using rape as a weapon of war.

Q5 **Nadhim Zahawi:** How is Bangladesh responding to the crisis? In your response, could you comment on the recent reports of the accord between Bangladesh and Burma on repatriation?

Tun Khin: I met one Minister and also some officials there; they want to get the international community involved this time because there have been many times that the Rohingya fled, in the 1970s and in 1991 and 1992 and 2016. There was repatriation happening between 1978 and 1991 and 1992. What they are saying is that this is on quite a larger scale. The Government is military, and Government is trying to force out all of the Rohingya people from Burma, so they seriously want to consider returning them by involving the international community. They must go back to their original place. They are from Arakan State, that is what they told me, as far as I am aware.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mark Farmaner: The Government of Bangladesh are obviously officially taking them, you are praising the Government of Bangladesh and they have accepted over half a million people into their country in the space of a few weeks.

But I think it would be wise for the international community and for this Committee to follow what happens after the international attention dies down, because traditionally Bangladesh has not been very hospitable to Rohingya refugees; they have actually opened fire in the past on Rohingya refugees trying to flee into Bangladesh. There is still a plan on the books to move Rohingya refugees to an island in the Bay of Bengal that is flooded during part of the year, and is completely unsuitable. They don't recognise them as official refugees, so in the past Bangladesh has tried to limit international support to Rohingya refugees, fearing that it will act as a pull factor.

I think we will have to pay attention very closely to make sure that when the attention does die down, the Bangladesh Government does not revert to the approach that it had towards refugees in the past.

Q6 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Would it be accurate for you to say that currently the accord is working and things are actually happening in the right way on the ground, and we ought to keep an eye on it because it could reverse?

Mark Farmaner: Generally the Government of Bangladesh is being co-operative and working with the international community and wants their support at the moment, as Tun Khin has said. That is while the international spotlight is on them and the crisis is new. I fear that that approach could change in the future.

Q7 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Mr Khin, I want to ask you about the Harakah al-Yakin, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. What level of support do you think there is for this movement amongst the refugee population that you have met?

Tun Khin: When I met the refugees, I asked about ARSA. Some of them told me about the kind of young people who joined. I asked them how they are organised about it. They say that some of these people are crazy—they just want to fight the military because these people have suffered a lot. What about those young guys?

Some young people couldn't go to university because of restrictions on studies. Some young boys could not get permission to marry for two to three years; some young boys' mothers had been killed by the Burmese military; some had land that had been confiscated by the military. These groups have all been together and that is what they are trying to fight with the military. They told me, some of them don't know about ARSA. They know that one group is fighting with them; that is what they told me.

Q8 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Clearly, it is fertile recruitment territory. There is plenty enough angst and anger among young men about what has happened to them for there to be fertile recruitment.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tun Khin: Since 2012, the crisis has happened against Rohingyas under President Thein Sein. Every restriction of aid was one of the tools, which is why people become quite angry—that is what they told me.

Q9 **Nadhim Zahawi:** How well organised are they—how well funded and trained?

Tun Khin: As for me, I do not know them. When I ask them, they do not know much about it. They say, these guys want to fight. They are very angry with the Government, the police and military and the authorities. Some people told me that it has become an unbearable situation.

We have asked the international community for help for more than 20 years. The international community has not given us a chance to get aid to our children when our babies are dying in front of us. There is no baby milk; there is no medical aid for elderly men. When pregnant women have been dying in front of these young men, that is how people become quite desperate. That is what I heard from them.

Q10 **Nadhim Zahawi:** In your view, how many are there in the movement, in Harakah al-Yaqin—hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands?

Tun Khin: I do not know exactly. Some people told me there are two to three hundred.

Q11 **Nadhim Zahawi:** So it is in the hundreds, rather than the thousands?

Tun Khin: It is not thousands at all.

Q12 **Royston Smith:** Aung San Suu Kyi has been criticised a lot for her response. Do you think that is justified, or is it counter-productive?

Tun Khin: Of course it is justified, because she is a Nobel peace prize winner. The Rohingya had much hope in her. When she was under house arrest, we supported her. Rohingya parties were in alliance with her. Even I myself campaigned for her in this building and on the other side of the building—for the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

She is denying all the atrocities, the crimes perpetrated by the military. We have seen it since October and November 2016, and later on we have seen the UN release a report that could amount to crime against humanity. Her own office has mentioned fake rape, fake crimes and that sort of thing. We have seen her information ministry a few days ago say that Bengalis are trying to leave Burma for Bangladesh because they want to be apart, because they are the same race there; that is why they are going there. That is the way.

We have seen the Government instigating it intentionally. Her denial is giving much seriousness to the situation and has instigated the whole Burma population becoming anti-Rohingya campaigners. No one wants to see Rohingyas as a part of Burma. That is very dangerous for the future. Of course, she is not ordering them to slaughter and to burn alive the Rohingyas—that is true, but she is denying that there is complicity in this genocide against Rohingyas.



Q13 Royston Smith: Do you think she is doing that because that is what she believes or because she is in a complicated and difficult situation herself? I do not have a view; I am asking you whether she may be trying to steer a course because she could end up under house arrest, which potentially would not help.

Tun Khin: You mentioned two parts—I do not know which part she is thinking about, but no matter which part she is in, the 1.3 million Rohingyas are human beings. Human beings should not be killed, raped and slaughtered in front of their fathers, mothers and sisters. That should not happen. She should stand up and talk about it. That's what I think.

Q14 Ian Austin: What is your view of the response of the UN and other international institutions and organisations to this latest crisis?

Tun Khin: We have seen the international community raising and talking about it. The UN Security Council discussed it. It has been going on for one and a half months, almost, but we have not seen anything improve in the situation on the ground. The Burmese Government are ignoring, and they are quite soft and not effective. We appreciate their concern, but there is no targeted thing to the military and the Government to stop this. That is what we need.

Half an hour ago, some houses were burning down in Buthidaung Township—I received a message. Every day, these things are going on—killings, burning, slaughtering. It has been one and a half months now. The international community knew it. The UN Security Council first discussed it after one week. It has been four weeks since that and the other two meetings we have seen, but there is no effective action.

Mark Farmaner: We knew this crisis was going to happen—everyone knew this was happening. It is not a surprise to anyone; perhaps the scale of it is a surprise. We had a similar military offensive in October last year where the military were conducting the same kind of human rights violations but on a smaller scale, and we have had repression increased against the Rohingyas since 2012, on a very significant level.

At the same time, during that period of increased repression against the Rohingyas, the international community has dropped the sanctions it put in place, even though a condition that the EU had put on lifting those sanctions was improving the situation for the Rohingyas. Those sanctions were lifted, despite the fact that things were getting worse. Every time there was a new wave of repression and new steps taken against the Rohingyas, the international community backed down.

We accepted the 2015 elections, even though Rohingyas were excluded. We funded the census, even though it excluded the Rohingyas, and the European Union and diplomats backed down on even using the word "Rohingya" with the Government of Burma, because the Government of Burma complained. Consistently, we sent a signal to the military and the Government in Burma that we were prepared to compromise when it came to the human rights of the Rohingyas, as long as the general direction of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

travel was considered to be good. That has been interpreted as a green light.

