

# International Development Committee

## Oral evidence: DFID's work on Bangladesh, Burma and the Rohingya crisis, HC 504

Wednesday 22 November 2017

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Mr Ivan Lewis; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Paul Scully; Mr Virendra Sharma; Henry Smith.

Questions 49-105

### Witnesses

I: Mr Khondker M Talha, Deputy High Commissioner of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the United Kingdom.

II: The Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Minister of State for International Development and Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Dr Richard Montgomery, Director, Asia, Caribbean & Overseas Territories Division, DFID, and Patrick Moody, Additional Director, Asia Pacific Directorate, FCO.

## Examination of witness

Witness: Mr Khondker M Talha.

**Q49 Chair:** Your Excellency, thank you very much indeed for being here with us today. We are very grateful. We have about 45 minutes with you, and we are going to try to cover nine areas within that time. Can I first put on record, on behalf of all of us, our huge appreciation to your Government and to the people of Bangladesh for the extraordinary hospitality you have shown to the Rohingya refugees during this crisis? I will kick off with quite a general opening question. From the point of view of the Bangladeshi Government, what are your main concerns about the current flow of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh?

**Mr Talha:** Thank you very much, Chair. Let me at the outset put on record my Government's deep appreciation of the way we have had the UK as a long-standing friend of Bangladesh, standing beside us in terms of both political support and the assistance provided for the Rohingya refugees.

The main concern is, to be precise, the return of the Rohingyas to their homeland, which has been their ancestral home for centuries; to reach a permanent solution to this problem, which has been ongoing since 1978, as you are all aware; and to have two dialogues with Myanmar, or Burma, as you call it, and through the international communities' support.

For the time being, the immediate challenge we face is the scale on which the Rohingyas have crossed over this time to Bangladesh—the number is now nearing 650,000. When we talk about these figures, we somehow tend to forget that there were already more than 400,000 Rohingyas living in Bangladesh. That adds up to more than 1 million Rohingyas. The rate at which they have crossed the border—this is perhaps, in the history of mankind, the fastest displacement of a persecuted population. We have never, perhaps, seen such movement. That adds to the challenge. Providing them with shelter, medication, treatment—these are traumatised people, and to provide them with all sorts of assistance is a gigantic task. That is also a big concern for us.

**Q50 Chair:** Can you say a little about the impact on the local Bangladeshi community and whether there are any tensions or difficulties between the host population and the arriving refugees?

**Mr Talha:** The local people were the first to greet these Rohingyas. You are aware that we had such a traumatic experience during the birth of Bangladesh. About 10 million of our people were refugees who took shelter, mostly in India, so we have that experience of how it feels to be persecuted. They were the first ones, before anybody could reach the Rohingyas, to greet them—that was on the way, in fact. Local people provided shelter, help, food and whatever they could, and they extended their hospitality.



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Now what has happened is that these people have become the minority in their own land because of the sheer scale of the flow of the Rohingyas. We had to convert schools and colleges into shelters, so for quite some time the children have not been able to go to school. The land that is temporarily accommodating the Rohingyas had been used as grazing land. It was basically forest land, although not very dense, and it was also the source of firewood for people.

Because of the population pressure, the prices of essentials in that region have gone up by between three and 12 times, and people's regular life has been severely affected.

- Q51 **Richard Burden:** Could we perhaps move on to the international response to the crisis and its co-ordination? The lead agency is the International Organization for Migration, rather than UNHCR. Are you happy with the fact that the IOM is doing that, rather than the UNHCR?

**Mr Talha:** We have a long history of co-operation with the IOM. You might be aware that we have a huge migrant population in the Middle East, and during the Gulf wars we had to bring back hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis who were working there. That was done with the support of the IOM. In 2015 we had some people living on boats, if you recall, and they were brought back with the help of the IOM. In other instances, whenever we had similar problems, the IOM was there to help us. For us, and for the time being, we are not facing problems with that co-ordination.

- Q52 **Richard Burden:** Thanks for that. What would be your overall assessment of the United Nations approach to what is happening, both in terms of the level of co-ordination involved in efforts, and the scale of the response?

**Mr Talha:** OCHA has made some assessments, and UNHCR and UNICEF have also made their own assessments of the requirements. They work in specialised areas so they are looking at things from their own mandates. The Geneva conference that was organised to raise some funds was based on those assessments, but this is a sort of first-aid approach for a patient who is suffering from fatal conditions. This is something that we do, but just to house these people, feed them and provide them with basic medical facilities would require more than £1 billion a year. It is the sheer numbers—that is just to provide them with the basics. We hope that there will be more such co-ordination because, as I said, this is just an initial thing. Initially, the target was somewhere around \$400 million, and the pledged amount is around \$300 million.

There is also this difficulty with the flow of the funds actually committed and then actually flowing to the agencies or the recipients. We have seen in our experience that there is a time lag in that, so that could be a difficulty in the process.

- Q53 **Paul Scully:** It is good to see you, as ever. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Are the Bangladeshi Government happy with the assistance of international NGOs and what they are doing at the moment? You talked about the IOM and the



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UNHCR, but what about the NGOs in general that are supporting them?

**Mr Talha:** Some of you might know that Bangladesh is also known as a country of NGOs. We have had a civil society partnership in our path to development. There are lots of both international and local NGOs that are quite used to the situation, and the presence of international NGOs is an advantage for us. The international NGOs are working on the ground, and we are happy to have them on our side.

However, I also have to mention that it is kind of an unsettled situation. Because of that, we also have to be very cautious regarding who is doing what, because there is always the possibility that, in the guise of non-Government actors, there could be some organisations that might be trying to create instability among the people. We are cautious about that.

Q54 **Paul Scully:** Is that what the registration system is designed to deliver, or are you trying to get any more out of it?

**Mr Talha:** The whole registration system is pretty plain and simple. We have a dedicated office for NGO registration, and this has been there, so we have not made any changes to those regulations. The registration system is a sort of formal documentation system to see the intent of the NGO and the area of the activities that they want to do and the sources of their funding. Those are the areas that the registration office looks at.

Q55 **Paul Scully:** Are there any areas in which DFID can help to support you in this sort of process, to make sure you have as effective progress on the delivery of aid as possible? Are there any areas that we can help, such as registration and giving support on that?

**Mr Talha:** We have a well-established system because we have had NGOs working in Bangladesh since its independence. That system has been working pretty well. Should there be any assistance that we might require, we would indicate that.

Q56 **Chair:** As you describe, the sheer scale and speed of what has happened has put enormous pressure on your country. We have taken some evidence from international NGOs, including the International Rescue Committee, that suggests registering is quite a slow process. Do you acknowledge that there is an issue with the speed of that process, and is there anything that could be done to assist Bangladesh on that?

**Mr Talha:** What we have done so far is register about 563,000 of those who have crossed over this time. We have covered roughly 80% of them—maybe more—and the process is ongoing. We actually switched about five or six years ago to the biometric registration of our own nationals, which has helped, because we have the equipment to do that and have by now grown the expertise to do that registration.

Q57 **Chair:** That is very impressive. I think the issue is not about the registration of refugees but registration for the NGOs to do the work.