Since then, there has been the worst human rights crisis I have ever seen in the country. We have never seen human rights violations on a scale like this at any point in Burma's past, perhaps since world war two, and there has not been a significant international response. The only sanction and international response that has been placed against the military has been the UK suspending its military training programme. There has been no other measure from any other country in the world, and now we are nearly seven weeks into a campaign of what the UN has called "ethnic cleansing".

On the question regarding Aung San Suu Kyi, the criticism of her is justified, but it is unbalanced because there are in effect two Governments in Burma now. Part of the Government is run by Aung San Suu Kyi, and she controls agriculture, health, education and things the military do not particularly care about. They still control themselves; they are independent. They set their own budget. They are not under her control. They control police and security services, prisons and large parts of the civil service.

Min Aung Hlaing is the guy conducting this military campaign against the Rohingyas and this ethnic cleansing campaign. He is not receiving anything like the same amount of criticism. Aung San Suu Kyi should be speaking out and defending the rights of the Rohingya. She should certainly not be—as she is—acting almost as a cheerleader in defending the Government, whipping up anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya tensions, with her Government denying these things are taking place. That is completely wrong.

She deserves to be criticised for those things but we have to see more criticism and pressure on the head of the military, because they are the ones carrying out this ethnic cleansing campaign and they are getting away with it.

Q15 Ian Austin: Thanks. That is very helpful and informative. Essentially, you are arguing for increased sanctions. Can you tell us a bit more about that and the impact you think it would have? What would you say to those who would argue that sanctions would do more harm than good in this situation?

Mark Farmaner: Sanctions can have different impacts in different circumstances. We need a combination of things. There is no single thing that is going to persuade the military to stop this campaign. It is going to take a combination of political, economic, diplomatic and legal pressure. Everything that can be done, should be done. It is like a process of adding straws to the camel's back.

Targeted sanctions that focus on the military, if done in the right way, could have an impact. We know that a big factor for the military is international acceptance. If you look at Min Aung Hlaing, he has a Facebook page with more followers in Burma than Aung San Suu Kyi.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Every time he meets a diplomat, every foreign trip is meticulously documented with photographs and in Burmese and English on his Facebook pages.

International acceptance and their status is very important to them. If there are measures taken, such as a visa ban, they could be combined with other steps. The EU has an arms embargo, but is not supporting that embargo being a global one, which does not make any sense at all. The EU could be supporting and lobbying for other countries also to impose arms embargos.

The arms embargo is loosely interpreted by countries such as Austria and Germany, which are selling dual-use equipment. Training aircraft are very easily adapted to target civilians, but Germany would still supply equipment like that. The EU should be banning the supply of any equipment to the military. We could be looking at other factors such as banning European companies from doing business and investing in companies and joint ventures in companies owned by the military.

But those measures should not be carried out as they were in the past when sanctions were introduced—a slap on the wrist because the EU felt it was under pressure to be seen to be doing something. We had these gradual incremental increases in sanctions over 15 years last time round—always the lowest common denominator measures, never linked in with any diplomatic efforts. Any sanctions should go hand in hand with an international diplomatic strategy to increase pressure.

Ian Austin: It is quite something to hear you say that there have not been human rights abuses on this scale in Burma at any point since the second world war. I am very struck by that; it is a powerful statement.

Q16 **Mike Gapes:** I understand that the Government of Myanmar/Burma asked the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to play a role and set up a commission. I understand they have a report from Kofi Annan with some recommendations. What is your assessment of that report and the recommendations? Do you think that will provide any way forward, or is it window-dressing?

Tun Khin: Of course, we Rohingyas welcome the Kofi Annan commission's report and recommendations, but we are a bit doubtful about implementation and what they will do about the report and recommendations. The other side is forcing the taking of the national verification card. The Rohingya belong to the NRC—the national registry. They now give us the white card instead of the national scrutiny card. The Rohingya do not want the NVC, which is a kind of new verification as a citizen.

You have to see why we doubt it. Before that, the UN did a report in July 2016. That had quite strong recommendations, similar to Kofi Annan's recommendations, but they did not implement anything. You know about the restriction on aid and the restriction of movement and so on, but they did not act. That is why people became desperate and things happened the other week. The problem is the military, but also on the other side



HOUSE OF COMMONS

they are not happy with these recommendations, after the recommendations we already mentioned. We worry. We doubt how they will implement it. That is what we should say for now.

Q17 **Mike Gapes:** To be clear, the Government have officially welcomed the report, but you think that in practice the military will not allow it to be implemented.

Tun Khin: Practically, they will not allow it. I think that they might not implement it, because there is no political will in Burma to solve the Rohingya issue, from the military or from the Government side.

Mark Farmaner: That is a critical point: political will. Aung San Suu Kyi has commissioned this report, which has some good recommendations in it, but at the same time as she is saying, "We will accept all the recommendations," her Government are going against them, whipping up more tensions and bringing out more anti-Rohingya statements. They might go through some limited tick-box exercise on this, but their heart isn't it. Aung San Suu Kyi is the one person in the country who could start to change hearts and minds on this issue. She has the love and support of people in a way that no one else does, but instead of supporting the issue and trying to challenge prejudice, she is playing to it, encouraging it and whipping it up. Unless she has a change of heart, even if they go through a tick-box exercise, it is not going to make changes.

Q18 **Chair:** Forgive me, but it is a very, very powerful thing to say that she is actually whipping it up.

Mark Farmaner: Yes. Even this weekend, Government Departments under her control were saying that the Rohingya are going back to Bangladesh because they want to be with their own race. There are numerous examples of the propaganda coming from her office and Government Departments under her control—not under military control, but under her control—that are producing lots of inflammatory statements, pictures of mutilated bodies saying, "Islamic terrorists are trying to take over. Bengali extremists are trying to take over the country." Very extreme stuff is going on in state-owned media and publications.

Tun Khin: Also, in her own words, when she was at a press conference with the Foreign Secretary, John Kerry, she said, "We don't call them Bengali. I would call them Rohingya or Muslims." On the other side, the Information Office is using "Bengali". A director in the President Office—the authority—always uses "Bengali" everywhere, on her Twitter and in the *New Light of Myanmar*. That is the way of instigating hatred against Rohingya that is going on.

Q19 **Mike Gapes:** To be absolutely clear, the opposition to political progress is not coming simply from the military. It is coming from within Government Departments that are under the control of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party.

Mark Farmaner: Yes. In the speech that she made in response to the crisis, she lied. She told lies about the treatment of the Rohingya in that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

speech. She said that the Rohingya had equal access to healthcare. I know that a lot of different media documented it, but she set out to lie and mislead in that speech. I am saying this as someone who has travelled the world and from an organisation that was leading the support for Aung San Suu Kyi and the democracy movement. It is hard to say these things sometimes and to accept that she would do this. In the face of an ethnic cleansing campaign, in the knowledge of what is going on, she is actively defending and acting as a human shield for the military.

Q20 Chair: Can I pick up briefly on a technicality? You used the word lie. Is it "lie" or "was unaware"? "Knew it to be untrue" or "was unaware of what the truth was"?

Mark Farmaner: There have been too many times when she has consistently said things that are untrue for me to believe that she is that misinformed. For example, every time she was asked about investigating human rights violations in international media interviews, she consistently implied and gave the impression that the Rakhine commission was investigating them, but she had set the mandate that excluded that. She knew full well that the Rakhine commission was not going to be investigating human rights violations and who was responsible. She gave the impression and used that commission as a defence when asked about investigations, and she has refused access to the United Nations fact-finding mission to investigate human rights violations.

Q21 Ann Clwyd: That is a very important point, that they still refuse access to the UN. What reasons do they give?

Mark Farmaner: It is quite sad to hear the Government under Aung San Suu Kyi—her spokespeople and others—coming out with a lot of the same lines as the previous military regime about international conspiracies, international media falsehoods, fake news, international interference, defending sovereignty. There is a whole range of different lines being used by this—and less sophisticated than the military in some cases. By now, the previous military regime would likely have set up its own investigation committee into what has taken place to kick things down the line and give the international community an excuse to say, "Well, let's wait and see what happens domestically." They have not even gone through that process this time.

Q22 Ann Clwyd: Many of us in this room campaigned for many years for Aung San Suu Kyi's release and also for the release of many Members of Parliament who were imprisoned in Burma for a long time. Some died, some eventually were released. We always argued, some of us, that lifting sanctions too quickly without waiting over a longer period of time to see what would happen in Burma was not the correct thing to do. I do not know what the Burma Campaign UK argued at the time.

Mark Farmaner: We believed that the sanctions were lifted prematurely and that doing so sends the wrong signal. As I said earlier, when the EU suspended sanctions in 2012, one of the conditions for the continuation of that suspension was an improvement of the situation of the Rohingya. In 2012, we had two rounds of mass violence against the Rohingya,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

displacing 140,000 people into squalid camps. The United Nations later said that human rights violations during the attacks on the Rohingya in 2012 could constitute crimes against humanity, yet months after that had happened the EU lifted the sanctions for good. This is the kind of message that the international community is sending: basically, the Rohingya are expendable as long as the impression was that there is progress in other areas and the so-called greater good.

- Q23 Ann Clwyd:** The Prime Minister announced the UK would suspend the training of Burma's military because of these concerns. Your organisation in particular called for the withdrawal of the education courses the military were on. One would expect the education courses would contain aspects of concerns over human rights. Why did you, in particular, want the education training stopped?

Mark Farmaner: The training course offered to the military was one normally offered to a country after it has undergone a transition to democracy, which Burma has not done, and it was being given to a military that was still committing violations of international law, war crimes and crimes against humanity. While the Foreign Office tried to argue that this was human rights training, we fought a year-long freedom of information battle with the Ministry of Defence and it was finally forced to admit that only one hour out of 60 on the training course was on human rights.

- Q24 Ann Clwyd:** What more would you want the UK to do?

Mark Farmaner: It is quite striking if you compare the situation now, with the worst human rights crisis we have seen for decades in Burma, with what was happening exactly 10 years ago in response to the crushing of the monk-led uprising. At that time, Britain led the world in mobilising support to pressure the military regime in Burma. They dispatched a Minister to ASEAN countries to try to build up support within Asia to apply pressure on the military.

The Prime Minister was personally calling world leaders to build support for action at the UN Security Council. The Foreign Secretary was calling EU Foreign Ministers trying to mobilise support from the European Union. None of that is happening this time around. We have had three meetings at the Security Council with no practical outcomes. We have had the suspension of EU training and we have had discussion now that the EU might introduce a visa ban, but it is not yet confirmed whether there are going to be any other measures. That is an incredibly weak response to what are such serious human rights violations and violations of international law. We are not leading the way in the way that we did in the past.

- Q25 Ms Ghani:** I have two very quick questions to Mr Khin. I am referring to an article you published, "Only international pressure can save Rohingya now". You may recall the article. You say that "the policy towards the military must change. A visa ban should be placed on military personnel instead of red carpet visits". Can you elaborate on that, please?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tun Khin: The military has been perpetuating crimes against Rohingya. Half a million of the population fled because of the atrocities: slaughter, rape and mass killings going on all over. It is not happening just today; it has happened since October and November 2016. In 2012 also there was state-organised violence by the military. At the same time, when they come to visit the western countries such as Austria and Germany, they are given a kind of red carpet and encouragement. If this continues, there will be much more. It needs to be stopped. They should call for sanctions on the military, who are particularly perpetuating actions against the Rohingya.

Q26 **Ms Ghani:** You mentioned Germany and Austria. Are you aware of any forthcoming visits to European countries that might be taking place?

Tun Khin: We have seen practically a few months ago.

Mark Farmaner: We are not aware of any other. Normally, the first we hear about it is when he puts it on his Facebook page that he is at the airport about to leave.

Q27 **Ms Ghani:** The Committee has received a letter from the Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. It has not been published yet. I am going to read out a line or two and I will ask a question to both of you. The letter says: "Accusations of ethnic cleansing and genocide are totally false. Such terms must not be used lightly and need to be considered only after there are solid evidences". That is a letter that we the Committee have received. Having taken your evidence just now, how would you like to respond to that, Mr Farmaner?

Mark Farmaner: It is the United Nations that is using the term ethnic cleansing. The United Nations has also conducted a study at the end of last year which was published at the beginning of this year and a study in June 2016 in which it concluded that the human rights violations against the Rohingya could constitute crimes against humanity. So this is not just a human rights organisation saying it. The documentation is endless on the human rights violations against the Rohingya.

This letter has come from an embassy, a ministry that is under Aung San Suu Kyi's control. This is denial of some of the most serious human rights violations which are not in dispute in the rest of the world. The United Nations has documented this. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty, and other organisations have documented this. Rohingya organisations have documented this for years. What we are seeing is an expansion and an escalation of these kinds of human rights violations against the Rohingya. It is not new. The fact-finding mission that the United Nations has established now to investigate this is not going to tell us anything we don't know and haven't known for years.

Q28 **Ms Ghani:** The letter continues: "Assertions in the media that horrifying crimes have been committed against innocent people have only served to intensify the anxiety of the international community". This contrasts starkly with evidence that you have given and what we have seen in the media. You believe that Aung San Suu Kyi would have sanctioned the



content and terms of this letter?

Mark Farmaner: Yes, absolutely. In the departments that she controls, especially her own Foreign Ministry, she is very strict with the output and the people who work with her. She is responsible for this. I know that diplomats have spoken to her about this issue in the past, because she had this flashing “fake rape” sign on her website and her Facebook page when the military were conducting an offensive in October and November last year. That was raised with her. She is completely aware of that and it is still up on her website flashing away.

Tun Khin: As a Rohingya myself, I grew up in Arakan State, I have seen this systematic persecution against my own people. During the democratic period of time, Rohingyas had rights like other nationalities in Burma. At that time my grandfather was a parliamentary secretary, but I am not a citizen of Burma. If you look at the whole issue like the stripping of our ethnic rights since 1962, when the military took power. They stripped us of our citizenship, they imposed restriction of movement, restriction of marriage, restriction of education and the confiscation of lands, and then they created popular violence in 2012 and state-organised violence, pushing the Rohingyas into their camps.