**Mr Talha:** Oh, for the NGOs? Well, registration of NGOs is, as you know, again a pretty simple procedure that they have to follow. I think there are



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nine documents they have to submit, including the memorandum of article and, as I mentioned, their sources of funds and what their objectives are—their letter of intent. Those are the pretty simple things they will need to submit.

**Q58 Paul Scully:** Once they have submitted those documents, how long does it take to get them registered?

**Mr Talha:** It depends. Once they submit the documents, that goes through a verification process. If the papers are in order, it should not take very long.

Having said that, what is perhaps important at this moment is that if some NGOs are facing difficulties, or think that they are, they can always partner with other NGOs and have the funds and services delegated to that area. As I said, there are thousands of NGOs in Bangladesh, and we also happen to have the largest NGO in the world, which is BRAC. Most of the DFID funds are channelled through BRAC, and BRAC does a wonderful job on the ground.

**Q59 Mrs Latham:** What discussions is Bangladesh having, and with whom, on the potential of providing schooling for the Rohingya children? Are you looking at spare capacity within the Bangladeshi system? Are you looking at the Rohingya teachers who are refugees helping out with that? Is there a problem with recognising their qualifications?

**Mr Talha:** At the moment, we are hoping for an early return for the refugees. That may not happen, so that would come in the second stage. We do not know what is going to happen. We are trying to talk to the Burmese Government to see how fast they can take them back. That is the immediate focus.

For the education of the Rohingya children, we will definitely be talking to UNICEF, to see what would be most suitable to be done for them. Along with UNICEF, they may have to take on board some of the local NGOs to deliver that service.

**Q60 Mrs Latham:** In places such as Jordan, when they have had a lot of refugees from Syria, they have done a morning session for the local children and an afternoon session for the refugees. Is that something you might consider? We talk about the sustainable development goals and nobody left behind, but if you lose a year out of education, you are way behind and always will be. It is important that the children get education. I recognise that you have logistical problems.

**Mr Talha:** Certainly. The Government are now thinking of expanding the two already existing camps where we have had the Rohingyas from 1978. The Government has already allocated 3,500 acres of land to expand the camps, if necessary. Those camps would provide for all the Rohingyas' basic needs, including education. That is the plan. In that area, perhaps we would not have any local schools. So the schools that we will have will perhaps be dedicated to the Rohingya children.

**Q61 Mrs Latham:** But that is long term; it is not going to happen in three



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months. So the children are missing out the whole of the time.

**Mr Talha:** Indeed, that is one of the challenges.

- Q62 **Mrs Latham:** I am not saying it is easy. It is not, and I recognise that, but I am concerned that the children will have a long time out of school. I recognise they are traumatised and they need help actually to get back into education; is that happening now, to help them not to forget what has happened to them but to come to terms with it, and get them so that they are not mentally disturbed and they can go into education when it is available?

**Mr Talha:** Well, Paul has been there and seen for himself the situation on the ground. At the moment perhaps the reality would not permit those sorts of facilities, because the challenge now is to have a roof over their heads, or to have a shed, and two square meals a day. We have thousands of Rohingya children who crossed over without their parents—14,000 of them crossed over without their parents—and 60% of all Rohingyas who have crossed over are women and children, so that is the bulk of that 640,000. The majority of the people will perhaps need some sort of immediate assistance, including education; but to do that, although we understand that they will be losing out on school days—which perhaps they didn't even have where they were in Rakhine state—is something we will definitely look into. That is something that we will have to provide them with.

- Q63 **Chris Law:** I appreciate the sheer enormity of the challenge that you have, with regard to displacement of people, and where exactly to locate them, so I want to ask a few questions about the plans for that. There have been discussions about a mega camp for up to 800,000 refugees at Kutupalong Extension. Is that still being considered, or is that no longer the case?

**Mr Talha:** The Kutupalong Extension is very much on the cards, yes. We are thinking of that. There is an island we are also thinking of, given the number. As you know, Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world, if you leave aside the city states, so land is very scarce. What we are trying to do is we want to keep them in one location, so that all the services can be provided to them in that area.

- Q64 **Chris Law:** It is important that you have clarified that, because there have been, obviously, some reports about concerns about a mega camp. One of them came from the UNHCR, which was concerned that putting all these people in one area could lead to fires breaking out. Even more importantly, infectious diseases could spread quite rapidly among such a densely populated community. What has the Government's response been to that, and are they taking these concerns seriously? What are the steps forward, to maybe mitigate that?

**Mr Talha:** What we found was that, when they crossed over, they were never immunised, so we started immunising them. That was the first thing we had to do, because an outbreak of cholera can easily happen in such cases, because they initially would not have access to safe drinking water.



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So we started immunising them. We have been providing them with vaccines.

There are other reasons why we need to keep them in one place. In the case of a breakout of fire, of course there will be firefighting systems in place; but one of the reasons is that this is a very vulnerable community now, and we do not by any means want them to be radicalised in any way—and there have been attempts. We had to ban, actually, two NGOs that were found to be doing that. So unless we keep them in one place it will be extremely challenging for us to control who goes in there and control who they mix with. Unfortunately, that particular zone is in an area where a lot of smuggling takes place, including gun running. That is a region that is not easy to patrol, so it is important that we keep them all in one place—maybe in two or three different camps, as we have done on previous occasions.

- Q65 **Chris Law:** On the flip side of that, of course, you then have a community that is isolated from other Bangladeshis, and a lack of communication between different communities can also lead to issues. On that note, you talked about the island of Thengar Char, which was quite recently developed from silt build-up. Is that correct?

**Mr Talha:** The whole of Bangladesh is made of silt.

- Q66 **Chris Law:** Yes, of course, but my understanding about Thengar Char in particular is that there is absolutely no infrastructure on it—there are no roads, there are no buildings; there is nothing—and it is two hours away by boat from any mainland. What concerns do you have about putting people there, given the lack of infrastructure and that it is so far away from the nearest community? There are also reports that waters around that island are regularly patrolled by pirates.

**Mr Talha:** It is not exactly like some media have portrayed Thengar Char—that we are going to dump them on an island. We do not want them to be like Robinson Crusoe. But if it is necessary for us to relocate them to Thengar Char, the necessary infrastructure will definitely be developed first, before we transfer them. It is not that we are going to put this huge population on an island without any communication or basic support.

As I mentioned, we have gone through this, so we know how it feels. Our honourable Prime Minister herself visited immediately after the 25 August crackdown, once the refugees started coming. She personally has suffered. You might know that her entire family was killed; only she and her sister survived. She personally knows how it feels to have such a traumatic experience. Bangladesh's approach to this Rohingya issue has been based on humanitarian consideration. So we do not have that intent, but where we will need the international community's support is in providing the basic necessities to this huge population.

- Q67 **Henry Smith:** Welcome, Your Excellency. Again recognising the huge impact and the challenge that Bangladesh has, what sort of support is the Government able to provide in terms of investigation for those Rohingya who might have suffered from sexual violence and other crimes? Are



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there some aspects of Bangladeshi legislation, like the Foreigners Act, that might be getting in the way of investigating and pursuing crimes that have been committed—particularly sexual violence—against the Rohingya?

**Mr Talha:** We have local NGOs that have been working with the victims of sexual violence. The media, international NGOs and human rights organisations have been recording all these violations. So far as the Foreigners Act is concerned, we have not come across any difficulty with that in recording those. Importantly, I must say that if that is done by the international community, it not only reaches the global community but is not seen as being done by a party here. Whatever we record might be seen as something Bangladesh is doing to make a point, so we would encourage the international community to do those recordings.

Q68 **Henry Smith:** Obviously the ultimate aim would be to see the return of the Rohingya to their homeland, but at this moment a lot of them are very fearful of that. The people of Bangladesh have been extraordinarily welcoming, but can we get assurances that no one will be forced to return and possibly face violence before the situation can, hopefully, be stabilised?

**Mr Talha:** Violence on the Bangladesh side?

**Henry Smith:** Fear of being returned to Burma and suffering violence there.

**Mr Talha:** That would be a big ask for Bangladesh; it is somewhere that the international community's pressure would be extremely important. As you are aware, the 1978 citizenship law triggered all these things. The citizenship Act was also endorsed by the latest constitution. That has made the Rohingya a stateless people. There should perhaps have been better vetting of that constitution, which has basically triggered a humanitarian crisis. This is the third large exodus of the Rohingyas from Burma, because they basically do not have any rights in Burma. That must be addressed and that legal space must be created, and that cannot be done through a bilateral negotiation. The international community, which has in a way welcomed Myanmar back into the fold, must engage to ensure that the Rohingyas, who have been living there for thousands of years—there is recorded history of their living there for about a thousand years—are not rendered stateless now.

From our side, as we have been providing shelter to these people, we recall that in 1978 those who came all went back. Of about 250,000 who came in 1991 and 1992, 33,000 are still in Bangladesh. They have been living in Bangladesh for three decades. Unless the international community can create an environment in which the Rohingya can go back to their own country, every day it will put pressure on Bangladesh.

**Henry Smith:** Thank you. I agree with your assessment.

Q69 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Your Excellency, you have mentioned the need for an international response to what is happening in Myanmar or Burma.



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Are you happy with the international response so far? Are there areas where you particularly feel more could be done to help the Rohingya within Burma? Do you think that the UK's role, in particular, in the international response has lived up to expectations?

**Mr Talha:** Once again, we have been very appreciative of the role of the UK, starting with the political pressure that has been applied through the Foreign Secretary talking to the State Counsellor and taking up the issue in the UN Security Council. That is an area where the UK has taken the lead in this case, and it has produced a UN Security Council presidential statement. Given the politics within the Security Council, perhaps that was one of the better outcomes that we had there.

But this pressure needs to be sustained. Given the UK's historic relationship with Burma, the UK is perhaps in a better position than many other countries to, in a way, try to convince the Government in Burma to create that space—to create that political, legal and humanitarian space where these people would be able to go back to their own country. One of the reasons that the Rohingyas are being persecuted, as they tell us, is that they fought alongside the British Army in the second world war, and that puts them on the wrong side in Myanmar's internal politics.

Q70 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Interestingly, the Myanmar Ambassador, when he wrote to our colleague the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, said the term "Rohingya" is controversial, it cannot be found in any British colonial records and not to recognise it. Earlier on, you said that they have lived there for a thousand years. Clearly, there needs to be pressure put on the Myanmar Government to recognise the people. Why do you think this issue was not discussed at the APEC meeting last week? Does there need to be regional pressure as well?

**Mr Talha:** Well, the APEC meeting, and also the ASEAN meeting, has discussed this—it is not that it did not come up. It did not come out in the statement, but that does not mean that they were not discussed. They say that a camel is a horse that is designed by committee. When you go for a consensus in a multilateral process, you have to do this—there are lots of negotiations. Then you finally come out with a paper—a declaration and an outcome document—but behind that there were lots of discussions. We are quite certain that there were discussions, both in the APEC meeting and in the ASEAN meetings, but perhaps they could not reach a consensus on how to put that in the final outcome document.

Q71 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** You have given me reassurances that there were discussions. Has Bangladesh had some discussions in neighbouring countries about the potential boat exodus that we may see now the monsoon season is coming to an end—the exodus into the Bay of Bengal—and how that could be managed?

**Mr Talha:** On the boat exodus, if you are particularly talking about the Rohingyas, we have one of the longest sea beaches, perhaps the longest unbroken sea beach in the world. It is about 90 miles long. These are all coastal areas where they are. These are desperate people that we are talking about and they will take desperate measures, but that is again why



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it is important to have them contained in one place. We do have a coastguard. Its size is not very large, but we try to patrol the coastal area to ensure that there is no boat exodus. But I do not think the largest coastguard in the world would be able to patrol any country's territorial water. We would appreciate, if there is information—

- Q72 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** But have there been discussions, maybe with other neighbouring countries, about supporting a coastguard and also a support effort in case an exodus does come about?

**Mr Talha:** If there is an exodus from Bangladesh it would be eastward, because westward is India. You might know that there are several thousand Rohingyas living in Indonesia and Malaysia as well. Those are the people who actually took the sea route to those places. They have families who are perhaps now in Bangladesh, so they may communicate and give them the hope that, "Once you can reach here, things are much better." It is difficult to control and contain those movements but we will try to do our best.

- Q73 **Mr Lewis:** Good morning. Obviously the situation facing the Rohingyas in Bangladesh will unfortunately be long term. What account is being taken of the fact that this is going to be a very long-term situation in the way that the camps are developed and run? The other issue concerns the relocation of the Rohingyas by the UNHCR in the 1990s. Are lessons learned from that being applied now in the situation Bangladesh faces?

**Mr Talha:** As I have already mentioned, 3,500 acres of land have been earmarked for these camps. We are thinking of building approximately 150,000 houses. With an average family size of five, that should be able to accommodate them. We would also provide the basic needs of healthcare, education and other things. That is where we will need a massive amount of international support. We are all hoping that it is not going to be a long-term thing.

As for lessons learned, this has been quite a difficult negotiation with Myanmar. In 1978, when the Rohingyas crossed over, they had their passports, or a copy of them, because they still had those passports. In 1991 and 1992, when they crossed over, they did not have the passports because they were taken away. They were issued with identity cards. This time when they crossed over, they did not even have the identity cards because those identity cards were taken away.

So the parameters for the negotiation have changed. In terms of repatriation itself, that is not going to work unless we have the international community closely following and talking to Myanmar regarding repatriation.

Every time it is a different ballgame. It is difficult to use the experience of 1978 or 1991-92 and apply that to the current setting. The only thing is, there has to be international oversight of the whole process.

**Chair:** Thank you. We are out of time with this panel. Your Excellency, thank you very much indeed for joining us here today. We are about to



take evidence from the Minister, Alistair Burt, and you are very welcome to remain in the Gallery, if you wish. We are very grateful, and I reiterate what I said at the beginning and what has been reaffirmed by others: we do appreciate the extraordinary efforts taken by your Government and people in this crisis.