They then stopped humanitarian aid to the Rohingyas. President Thein Sein, the last time, asked, “Do you want to leave this country, or do you want to stay without food?” That is the way he put it. What is happening now is mass killings, direct killings of the Rohingya—slaughtering, burning alive. This is the latest stage. According to the people whom I met in Bangladesh, they state that this is actually the last stage of genocide: there is no more step from now. That is what we have seen.

Q29 **Chair:** May I ask two final questions? First, Mr Khin, do you agree with Mr Farmaner on the question of sanctions? Secondly, people have said that sanctions would only push Burma back into the influence of China, and would therefore reverse some of the progress that has been made in recent years. Would you care to comment perhaps on the first one, Mr Khin, and Mr Farmaner on the second?

Mark Farmaner: He is asking if you support the sanctions that I have been talking about, and whether you also support the targeted sanctions on the military.

Tun Khin: Yes, of course.

Q30 **Chair:** You agree with Mr Farmaner?

Tun Khin: Yes, I totally agree.

Q31 **Chair:** Mr Farmaner, would you care to comment on the China question?

Mark Farmaner: I think it has always been exaggerated. There is a lot of prejudice and hatred of Chinese people within Burma, just as there is against Rohingya and Muslims. It is not on the same scale, but it would not surprise me if the nationalism focused on the Rohingya and Muslims at



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the moment resulted in violence against people from China in Burma very soon.

We have to separate the issues. If we have targeted sanctions on the military, pressure on the military is a very a different thing from sanctions on the Government. Although the West is critical of Aung San Suu Kyi and what is going on at the moment, they are still backing her. They see her as the only game in town. She is still going to get the international support for the reforms that she wants to push through and the modernisation of Government; that is not going to change. So I don't think that is a danger, and certainly the military do not want to be pushed closer to China.

It is also, I think, a myth that Aung San Suu Kyi is in danger of a military coup. The current political system in Burma is entirely the creation of the military. They introduced this new constitution in a top-down process—they did not negotiate or compromise with anybody—and they are doing very well out of it. They have got the sanctions lifted; Min Aung Hlaing has been on trips to Europe and around the world—he travels more abroad than Aung San Suu Kyi, the foreign minister. They are more popular at home. They are no longer facing a threat of an uprising at home. They are not facing international pressure in the way they used to. So, Aung San Suu Kyi is not constrained by that, and sanctions are not going to make any difference to that factor.

Q32 **Chair:** Thank you very much both of you for coming in. We are grateful for your testimony this afternoon.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Champa Patel and Dr Lee Jones.

Q33 **Chair:** Dr Patel and Dr Jones, can I ask you briefly to introduce yourselves?

Dr Jones: I am Lee Jones from Queen Mary University of London. I am Reader in International Politics. I have been researching Myanmar for around 13 years, including research on the impact of international economic sanctions on the country.

Dr Patel: Hi, I am Champa Patel. I am the Head of Asia for Chatham House, but formerly Regional Director for South Asia and South East Asia for Amnesty International.

Chair: Thank you very much for coming.

May I start off with a question about Burma's internal politics? What is your view of the statements by the Burmese Government, both civil and military, on the current situation? Have you been at all surprised, and why is there so little apparent trust from international reporting and the NGOs? Mr Jones would you like to start us off?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dr Jones: The basic take-home point I would want you to understand is that virtually nobody inside the country views the Rohingyas as one of the indigenous ethnic minorities of Myanmar. They are viewed almost entirely as illegal Bengali immigrants, who have come into the country either under British colonialism or under the independent Government by sneaking across a poorly defended border.

The view inside from the majority of the population is that the outside world simply does not understand this fact and there is a kind of global conspiracy against the Government. In fact, the population has rallied behind the head of the military and Aung San Suu Kyi. I would say that the country is more united now than it has been in 50 years. That is the result of a particularly racist, xenophobic form of nationalism, which has increasingly incorporated Buddhism in a very intolerant manner.

This is a very long-standing issue; it has not emerged only since the transition to a more electoral regime. It has happened for many, many decades. That is why we have seen many rounds of forced displacement against the Rohingya. Any attempt to intervene on this issue will confront that entrenched political reality inside the country.

Dr Patel: I agree; one has only to look at social media posts to see the high level of support for the Government and the military. We have talked a lot today about the discrimination that has been perpetrated over decades. One should not dismiss easily the cultural aspect of that. Whether it is from hard-line Buddhist clerics such as Ashin Wirathu, the cultural discrimination aspect of it is equally as important in finding a solution to the current impasse as well as tackling institutionalised discrimination. Perhaps we can talk more about that in this session, but it is going to be difficult to see a political solution that deals with the current situation, unless one tackles the long-standing cultural discrimination faced by the Rohingya.

Q34 **Ms Ghani:** You are both experts in your field and have no doubt been observing the situation in the region and country for some time. I want to go back to the letter that was sent by the embassy. There is an interesting point that refers back to the evidence that you just gave about a feeling of conspiracy theory in the country.

The letter says: "While such claims,"—going back to horrifying crimes—"might appear realistic at initial glance to an ordinary viewer, skilled observers with knowledge of the history of Myanmar and exposure to the propaganda tactics of terrorists will see such comments for what they really are."

I would like you, as expert observers, to explain to us whether what we are seeing and hearing are the realities on the ground, and what the embassy is trying to put forward in the letter and would like us to understand is not actually true. I would like you to elaborate on that a bit.

Dr Patel: The previous speakers have already outlined that the UN and other credible international organisations have documented facts on the ground over a successive number of years. The embassy, of course, is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

going to provide a rationalisation that suits its own political objectives but there is a corresponding, if not higher, body of evidence that shows the high levels of discrimination, both cultural and institutionalised, faced by the Rohingya but also other Muslims in Myanmar.

One must be careful, but I think the Rohingya face a particular, virulent form of discrimination because they lack citizenship but these measures in place that discriminate against the Rohingya also discriminate against other Muslim minorities in Myanmar.

Dr Jones: I think it is true that the embassy is obviously engaged in an information war and is putting one side of the story—and it is a very slanted one. The embassy may be on stronger grounds in disputing particular claims and the particular use of terminology such as “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide”.

Whether you want to call what is happening there in those terms is open to some dispute. Those terms have been used by campaign groups and the term “ethnic cleansing” has been used by the United Nations. I think how the Myanmar Government understands it is that this is a security operation against terrorists, and that it has essentially gone disastrously wrong and many people are fleeing the crackdown.

I think there is some truth in that. It is not my view that the Myanmar Government is trying to exterminate an entire population, which is the usual understanding that we have of the term “genocide”. Nor has it cleansed this ethnic group from all parts of Rakhine State. The violence is concentrated in the northern part of Rakhine State, which is where the ARSA operations have taken place. Of course, very large numbers of people have been forcibly displaced by an extraordinarily brutal and incompetent security crackdown. But that is my view of what is going on, and that may be the position that the embassy is trying to communicate. To say that there are no atrocities and no crimes and so on is clearly false.

Dr Patel: Under the laws of war and international law, it is clearly a disproportionate response. Previously, it was said that ARSA numbers are essentially in the hundreds rather than thousands. To see the exodus of half a million people into Bangladesh and hundreds of thousands of people internally displaced within Myanmar: this is not a proportionate response to whatever terrorist threat they thought was posed.

Dr Jones: To underscore that, “proportionate response” is not usually what the Myanmar military does. The way that it carries out counter-insurgency operations is very commonly this approach of attacking entire villages and displacing large numbers of people. This is why there are many refugees being displaced in fighting in Kachin and Shan States—some over the border into China, for example. This is classic incompetent, heavy-handed brutal counter-insurgency operations from the Myanmar military.

Q35 **Ms Ghani:** It has been quite difficult to observe Buddhists being involved in this sort of nationalism; this is not what you expect to see from



Buddhists. To be realistic, it is not often we see vast groups of Muslims being victims of a crime, because you always assume they are involved in something else—that isn't appropriate, but it is just the way the media portrays them. That has been quite difficult for the West to digest. How important do you think is this model for a Buddhist nationalism of just trying to remove people who do not conform, whether it be through their heritage or their faith?

Dr Patel: I think it is more accurately nationalism. What we may see is a move towards more Buddhist ideological justification for the position that is increasingly hardening. It is different from the motives of other transnational extremist groups that use religion as an ideological justification, whether it is the establishment of a caliphate or whatever. In that sense, I think it is more accurately nationalism, although it has clearly become more infused through its association with Buddhism.

But this is not unique: we saw this in Thailand and we have seen it in Sri Lanka. Asia is such a wide heterogeneous region; it is not necessarily just an Islamist threat—you have Christians being persecuted in Pakistan. The reality of the region is highly complex.

Q36 **Chair:** The monk Ashin Wirathu has been extremely active in stirring up violence; perhaps you would like to talk briefly about that.

Dr Jones: I wouldn't want to over-state the importance of a single individual. Ashin Wirathu was jailed by the military regime in 2003 for incitement against Muslims, which shows you that this was going on even under the previous military junta, and they were actually taking steps to try and suppress some of this extremism.

Under the new civilian administration since 2011, these groups have been able to organise much more freely. Again, this has very long roots. The fusion of Buddhism with Ma Ba Tha Buddhist nationalism since the 1960s has become increasingly exclusive ethnically and religiously. There is a deep-seated fear that goes back to the colonial period that Buddhism is at risk of extinction.

The British brought in plenty of Muslim workers from the rest of the Indian Raj—as it was then—and also Christian missionaries. There was a deep-seated fear on the part of many Buddhists at that time that their religion and culture was under threat. That has persisted. Even though only 3% of the population is Muslim, there is nonetheless a widespread belief that there is a sort of demographic tidal wave of Muslims sweeping over the country that will render Myanmar rather like Indonesia, for example.

Indonesia used to be under a Hindu empire, now it is majority-Muslim. This is a deeply-seated fear that is widely held, however irrational and disconnected from reality you may think it is. This is why there is such widespread support for discriminatory provisions in law to "protect" the race and religion, and either indifference or active enthusiasm for the maltreatment of Muslim populations.

Q37 **Ms Ghani:** You said that only 3% of the population is Muslim and that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

there is widespread support for the things that are taking place. I just need to understand how much widespread support there is amongst the average Burmese person, who might be getting very limited access to the media. Is this just done by those in power, or is the average villager also psychologically engaged in thinking these are the other people?

Dr Patel: Mobile phone penetration is at 70%. Any quick scan of social media—I am sure you will find this as well—will show just how offensive, virulent and hateful the rhetoric is. It is very difficult to read. One should not underestimate the high level of public support for the measures being taken against the Rohingya within Myanmar, which plays into the potential solutions and a way forward. If you have a public climate that is so hostile to the Rohingya, there is a cultural aspect to this that needs to be addressed as well.

Q38 **Ms Ghani:** How do we overcome that?

Dr Patel: Do you want us to talk through all the potential options now?

Q39 **Ms Ghani:** If there is an issue among those in power and there is also an issue among the communities on the ground, this is going to be quite a task. You would assume that perhaps there would be enough good people on the ground saying, “Not in our name”, but you are telling us that that is not the case—that it is even more complicated than we think.

Dr Patel: Yes. The response of the international community so far is focused largely on the humanitarian crisis—

Q40 **Ms Ghani:** No—within Burma.

Dr Patel: I was going to say that—it is focused largely on the humanitarian crisis. But as others have said, there is a lack of political will within the country to find a long-term solution because the root of the problem is the ongoing statelessness of the Rohingya. Until the ongoing statelessness can be resolved—but that is still only one aspect of it, because to give people citizenship does not mean that they are going to be accepted by other citizens in the same country.

This is something that has to come from within Myanmar society, supported by regional powers and the international community, to reverse decades of institutionalised and cultural discrimination. There are no short-term fixes here, but there are immediate things that be dealt with: ensuring that there is humanitarian access. I am sure we will talk about whether sanctions will be helpful or not, but solutions have to come from within the region. Regional countries have a greater role to play—India, China, ASEAN countries—and have not really stepped up to the plate in the way that they could, because they are genuinely influences on Myanmar in a way that the UK, the EU and the US are not.

Dr Jones: There are short, medium and long-term things that can be done. The shifting of cultural attitudes clearly sits in the long-term goal. These are deeply-seated attitudes that will not be changed overnight, but things can be done to challenge and shape public attitudes by amplifying the voices of moderation; amplifying the stories of communal harmony—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

these communities did live together peacefully side by side for many decades—and taking steps to mainstream more tolerant attitudes through the education curriculum.

There are concrete steps that can be taken, but these will only yield results over the course of decades, perhaps. There are other short and medium-term things that have to be done. The idea that we can change attitudes and then that solves the citizenship problem—it cannot be done that particular way.

Q41 **Mike Gapes:** Is it true that some of the Rohingya are not Muslim and some of the people who have had to flee to Bangladesh are from other religions? I was told that by someone—is it true?

Dr Patel: Yes; ethnicity and religion are not necessarily synonymous. You can have Rohingya Hindus. Other minorities in Rakhine who have been caught up in the violence have also had to flee their homes, as have Rakhine Buddhists, who were living in the same area.

Q42 **Mike Gapes:** So they have gone to Bangladesh as well?

Dr Patel: In much smaller numbers.

Q43 **Mike Gapes:** So this is an attack on a people living in an area, pretty indiscriminately?

Dr Patel: Yes. It is clear that the response has been disproportionate to the risk that they felt was posed by the ARSA.

Q44 **Mike Gapes:** So Bangladesh, which is a predominantly Muslim country, but which has within it Christians and Hindus and, presumably, Buddhists as well, is hosting people of many different communities and different religions: predominantly Muslim, but also of other faiths—is that correct?

Dr Patel: Yes, but in much smaller numbers.

Q45 **Mike Gapes:** I understand that. I was told it, so thought I would check. Thank you.