**Mr Talha:** Thank you.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: The Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Dr Richard Montgomery, and Patrick Moody.

Q74 **Chair:** Minister, welcome and thank you for appearing before us once again. You have a portfolio that coincides with the areas on which we are holding our inquiries, and we are grateful to you for joining us. We have an hour with you, and we will seek to cover 12 different areas in that hour. We will all have to be concise, so I will try to set an example with my opening question. We heard last week from Human Rights Watch that four years ago it reported that ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya was happening. Why has it taken so long for the international community to act?

**Alistair Burt:** First, thank you very much for inviting us back again. To demonstrate the relationships now across Whitehall and how we are dealing with this, I have with me Richard Montgomery from DFID and Patrick Moody from the FCO. As I represent both Departments, it is an object lesson in how we try to handle these things.

The situation, as the Committee well knows, is that this is a long-standing issue of significant animosity and hostility towards the Rohingya people from a significant majority of those in Burma. There have been frequent clashes in Rakhine state, from not only state actors but also ethnic Rakhine who live in the area. That is well known. Over a lengthy period of time, therefore, the United Kingdom and others have been working to try to defuse this.

The Committee itself made some recommendations in 2014 that the UK has been acting upon with others, to try to find ways in which intercommunal violence can be lessened and to descale. In recent times, the Kofi Annan commission to look at what might be the ultimate destination of the Rohingya people—I do not mean physical destination; I mean their destination as a community within Burma—has been part of the efforts made to tackle this. My sense is that the international community, as well as responding to spikes in violence after October 2016 by making very clear to the Burmese authorities what was not acceptable in terms of an overreaction from the security forces, has worked to try to descale the violence and the reasons for conflict by working on a longer-term answer.

I think therefore the answer to your question is that although there have been spikes in violence, even after October 2016, there was nothing in the

responses then to indicate that such an extreme act as what followed in August 2017 would happen. The work being done before that was designed to ease the tensions and end the conflicts between the different communities. That has been the long-term aim, and that work has been consistently carried on.

**Q75 Chair:** Do you think, with the benefit of hindsight, it was an error to court the military leadership quite so closely?

**Alistair Burt:** I am not sure whether courting the military leadership is the right response. Efforts have been made to support the democratisation process and the effective elected leader of Burma and to pursue a process that would gradually lessen and reduce the role of the military as democracy takes hold and civilian Government gets stronger. I think the people of Burma are courted, in the sense that the path to democracy will be best for them and best for the region. We have a number of programmes in place, and it is a process, by and large, that we have been supporting across the parties in the UK.

I doubt if there is any evidence to suggest that the military have been particularly courted. They are a force in Burma, of course, and they are responsible for what we have seen recently, so they have to be recognised as that, but I think the courting has been the process of democratisation that we want to see in Burma.

**Q76 Chair:** The scale of the migration, which we heard about from the Bangladeshi Deputy High Commissioner this morning and in other evidence, has been rapid and enormous. What preparations were made for the potential for such a migration across the border into Bangladesh?

**Alistair Burt:** The scale has certainly been extraordinary; 600,000 people moving in a matter of days is an immense burden. The UK Government put on the record our appreciation of the extraordinary efforts of the Bangladeshi Government and the Bangladeshi people to care for those who have arrived on their borders. The numbers are enormous and the land available is not easy, and 300,000 people who had moved in the past were already there. First and foremost, I make that clear.

In terms of preparation, we became aware of increased risks of further conflict in northern Rakhine in the months preceding 2017, including reports of murders and an increased security force presence, and by late August our daily monitoring indicated an increase in the numbers of new arrivals. However, because we were already out there and on the ground, we were already providing support to Rohingya people and the communities that host them in Bangladesh long before the current influx began, including programming of £13.9 million since 2014.

When things started to happen, we responded very rapidly. We released £5 million in additional funding to meet urgent needs on 8 September. Since then we have announced a further £42 million, bringing the total to £47 million to provide food, medical help, safe water and sanitation, shelter, nutrition and psychological support to Rohingya refugees since the start of the crisis.



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We were already on the ground. We were prepared for the usual movements of people that happen from time to time, but there was no suggestion that anyone could have anticipated the extreme scale of what happened. However, because we were on the ground, we were the first, and we are the largest, bilateral supporter.

- Q77 Mrs Latham:** Thank you, Minister. Has anything been done over the last few years by the UK or by other international actors to try to understand and counter the anti-Rohingya public discourse in Burma? In 2013, our predecessor Committee, of which I was a member, recommended that work be done on combating intercommunal tensions, especially through the use of interfaith dialogue. The Government agreed. Can you tell us what has happened?

**Alistair Burt:** Yes. As I indicated at the start of my remarks, the fact that this is not new is well known to all of us. At the base is a hostility and an animosity based on ethnic rivalry. Accordingly, following up the suggestions made by yourselves in 2014, we have indeed invested more in inter-faith initiatives.

We designed a new peacebuilding programme, which Ministers approved in September 2015, to include significant funding to tackle intercommunal violence through a peace support fund—the PSF; the Paung Sie Facility—which has committed \$4 million to inter-communal harmony efforts in Rakhine as part of \$6.8 million invested countrywide. DFID has contributed 85% of that total, including a major contribution to Kofi Annan’s commission. I think Richard has some further information on that particular area of peacebuilding.

- Q78 Mrs Latham:** It does not seem to have worked, though.

**Alistair Burt:** Let us be clear about this: there is no easy lever to pull to deal with generations of hostility from one community to another. We can look all around the world at where that is the case. No one programme will suddenly tell people to be nice to each other; it is just not realistic and will not happen.

If anything is to change people’s attitudes, it has to be long term, which is why the engagement with Burma is still very important. However, there is no flick of a switch that can change things like this. If I may, I will let Richard say a little bit more about what has been done.

**Dr Montgomery:** The funding that the Minister has outlined was used to support inter-faith dialogues. We work with a number of—particularly Burmese—NGOs, such as the Search for Common Ground, the Centre for Diversity and National Harmony and an organisation called the Spirit in Education Movement. We also finance some attempts to operate dispute resolution between ethnic communities, which I think Mercy Corps were most involved in.

We worked with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting to monitor social media, and to try to combat what is effectively hate speech. I am sure the Committee is very aware that that hate speech has risen



dramatically in the past year or so—it is quite extreme. The biggest effort that the UK Government have made in the last year is supporting the Annan commission, and making sure that it was fully resourced so that it could do its work.

- Q79 **Mrs Latham:** In 2014, the census, which we funded, allowed the Burmese Government to not mention Rohingyas, and for them to be excluded from that census. In hindsight, was that a mistake?

**Alistair Burt:** The answer is that we would have wished the Rohingya to be included in the census. They wanted, very strongly, to self-identify, but for reasons of anticipated conflict and violence, it could not be done. There was clear evidence from the Rakhine community in the region that there would have been violence because they do not see them as Rohingya. A lot of effort and pressure was put on the authorities who were compiling the census, but it reached a point where we realised that violence was highly likely to result. Would it have been better if the Rohingya had been included? Of course—they wished to self-identify as Rohingya. Would it have been worthwhile losing lives and increasing violence as a result of us pressing the point on the census, which we were not able to do? Probably the answer to that is no.