Q46 **Ms Ghani:** My final question is about the ARSA. What do you think of suggestions that it is linked to a wider international radical Islamist terrorist network? Do you think that has been blown out of proportion?

Dr Jones: The organisation that has done the most public work to investigate ARSA is the International Crisis Group. They are the only ones that have produced any concrete evidence of any external linkages that ARSA has outside of Myanmar. They have found that there are exiled Rohingyas in Saudi Arabia that are providing moral and financial support to the group. Beyond that, any claims that they have any external linkages or any external funding or arming are rumours, innuendo or propaganda without any evidence being offered.

There is some quite solid investigative journalism by Agence France-Pressé that found that the leader of this group had tried to raise arms and money in Bangladesh among Islamist groups and they had rejected his advances.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Now that the group has demonstrated its capacity to strike, those groups have now offered their assistance, and he has rejected them. So ARSA has realised that it does not help the group to be associated as an Islamist terrorist group, which is what the Myanmar Government are trying to portray it as. It wants to depict itself entirely as being a national liberation movement. So far, all the publicly available evidence points in that direction.

Dr Patel: The challenge is, whether it asks for support or not, the other transnational extremist groups may offer it. There is a risk, whether it is al-Qaeda in the September video saying, "Support our brothers and sisters" or whether it is IS-linked groups. It is not a question of whether it is sought, but it could still be offered. There is a risk of that.

Q47 **Ms Ghani:** But there is no evidence of a link.

Dr Jones: No.

Ms Ghani: That is what we need to be clear about.

Dr Jones: It is important to note that the situation in the border is so appalling and so desperate that it is undoubtedly a breeding ground for Islamist violence. Unless the situation is resolved, the possibility that jihadis will flock to this area to try to stir up trouble and join the organisations and so on increases with every month that goes by.

Q48 **Mike Gapes:** Can I ask how you would assess the international response to the crisis in Rakhine so far?

Dr Jones: It has been quite limited. As was mentioned earlier, the United Kingdom is the penholder on the UN Security Council for Myanmar and has convened two closed discussions, informal consultations, and one open meeting at the Security Council.

The Security Council is clearly deadlocked because China and Russia do not think that any more significant pressure should be placed on the regime. They would see it as being counterproductive. Although certain officials in the United Nations have been very vocal, the UN Security Council is not going to pass even a resolution or even issue a presidential statement on this.

So it comes down to bilateral or multilateral pressure. The situation is largely as your previous witnesses described. Very little has been done. There was a statement of concern from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which did not criticise the Government, but did call on it to offer humanitarian access and implement the Annan commission's findings. There have been calls for stronger action from Malaysia in particular, which takes a very firm stance on this issue. Beyond that, very little is happening, it must be said.

Dr Patel: I think it is likely that countries like China and India have privately raised concerns, particularly if they feel that the situation is going



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to undermine the economic interests in their countries. They would never do so publicly; I don't think that will ever happen.

I believe a concerted effort is needed in the region to find an alternative solution, because it affects many countries in the region: not just neighbouring countries like India and Bangladesh, but Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, which have hosted displaced Rohingya populations from previous crises. I think there is an absence of that at the moment. ASEAN has no co-ordinated multilateral response. Indonesia has done the most behind the scenes to try and find a solution. Malaysia engages in megaphone diplomacy, but there is no effective intervention at the moment.

Q49 **Mike Gapes:** Is Myanmar a member of ASEAN?

Dr Jones: Yes.

Q50 **Mike Gapes:** As I understand it, they normally work by consensus. Is that correct?

Dr Jones: That is true, although the Malaysians say the latest statement from ASEAN was not made by consensus. They have distanced themselves from it, so it does not reflect reality.

Q51 **Mike Gapes:** Is there a potential that this could then become a very divisive public issue?

Dr Jones: It is already a divisive issue in the region. The Muslim majority nations in ASEAN have always been more concerned about this issue than the others.

Q52 **Mike Gapes:** As regards the UN Security Council, in the case of Syria there was a push, even knowing that there would be a Russian veto, to go for a Security Council resolution. Are we at that point yet, where the EU countries, the US and the UK could push something, knowing that it will be vetoed, or is there a problem even getting a majority among the 15 on the Security Council?

Dr Jones: It depends on what the resolution would say. What would the western states actually put in a resolution that was not just a statement of condemnation and concern, which they can say—and have said—around the Security Council table?

Q53 **Mike Gapes:** But they can't even get the Russians and Chinese to agree to that.

Dr Patel: The Russians and Chinese will not agree to a resolution at this stage or, I think, ever.

Q54 **Mike Gapes:** At which point, is there any possibility of a General Assembly route, using the Islamic Conference, and the uniting for peace procedure, which could be extremely embarrassing for China?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dr Patel: I do not think China would perceive it as that. The question I would probably formulate is what is likely to have an impact on the ground, because these resolutions have negligible impact.

Q55 **Mike Gapes:** I understand that, but clearly for the Government of Myanmar-Burma and for China it would be extremely embarrassing to have a huge number of countries around the world focusing on this issue.

Dr Jones: It would be embarrassing for the Myanmar Government, undoubtedly, but I do not see why China should be particularly embarrassed. It is not as if China is directly or indirectly responsible for what has happened.

Dr Patel: Or affected directly, either. The refugee flows are not going in their direction.

Q56 **Mike Gapes:** So what are you saying—that there is no real scope for a regional solution at the moment?

Dr Patel: No, I think the solution will have to lie in the region, but there is no political will to find a solution at the moment. So for ASEAN the principle of consensus is basically hampering any ability to find a co-ordinated way forward, because essentially they would have to agree with Myanmar, so they cannot agree a resolution currently. Who are the influences on the Myanmar authorities? It is India, China and ASEAN to a lesser degree. In the absence of any kind of political will you are in an impasse. It is because people do not want to deal with the root issue of the ongoing statelessness of the Rohingya.

Dr Jones: I emphasise that ASEAN became very concerned about the situation in Myanmar when it was put under a great deal of pressure by western states, particularly after 2003, and ASEAN did in fact try to create a lot of pressure on the then military junta, to accelerate the progress towards what the military calls discipline-flourishing democracy. It had absolutely negligible impact. The Myanmar military is not in the business of listening to outside advice. So even if ASEAN was able to agree a common approach, it is not clear what it could actually do that would be any use, and Myanmar would not listen to ASEAN.

Q57 **Mike Gapes:** And that was at a time when there were UN sanctions.

Dr Jones: There were never any UN sanctions.

Q58 **Mike Gapes:** Sorry—international sanctions from some countries.

Dr Jones: There were international sanctions, which ASEAN has never agreed with, because it sees them as counterproductive—rightly, in my view.

Q59 **Mike Gapes:** This is very bleak. What influence—and our job is to scrutinise the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—does the UK Government have?

Dr Jones: I think the UK Government has to tread quite carefully, because of the colonial baggage. This problem does go back to the colonial



HOUSE OF COMMONS

period when large numbers of Bengalis moved into Myanmar, and that played into the form—

Mike Gapes: We are going back 100 years.

Dr Jones: Yes, but memories are very raw of these things. Anticolonial nationalism is still a very strong force in the country. So when we have, for example, people reciting Kipling in the Shwedagon pagoda—

Mike Gapes: The Foreign Secretary.

Dr Jones: That causes a significant backlash in the country. So we may be going back 100 years. In fact we are not going back quite that far; but this matters for nationalists on the ground. The fervour of nationalism in the country right now is very strong. There is a baggage there that is felt by the people on the ground. The UK needs to tread very carefully.

Can the UK have any leverage or influence? Perhaps the main access that the UK thought it might have is through Aung San Suu Kyi; indeed, the Minister of State has visited her and had assurances from her, for example about the repatriation of refugees. But she seems to have repeated in private what she says in public, which suggests that she genuinely believes the things that she is saying in public. I would not forcefully disagree with anything that has been said about her position so far. I think UK leverage is pretty limited.

Q60 **Mike Gapes:** Does the US have any leverage?

Dr Jones: Not in particular. The reality is that two decades of western sanctions have essentially removed any leverage that the West had over Myanmar. So if they want to re-impose sanctions now, very little US investment exists in the country to cut off. There is no relationship to sever.

The western powers do not have any relationship with the Myanmar military any more, for example; cutting off training and things like that cuts off the links or any dialogue they might have with the military. There is no high-level dialogue between our military personnel at the embassy and military personnel in Myanmar. There are very few links and relationships. The links are all into the civilian side of the Government.

Q61 **Chair:** The British Chief of the Defence Staff went out to Myanmar in 2013—I think I am right in saying that—so there are some links.

Dr Jones: But ad hoc links. I am talking about institutionalised dialogue between the two sides.

Dr Patel: Sanctions from the West will be seen as largely symbolic. They may serve to make the West feel better, but they will not change realities on the ground. It goes back to the question of how much focus has been put on Aung San Suu Kyi, relative to the focus on the military who are actually conducting the campaign. There is an element of that that is counterproductive, in my view, because we are not focusing on the people who are actually conducting these operations; we are focusing on a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

symbol. Sanctions in that respect would have symbolic value, but perhaps more to the West than in terms of the impact intended on the Myanmar military.

Q62 **Mike Gapes:** Final question from me. Is there any country that can facilitate a peaceful resolution to this issue?

Dr Patel: I would say China.

Dr Jones: The country that can facilitate a peaceful resolution is Myanmar.

Mike Gapes: No—any other country.

Dr Jones: By this I mean that the refugee issue will be solved—if it is solved—bilaterally, by agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh. That is what happened in the previous rounds of mass forced displacement in 1978 and 1992. After 1992, it was done with the involvement of the United Nations. China is not going to apply external pressure on Myanmar to do particular things about the Rohingya situation.

I would say that China is not simply obstructionist in this situation, though, because it knows that the defence of Chinese investments inside the country is not necessarily secured in the long term by these kinds of brutal counter-insurgency operations. It has tried to become more and more involved in the internal peace process in eastern Myanmar; its special envoy is directly involved in those talks.

China also offered to mediate between Myanmar and Bangladesh at the end of last year. That was rejected by Myanmar. So I think China is open to what is increasingly called “creative involvement”, despite its rhetoric of non-interference, but it will not apply overwhelming pressure on the Government to try to make it do x or y, and it is very doubtful whether it would be able to do that either.

Mike Gapes: Thank you.

Chair: Happy?

Mike Gapes: I am not happy.

Chair: Content that the question has been answered?

Mike Gapes: Yes.

Q63 **Royston Smith:** I want to go back to sanctions first. Dr Jones, you are on record saying that you do not think they will work, and you have just made that view clear. You both said that, although the previous witnesses said that they thought they were a good idea. I can understand that people have different views, but they did distinguish sanctions on the country from sanctions on the military. I understand that you do not think sanctions are a good idea, but could you touch specifically on sanctions on the military, rather than just sanctions in general?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dr Jones: To be clear, I am not saying that sanctions in general are bad or that they never work, but I did conduct a three-year study into the impact of economic sanctions, including in Myanmar.

The arms embargo had zero effect on the military. In fact, from 1989 to 2010, the military were able to import \$2.48 billion worth of arms and the army doubled in size in that period. Clearly, the arms embargo did not restrict the military—in fact they are more powerful than they ever were.

As for sanctions targeted at particular individuals, such as military leaders, senior officials, crony capitalists linked to the regime and so on, I found that they also had a negligible impact largely because those individuals do not particularly wish to travel to or transact with the West. That is not as important to them as has been previously portrayed in this session. They were also able to evade most of those sanctions either by manufacturing new passports or setting up proxy companies to evade banking restrictions. In the asset freeze, barely \$1 million of assets were seized in the West because those individuals do not bank in the West. A leaked diplomatic cable from the United States in 2008 concluded that, “sanctions may have complicated their lives” but, “it remains business as usual”.

Crucially, those sanctions did not have any political impact. Surely the purpose of sanctions is to impose some kind of economic pain to get political gain. The hope is that you change the behaviour of the people being targeted by the sanctions. There is no detectable change whatever in the strategies being pursued by the people and entities targeted by sanctions.

The 2008 constitution, as you have previously heard, was mostly crafted by the military. The exact same deal that was on the table was offered by the military to opposition forces in 1993. This is a long-term strategy put forward by the military for the transformation of Myanmar’s regime, and they succeeded. In so far as sanctions made it more difficult for them, all they did was slow down that process. To my mind, 15 years of sanctions only delayed the transition to the current institutional set-up. I have not seen anything change in the country that would make me think that sanctions would be more effective now than they were in the past 20 years.

Q64 **Andrew Rosindell:** I have a general comment and question. The whole situation is very depressing; it does not sound to me like there is any obvious immediate solution. My question is did we see this coming? Was this anticipated? Has this been brewing for a long time? If it was, how did we not prepare for this situation? It is always better to try to solve an issue before it blows up than to wait and see people be displaced and have cruel actions taken against them. How is it that countries such as the UK and others did not see this coming and prepare for it, in your view?

Dr Patel: That has been well articulated by the previous speakers. This was known, although perhaps the scale or the intensity of the current crisis was not. There have been sporadic crises, such as last October and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

in 2012, when there was the anti-Muslim violence in Rakhine State. This should not be a surprise to people who have been observing the country and noticed where the headwinds are. Perhaps the scale of the response by the military to the attacks is much greater than has been the case before, but this is not new. In that respect, yes, why hasn't the international community done more previously to try to address these things? Maybe some of that is not wanting to undermine Aung San Suu Kyi and the delicate balance between the NLD and the military in the new Government, but I think there is enough evidence now on the table to show that the sitting civilian Government are not doing anything to address the issue either.

Dr Jones: I broadly agree. This is a slow-burning crisis. There have been previous rounds of massive forced displacement; this is simply the latest. Communal violence flared in 2012 and there were massive security crackdowns following ARSA attacks in 2015-16, so this has been looming for some time. Western Governments have been aware of those issues and aware that it is a really complicated issue that is very difficult to resolve, so I think there has been a focus on the so-called democratic transition in the country at the expense of other issues.