- Q80 **Mrs Latham:** But there is huge violence and conflict now, without the Rohingya being mentioned in the census. What is the difference?

**Alistair Burt:** If there is a fresh spark to violence then you want to avoid it. We are coming from a position where it is endemic because of the relationships. The only thing that can change that is long-term change, which is why we all supported the Kofi Annan commission. That gave an opportunity for Burma to look at the issue and come up with some long-term answers that would deal with local pressures in Rakhine, and also with the ethnic animosity and the like. It is still, of course, part of the programme for the future, which Aung San Suu Kyi has recognised as well.

I come back to the point that it is difficult to identify things that the international community could have done that would have ended generations of violence by the stroke of a pen or an external intervention. Remember that those external to Burma are deeply distrusted. The UN is distrusted, external intervention is distrusted—95% of the population support what the Burmese military have done. There is no question that someone from outside can come along with an idea that will prevent that, or stop it in its tracks. Only long-term cultural change can do that, and to that we have all been rightly committed, and we must go on.

- Q81 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** The Burmese Ambassador wrote to our colleague, the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and he said that the Muslim community refused to take part in the population survey that was conducted, which was the reason it failed. You seem to suggest that it was the Burmese authorities that refused to include them. Are you saying that the Ambassador is incorrect in the letter that he has written to our colleague, Tom Tugendhat?



**Alistair Burt:** I think it is an interpretation of the facts. As I understand it, the Rohingya people wanted a box on the census form that they could tick, and they were refused it. You tell me whether that is a refusal to take part, or whether that is the authorities contriving the situation which made it impossible for them to take part. My understanding is that that was the situation.

Q82 **Paul Scully:** Can you let us know what discussions the UK Government have had with Aung San Suu Kyi in particular, especially with regard to the activity of the Government's armed forces and her influence on what is going on at the moment?

**Alistair Burt:** There has been a series of conversations between the Foreign Secretary and Aung San Suu Kyi—on 7 September, 14 September and 21 October—and our colleague, Minister Mark Field, met her in Burma on 25 September. We have raised our concerns about the continuing violence and the need for allegations of human rights abuses to be investigated and for humanitarian access to be granted to affected communities.

I think we are all in a position of recognising that here is someone who attracted huge moral support for her stance against the Burmese authorities over many years and who we still believe is the person most likely to lead the Burmese people towards a different future—a democratic future. She finds—and we find a dilemma in this—that the whole Government of Burma is not entirely under her control or civilian control. It would appear clear to all of us that it is the military in Burma, together with non-state actors there, such as militia from the Rakhine ethnic community, who have been able to perpetrate the atrocities and appalling situation that we have seen. She is not in control of the military.

We have made representations to her to say that her response needs to make clear what view she takes of the situation. She has made a couple of speeches. Her second speech confirmed the importance of the Kofi Annan commission. It set up the internal union commission to deal with some of the issues that have been raised, and she has called for the return of the Rohingya people to Burma.

But I think there has been some disappointment that that voice has not been stronger and more determined. We would all have liked to have seen it. We would all have liked to have seen the language of condemnation and recognition of the abuses that have taken place. It has not been as strong as the international community or the British Government would have liked—I will be very clear about that. But, not to recognise the domestic political situation in which she lives and works would be to fail to take into account a major factor that is part of the determinant of this whole scene.

We would like her Government to succeed. There must be no condonation of what has taken place. Even though we recognise her difficulties, we would want her to be clearer on what has happened. So there is regular



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and constant contact, including contact even as of now by Minister Mark Field, with representatives over that.

- Q83 **Paul Scully:** Some people have talked about the threat of a coup or the country closing in on itself if she did speak out, and that the military might take over. Do you give any credence to that? Also, you were talking about the peace initiatives. One of the risks to anything happening to the country's Government is ethnic conflict in other states as well: the Karen, the Karenni and the Shan, and right the way around. Could you say a little bit about the threat to peace around the country as a whole?

**Alistair Burt:** Yes, Mr Scully, you are absolutely correct. Again, because of the awfulness of what has happened, there is a concentration on what has happened to the Rohingya people, but you are right that there is a difficult ethnic conflict situation right throughout Burma. They are still engaged in physical conflict in different areas, despite efforts to bring peace. Perhaps I might ask Patrick from the FCO to say something about that in a moment.

Your first question was about the risk of coup. The short answer is: it must always be there. As I indicated, all our evidence suggests that the population thoroughly approve of what the military have done. They have taken advantage of the situation, labelling the Rohingya community as they do to demonstrate to the Burmese people what they have done on their behalf. If they were to start to portray a popular political leader as an enemy of the people and an enemy of the military, who knows what may happen? I think that the risk is there is recognised, so that is a reason to be cautious of political developments there, but, as I said earlier, no condonation for activities that have taken place, because there cannot be. Patrick may say just a brief word about the other tensions in the country.

**Patrick Moody:** I think the Minister covered it very well. It is obviously a difficult balance, because there are wider interests and a considerable amount of tensions across the rest of the country. Aung San Suu Kyi has played an important role in trying to drive forward those peace dialogues, so it is a difficult balance between addressing the immediate problem in Rakhine, keeping the progress going on the other tensions, but also recognising, as the Minister set out, the very delicate political position in which she sits. That is why our policy, as, again, the Minister set out, has always been a long-term one, about trying to take forward a series of measures across the board, which are necessary to embed democracy after so many years of military dictatorship.

- Q84 **Paul Scully:** You rightly say that the Burmese people are largely behind what is happening to the Rohingya people at the moment. Have you had a sense of whether they are aware of the extent of what is happening? Not just the numbers being pushed across the border but in terms of—when I was there in September we heard stories about children being beheaded, having their genitals mutilated, and about machete attacks, and these kind of things. Do you think the Burmese people are aware of the extent of the violence, or is it just the move that they are supporting?



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**Patrick Moody:** I am not sure I can report with exactitude on exactly what the public mood is, beyond, as the Minister said, general public support for the military action, a wide fear—unfounded, of course—of Islamic terrorism, etc., and that creates a context in which people hear what they want to hear. I suggest Richard might have something more on that.

**Dr Montgomery:** I think the social media coverage suggests that the answer to your question is probably no; that they are distrusting of external accounts.

Q85 **Chair:** Minister, are we getting the tone and balance of what the Government says about this right? I welcome many of the things that you have said today, but Mark Field, your Foreign Office ministerial colleague, made his speech in Burma on Monday. His only comments on this issue in his speech were to say to Aung San Suu Kyi, “We are particularly grateful to you...for your willingness to address the issue...We welcome your inclusive vision for Rakhine and commitment to the right of return for refugees.” Is that really the right tone, given the scale of what we are seeing happening here?

**Alistair Burt:** It is the right tone looking forward, because—

**Chair:** “Inclusive vision for Rakhine”?

**Alistair Burt:** Yes, because she has said she wishes to see the Rohingya people return to Burma, and if Kofi Annan’s commission is followed it will go along with an economic plan, which is essential in that region as well, so that the enmities and animosities do not build up. If the Burmese people see that the Rohingya are treated differently—given economic advantages not available to others who live in the area—that would be wrong. So the inclusive sense that she is talking about for the future is, I think, very real; but do not mistake, in Mark Field’s comments about the future, any sense that there is not deep concern about what has happened up to now.

The comments that I make about our disappointment with Aung San Suu Kyi’s position are ministerial comment on a Government position. We are concerned about how this has been treated up to now—the speed of her response and her recognition—but someone has got to take Burma forward, and if Aung San Suu Kyi is clear about the role of the Rohingya people in Burma in the future and can lead that, that is important, and it is important to make a comment about it.

Q86 **Henry Smith:** Thank you, Minister, for appearing. The UK Government, as you know, has been focusing on the five-point plan of stopping the security force violence, humanitarian access within Burma, safe return and implementation of the Annan commission, and access for and co-operation with the UN Human Rights Council fact-finding mission. What progress have you assessed is being made with the five-point plan?

**Alistair Burt:** We are working diplomatically and with agencies in relation to each point of this. First, on stopping violence in northern Rakhine, that



is the most difficult area to get into; agencies are still finding that difficult, and while things have settled to some degree in southern and central Rakhine that is still very difficult. But there is evidence of some access starting to be granted, and we are working with other agencies to see an improvement in relation to that. So the violence is still going on; it is at a lower level. It is not, sadly, just being carried out by the military, but by ethnic Rakhine communities, who are armed and have been armed by the military. So although the violence has lessened it has not completely stopped. We still are determined to insist upon unfettered humanitarian access to northern Rakhine, and there is some evidence that that is improving, though it is not fully there at the moment.

The third point is securing the conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified returns to home. That will be longer-lasting. That is where both the commission set up in Burma itself by Aung San Suu Kyi and the Kofi Annan commission have to demonstrate some activity and some success. It is too early to make an assessment on the domestic one in Burma. We don't know enough about it. It has sought private donations; we want to see other donors involved. It is too early to say.

On the other aspects, again, there is no suggestion that there is an early or quick return of people to Rakhine. It would be foolish to say otherwise. If people are to return, they have to feel they are going to be secure and safe. It is not just a question of physically returning them. At this stage, it would be unwise for families to return. They want to. All the evidence we have is that people talk about going back and want to go back. We have ideas about how the state could be reformed economically—what plan there could be to make that easier. We know that for those who want to go back, it is about improving skills and opportunities—but that will come over time.

Access to the UN fact-finding mission is essential, because this is the long arm of justice. It is, I hope, no coincidence that we are sitting here on the morning when Ratko Mladić's verdict has been announced in The Hague, 20 years after the events of Srebrenica, which I know a number of people in this room have been very concerned about. It is essential that information is available so that those who have perpetrated the worst acts upon others can be brought to justice over a period of time. The UK will be fully behind and giving support to that.

The fifth point—the implementation of Kofi Annan's commission—will take time. There is work going on on each of the points. Some of them are immediate, such as the humanitarian access; some of them are longer-term. Progress is being made, but on some of the longer-term ones there is still much to be done.

**Q87 Henry Smith:** I very much appreciate that, and I am grateful for your comments. Touching on the long-term vision and the challenges of return, what sort of lessons have been learned from the 1990s repatriations? Are any of those relevant to a way forward with regard to the challenges today?



**Alistair Burt:** Again, the fact that we have been engaged for a long period of time in Rakhine is significant and important. The UK has not suddenly turned its attention to this area in the past couple of years. We were strong advocates of the commission that eventually became the Kofi Annan commission, to try to learn some of these lessons, but as Ms Latham was saying, this has not been successful. I remember years ago going with Peter Pike to South Africa in the teeth of apartheid and looking at what could be done. Peter said, "You can't just pass a law to change people's hearts," and it is true. These are deep enmities built up on the distrust fostered by those in whose interests it is to label people as the other and all that.

The lesson that has been learned from that is that there are not a couple of easy actions to take to bring people back. If you surround them with troops supportive of them and prevent attacks upon them, all you have is divided communities who live in some sort of state with each other until an opportunity comes to fight and to kill each other, so that can't be the right answer. It has to be a longer-term answer, which is where the commission comes in and where—if at all possible—Aung San Suu Kyi, if she can lead the Burmese people in a different direction, can make a difference too.

**Chair:** I am keen that we move shortly to the questions that relate more specifically to DFID and the humanitarian response, but there are just two more questions I am keen to take—first from Richard and then from Pauline—on the broader political situation.

Q88 **Richard Burden:** In relation to the United Nations, do you honestly think anything has been achieved so far by the 6 November presidential statement in terms of influencing events? If so, what?

**Alistair Burt:** I will just make a couple of factual points, if I may. The UK has raised Burma four times at the UN Security Council since the outbreak of violence. On 6 November, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on Burma—the first council product on Burma for 10 years. The UN Security Council has called for the Burmese authorities to stop the violence and allow humanitarian access, and we are considering, with other Security Council members, what further steps are needed. On 18 September, the Foreign Secretary convened a meeting of Foreign Ministers at the UN and called for our five-point plan to be implemented, and Lord Ahmad spoke at the Human Rights Council on 11 September.

I think we have been as active as we can. Please don't underestimate the presidential statement, because that has to be agreed by consensus. That means the Chinese, who clearly take a close interest in Burma, did not veto, and supported a statement calling for an end to the violence and allowing humanitarian access. Recognising the realities of the UN, as increasingly we need to do, and being aware of the damage that can be done by vetoes and the like, means that the UN is truly the art of the possible rather than anything else. Our representatives there have done a very good job.



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There is a wider question—if this Committee has not considered it, I am sure it might at some stage, as the Foreign Affairs Committee might—and that is how you actually succeed with the international order these days when the UN Security Council, through its processes, cannot deliver an answer to conflict areas, from Syria to Yemen to here, because of the power of the veto and the like. Within that, I think we have done what we can at the UN, and we should not underestimate what has been achieved.

**Q89 Richard Burden:** Okay, thanks. Can we move on to the issue of accountability? You mentioned that today there is the trial of Ratko Mladić, and in fact in the last few minutes the verdict has come through: he has been found guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes and sentenced to life imprisonment. Would the UK Government support a referral to the ICC on the situation in Myanmar?

**Alistair Burt:** I am sure the short answer to that is yes. I turn, for the technicalities, to Mr Moody, because the processes of referral may not be quite as clear as we would like to think.

**Patrick Moody:** Essentially there are two paths. There is self-referral by the state concerned, which frequently happens, and we should not rule it out as an option over time, because states look back at their history and take this action further down the line. The other is for the UN Security Council itself to do it under a chapter VII resolution.

First, I think we need to recognise that we have a fact-finding mission to build up a body of evidence that can add to all the reports coming out from NGOs and other visitors to the region. But we will have to balance that out against the points the Minister referred to, in terms of how realistic it is to get consensus for a chapter VII resolution. The best thing we can do now is to call out the facts for what they are and to build that body of evidence, so that we can move international opinion.