This has been a long-standing grievance for all of Myanmar's ethnic minorities: in the West, we have tended to focus on conflict between the military and Bamar democratic forces and ignore the long-running ethnic conflicts—these are the longest-running ethnic conflicts on the planet—which have plagued the country since independence, and even beforehand.

Ethnic minorities in the country have always felt that there has been too much emphasis on Aung San Suu Kyi and the quest for democracy, while their plight has been ignored. The West has engaged with Myanmar during the transition, but the Kachin and Shan people are now saying, "They're doing to the Rohingya what they've been doing to us for the last five years, and you've been ignoring us. Now you're making a fuss about what's happening to the Rohingya. You're so one-sided."

So there are even divisions among the ethnic minorities, and I think it is partly because of this one-eyed view that we in the West have taken towards the situation. It has been a morality play between the wicked military and the great democrats, when the situation in the country is actually much more complicated than that. The ethnic dimension to Myanmar politics and the violence in the country is really strong, and is perhaps the most determining factor in what actually happens in the country.

Dr Patel: Just to add to that, on the discrimination faced by the minorities, the Kachin-Shan conflict has been decades long, but they are still recognised as citizens. The situation of the Rohingya is unique in that they lack citizenship. As much as the international community is looking for a solution, at some point there needs to be a discussion about statelessness, because until that is resolved, what does repatriation actually mean in practice when you don't have citizenship? What does it



HOUSE OF COMMONS

mean to verify somebody who doesn't have papers because they don't belong to the country you are sending them back to? What are you sending them back to if the military has razed villages to the ground?

I think there are other things here that need dealing with, because you are essentially sending people back into an environment that is inhospitable for them because they are culturally not accepted. Refugee repatriation is just the beginning of a range of things that are needed in order to find a long-term solution.

Q65 Ann Clwyd: So what is to be done? We have heard a lot of negatives, but what are the positives? What, positively, should this country be doing?

Dr Jones: To me, the only real way in is the Annan commission, because the Government has at least pledged itself, and has reaffirmed the pledge, to implement the Annan commission's recommendations in full. There are doubtless divisions within the Government, and certainly within the military, about how far to go with this, but given that that is their public commitment, it gives outsiders a way in. It says, "Okay, this is what you want to do. Let us support you in the implementation of this." That, I think, has to be the central plank of any external policy.

The refugee crisis has to be addressed through, basically, a massive aid and development initiative. There are the issues that Champa just mentioned about verifying refugees. Because of the scale of the displacement and the destruction of people's homes and property, even fewer people this time around will have documentation, so although the Myanmar Government has said it will accept bona fide refugees back, the question is on what terms, using what documentation and so on. There will need to be a technical assistance effort to try to help people prove their bona fides.

But then there is the question: repatriation into what? Of course, repatriation must be voluntary, and it must be safe. That is the non-refoulement principle. It is essential to uphold that principle, and in the past, that has proven extremely challenging. After 1992, Bangladesh forcibly repatriated many Rohingya refugees, even under United Nations supervision. There will need to be a lot of independent monitoring of the situation there to make sure that those abuses do not recur. Repatriation has to be voluntary, but we are essentially asking the Rohingya at the moment to be repatriated into concentration camps, because those are the conditions that they will be repatriated into. Nobody will willingly agree to that.

What I have suggested is a sort of Marshall plan for Rakhine State to massively uplift the social and economic situation for all the communities in Rakhine State. It cannot solely be aimed at the Rohingya population. The reason is that the ethnic Rakhine, who are the majority ethnic group in that area and are Buddhist, often see external donors as being one-sidedly in favour of the Rohingya, so they would not really allow any one-sided aid effort to deploy, but also their conditions are atrocious. Often the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

conditions in Rakhine villages are barely any better than those in the internally displaced persons camps.

What the UK and others could do is try to form a donor consortium to support the rapid implementation of the Annan commission's recommendations. Chinese involvement could and should be sought as part of its belt and road ambitions. If projects were run through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank—which, thanks to the involvement of the UK and other European countries, is governed according to international norms—the mega-projects that have caused so much corruption, forced displacement, land-grabs and so on could be avoided. In the longer term, we need the programmes I talked about to tackle Islamophobia and ethnic conflict inside the country.

Dr Patel: I would add citizenship, because essentially you cannot ask people to return to somewhere they are not recognised. This may be unpalatable, but if we are to learn from the history of displaced populations that lacked citizenship, there must be some thinking done about what happens if that population becomes semi-permanent, if not permanent, in Bangladesh.

Obviously, people want to focus on a solution that allows for the return of people, but if one is to look at the situation of the Palestinians, we must also think about the half a million people who are now displaced, do not have citizenship and will not have the required papers. There are some contingency scenarios here that I am not sure I have the answers to, but they need to be considered as well.

Dr Jones: The bottom line is that if the Myanmar Government does not accept this kind of assistance, it would need to be redeployed to the borderlands of Bangladesh, which is also an extraordinarily impoverished area. Bangladesh does not wish to absorb this population and cannot do it without international assistance. That is why repatriation under safe, decent, humane conditions is the only way forward, but if that will not be accepted, those people have to be helped in situ.

Q66 **Mike Gapes:** Bangladesh has taken a huge number of people. Correct me if I am wrong, but they are not all in camps; some of them are in towns and villages. Given what you said about people not wanting to go back to concentration camps, is there not a great pressure on those people to better the lives of their children by going away from the border area, elsewhere into Bangladesh, and then in effect permanently staying in Bangladesh? Is there any pushback you are aware of within Bangladesh against that? Linked to that, on the point you made about Palestinians, the Palestinians in Jordan became part of the society, whereas in Lebanon they were not allowed to own land or inherit. How is Bangladesh reacting to and dealing with these refugees?

Dr Patel: Bangladesh has historically always hosted displaced populations. They already hosted about 400,000 formerly displaced Rohingya before the current crisis. The challenge for Bangladesh is its own domestic political context. The ruling Awami League will have concerns about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

radicalisation and recruitment if the situation becomes protracted. Opposition parties like the Bangladesh Nationalist Party will say that the Awami League are not doing enough to support the Rohingya. It could play into domestic politics going into next year, when there are elections to be held, in a way that is unhelpful to the situation of the Rohingya. It could get enmeshed in domestic politics in Bangladesh. Could you remind me of the question?

Q67 **Mike Gapes:** I was just thinking about the people wanting to move from the border areas elsewhere into Bangladesh.

Dr Patel: Or India, or Thailand, or Malaysia, or Indonesia, but that is not something new. You have seen those migratory patterns with earlier crises. That is why I think strongly that there should be a regional solution. It affects many countries in the region, and the lack of a multilateral response from countries in the region because they do not want to deal with this issue is just sowing the seeds for future discontent. As well as repatriation, unless there are legal pathways to citizenship alongside a longer-term project of dealing with cultural discrimination, there is no end to this. It is a cycle that will keep happening, in my view.

Chair: It is a cycle that we see veiled in different ways in the UK, with feelings of resentment about the perceived inaction towards this community growing. That is one of the reasons why we are extremely grateful for your evidence today and for the evidence earlier. Thank you very much indeed for coming and spending time with us this afternoon.