**Alistair Burt:** It is one of these really difficult political considerations. The short answer to your question has to be yes; you want justice to be done. How to get it done becomes the most important thing, as opposed to making a gesture. If by making a gesture of referral, or trying to organise a Security Council resolution that will fail, you put in the dock the people who are organising the veto, who will come up with an explanation of why they have done that, you don't achieve the objective. Is there another way to do it?

I am absolutely firm on what I said a few moments ago about justice mattering. I am the UK's international commissioner on the International Commission on Missing Persons. That is the group that did so much extraordinary work in relation to Srebrenica, to identify the victims. By identifying the victims and how they were killed, it was able to say who killed them, which has led to the verdict today, so it really matters. How to do it is just as important as a symbolic gesture to get something on the way.

We will work with others on what is the most likely way to secure convictions, but it becomes necessary to try to organise that reference. That could be done, but over time, a country may change as well. Burma may change and say, "We don't want to be associated with this any longer. It is time for those who were responsible for this to be held accountable." I do not know, but that the long arm of justice should succeed here is really important.

**Chair:** Sorry, Richard, we must move on or we will not get on to the DFID-specific aspects.

**Richard Burden:** I have just a very brief follow-up.

**Chair:** Go on, then.

- Q90 **Richard Burden:** I asked the previous panel a question on the International Commission on Missing Persons. Is anybody involving them in the situation in Rakhine?

**Alistair Burt:** I hope so. The commission is constantly looking for where it might be effective and helpful, and I am in regular contact with the director.

- Q91 **Mrs Latham:** Rex Tillerson said last week that sanctions won't resolve the crisis. What is the Government's stance on sanctions? Do we agree with him or do we think sanctions could be part of the solution?

**Alistair Burt:** It is the usual dilemma in relation to sanctions. Can you take sanctions that are not going to be damaging to the bulk of the people and make the poorest people poorer? Can you target sanctions on those who are the perpetrators? There is already in place a Europe-wide agreement by European states that there are no invitations to military leaders—military leaders do not travel throughout the European Union or come to the European Union. That has not been formalised as a sanction on those individuals, but it could be. Effectively, targeting the people who are responsible seems to us to be the most important thing. I think we would look at sanctions in that light. If sanctions were possible that would achieve an effect and demonstrate a determination by the international community to bring about a result, I would always be interested. Sanctions as a gesture may not be right, and I can understand where Secretary of State Tillerson is coming from.

- Q92 **Mrs Latham:** Is Aung San Suu Kyi included in that list of people?

**Alistair Burt:** No.

**Mrs Latham:** So she can travel wherever she wants.

**Alistair Burt:** She can indeed, because she is not a military leader in Burma and she is not individually held responsible for the actions of the military. We are quite clear that they have been the perpetrators of this violence.

- Q93 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Moving on to DFID programmes, particularly in the



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light of one of the earlier questions about DFID funding the census and maybe some hindsight of whether more conditionality could have been put on to that, should some or all the DFID programmes in Burma be suspended or have additional conditions put on them? What are you considering in terms of the DFID programmes in Burma?

**Alistair Burt:** I will let Richard answer in a second. At present, no, because the programmes are designed to continue the processes we spoke about earlier of improving the situation in Burma as it looks towards democratisation and development. They are not designed to sustain the military in any way. They are designed to help the processes we were discussing earlier, to assist the poorer people of Burma who have suffered economically and in terms of governance from the military dictatorship, and to move them on.

I was in Burma at the end of June, before the present difficulties began. I looked at programmes involving education, where we are supporting those who are teaching English throughout the country. I went to see the hospital in Yangon and the Minister for Health. I went to see a fish farming project out in the delta where people were being given the ability to improve their business situation—to gain credit and move their business and their livelihood on. At present, we have not thought that those are the sorts of programmes where a decision to stop them is right. That might be portrayed by those who wish to do so as, “Here is the international community telling you, again, what they think of you. Here is the international community cutting off support for you. It is all because of these people and what they are saying in the international community about Burma.” I am not sure it is necessarily the right response. Richard, just say a little bit more about the programmes.

**Dr Montgomery:** Thank you, Minister. It is worth going back a little bit to the 2014 report that this Committee, or its predecessor, did, reviewing the UK aid programme to Burma. We really have stuck to the principles recommended by the Committee in our increased support during the democratic transition. That includes the fact that we give no financial aid to the Government of Burma. There is no sectoral or general budget support, and there never has been.

The programmes that the Minister relates are programmes that the Committee’s predecessor was fully aware of, such as the 3MDG fund, a pooled mechanism that the UK contributes to along with other donors, which targets poorer people who need maternal and child health service, vaccination coverage and TB services for people who at the moment are not reached by conventional services. That is an example of a programme where, if we were to scale it back, it would hurt poor people but not really change the attitude of either the military or the ruling elite.

A similar programme is the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust, which the Minister saw when he went out in early July. That provides support in different parts of the country, many of them ethnically diverse areas, and tries to improve people’s livelihoods and help them to generate further incomes from better-quality agriculture or connections to agricultural

markets and opportunities. It also helps some very vulnerable people who are basically living at subsistence level.

**Alistair Burt:** There is one programme that was stopped, as the Committee is probably aware. We do not give any form of military training or have any association with the Burmese military in that way, but there has been a classroom-based programme under way to try to encourage an awareness of human rights. That has been stopped, because there had to be that sort of gesture to the military, bearing in mind what had happened. That was the only connection that there was with the military.

- Q94 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I am pleased that you have said there was no direct payment to the Government and so on. The director of Human Rights Watch said to us last time that there should be a review of policy. He did not say that DFID funds should stop, in case it reinforces authoritarianism and rights abusers. What protections are we putting in to ensure that programmes—I agree they are run by local partners—are not ending up benefiting or enhancing the hand of, perhaps, the Burmese Buddhist communities to the detriment of other minority or vulnerable communities in Burma?

**Dr Montgomery:** We already have safeguards, checks and due diligence on all our partners, certainly for financial issues, on whether there are any connections with the military-business complex, if you like. The military has a lot of economic interests in the country. You are raising a very relevant issue, and asking a question that we are asking ourselves: how confident are we that we are not supporting people who are supporting hate speech or are complicit in supporting atrocities being carried out on the Rohingya? That is an area that our Secretary of State has asked us to delve into, to ensure that we have a robust process in place, and that is under way.

We still remain of the view that a democratic Burma is more likely to protect the rights of minorities, and more likely to support accountability in the long term. We ask our questions: "Can we do more to support that? Can we do differently to support that?" The issue of the ethnic patchwork, and ensuring that we are really focused on inclusion and working with ethnic organisations rather than just with the majoritarian ones, is something we are looking very closely at. We welcome the IDC's inquiry into the shape of the Burma and Bangladesh programmes later on this year.

- Q95 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Particularly with some of the relatively shocking accounts of sexual violence that are coming out at the moment, are we looking at ensuring that those programmes are sensitive to such issues, and maybe even having some additional training for some of those local providers to ensure that those issues are properly reported? That touches on what you mentioned earlier about ICC referral and reporting.

**Alistair Burt:** We have seen the stories of sexual violence and the reporting, particularly the Sky coverage that was so graphic and disturbing. Remember that this country has taken a lead against sexual



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violence in conflict for some time, with William Hague's excellent work on it, leading the UN. Our programmes are sensitively defined. This is an epidemic. This is a worldwide sense that women are particularly vulnerable in a confrontation, which is horrific. I suspect we may be talking about that in relation to the protection of women in Bangladesh at present and what can be done in the camps, but you are right that all of these programmes have to be that sensitive, and that is a significant concern for the Department and our Secretary of State.

- Q96 **Chris Law:** I want to pick up on one point that Lloyd was touching on about the military training the UK was previously funding. Why was the UK funding that, given that we knew the circumstances on the ground regarding various ethnic communities, not just the Rohingya?

**Alistair Burt:** I come back to a point I have come to before. If you are dealing with states where everything is great, they do not need this sort of training. The very fact that you have to consider this sort of training usually means something is going wrong. It is not just in Burma but in other places where there have been difficulties, and we believe that police and security force reaction is not only wrong but likely to be counter-productive to what is expected and to cause more injury and violence to people. If those states are willing and want UK training in how better to control a crowd, what the right thing to do is in relation to an incident that would result in less loss of life and less injury, and how greater respect for individuals could be demonstrated, then that is where the United Kingdom offers that support. It is not a tick in the box for any particular state, but you would not be doing it unless there were problems.

That is the background to human rights training for security and military personnel where we consider it to be appropriate. However, as you have rightly indicated, if a point is reached where clearly, because of circumstances the United Kingdom should not be associated with a place, the programmes are stopped.

- Q97 **Chris Law:** In hindsight, would you consider it a mistake? And secondly, very little of the funding that went towards military training went into hours committed to human rights training.

**Alistair Burt:** In hindsight it is difficult, because you make judgments based on what you have at the time. We go back to the long-standing nature of the conflict—how can that be eased? A whole series of things have to happen for the respect and understanding of a different community, rather than labelling them as the others and labelling them in a way that gives you a sense of immunity for your actions towards them. That has to be part of it. Would you consider working in areas like that, to change that attitude? I think the short answer will always be yes, if there is any likelihood that any good would result from it. If the evidence is overwhelming that it is pointless, you pull out, but then who does change attitudes in those circumstances? On the proportions of money spent, Patrick has that.



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**Patrick Moody:** I have not got the proportions of money, but the primary objective, as the Minister was saying, was trying to change attitudes in the leadership culture within the military, precisely as part of that democratisation process of creating a modern military that fitted in under civilian control in the way that we would expect. A lot of it was around leadership and leadership attitudes, but contained within that were issues around integrity and human rights. It had a wide aim, but within that, as part of it, were the objectives of changing attitudes, human rights and proper respect.

Q98 **Chris Law:** Thank you. The next question is more specifically about moneys. How much of DFID's pledged funds have been released and to whom—local, regional or national responders?

**Alistair Burt:** Do you mean in Bangladesh or in Burma?

**Chris Law:** In Bangladesh.

**Dr Montgomery:** I do not have the exact figures of how much has been released, but I believe that it is most of it. We already have in place what we call a multi-year humanitarian programme, which has meant that although we have pledged more money to the response, we already have a proved mechanism through which we can channel that ministerial approval. We can write to you with a breakdown of the agencies that we think have benefited.

**Chair:** Thank you, that would be appreciated.

**Alistair Burt:** What has already been done is huge and significant. I could go through the statistics, but it would take time. Hundreds of thousands of people are being given food, water, sanitary assistance and shelter. That has all come through funds that DFID has already provided. It has to work out through the agencies so, again, it is not simply a question of releasing it all. It will go out over a period of time as there are needs.

We have been a contributor and driver of the Geneva pledging process to get more money from other donors. My understanding is that about 70% of that money has been raised but, as you rightly say, it has got to be used.

Our understanding is that the co-ordination in the camps is good. IOM is running it but with UNHCR support. The agencies were dealing at first, let's remember, with an extraordinary influx. They are now in a better position of co-ordinating on the ground, so the moneys being available is important and then they are drawn down as they are needed.

Q99 **Chris Law:** Are DFID representatives participating in decision-making processes at Inter Sector Coordination Group or cluster meeting levels in Cox's Bazar?

**Dr Montgomery:** Our staff? Yes.

**Chris Law:** They are?

**Dr Montgomery:** I can't guarantee that they are involved in every meeting, but we have regular visits by our staff, both from the DFID Bangladesh team and CHASE, our humanitarian department. We have regular visits down to Cox's Bazar.

**Alistair Burt:** There is an ask, bearing in mind who might be listening to this. We need to get longer-term permits for workers who are operating there at all levels. At the moment, it is three months; we could do with longer-term permits. That is quite rightly in the hands of the Bangladesh Government. We would be very grateful if they would respond to this and provide some longer-term permits; that would help the work being done.

**Chair:** I am sure we would endorse that as a Committee, and I think a note has been made by our friends from the Bangladeshi High Commission. Thank you very much.

Q100 **Chris Law:** My last question. How involved are the Rohingya and host populations, including women and girls, in participating in delivering the response that is being given by DFID?

**Dr Montgomery:** That is a really relevant question. A coherent Rohingya leadership in the camps is not evident, but there is every attempt being made by the various agencies, including the Inter Sector Coordination Group and the different cluster agencies, to ensure that they are consulting with community members. But we do think this is an issue.

More broadly, one of our big concerns, as the crisis continues to evolve, is better camp management. How do you deliver a coherent set of packages, not just shelter, food and water, but long-term sanitation, services such as safe spaces for women and non-formal education for kids? How do you ensure that the community gets this whole range of assistance? That camp management is a real challenge in what are really awful conditions.

**Alistair Burt:** And again, those are awful conditions that have just suddenly sprung up. The speed with which this has all been done is something that the Committee, I am sure, does bear in mind. It will not all work straightforwardly straight away. The progress that has been made has been immense, and involving the Rohingya community is clearly a key part of it.

**Chair:** We have less than 10 minutes and there are three areas that I am keen to cover, some of which you have just referred to. Henry first.

Q101 **Henry Smith:** I will be very succinct. What support is being committed to the local host population, who are, of course, under immense pressure?

**Alistair Burt:** They are, and I say again to the Bangladesh Government and the host community that there is a recognition that the world would be facing an even greater horror were it not for their hospitality and the work that has been done.

We recognise that the stress on host communities is considerable and increasing. We were providing support to refugees and host communities



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according to their needs before the latest influx, and we are continuing to do so.

UK funding is provided in support of the inter-agency humanitarian response plan, which targets the needs of all Rohingya refugees and 300,000 host-community members. Host community needs are also a vital part of our planning for a protracted crisis, so they are indeed part of the plan for the future.

**Q102 Chair:** Richard referred just now to education and, as you may know, yesterday we published our first report of this Parliament on global education. That includes a significant element on education in emergencies, with the increasing world population of refugees and internally displaced people. Can you tell us what is being done to ensure that some form of education provision can be provided?

**Alistair Burt:** Yes, I can. UNHCR is supporting non-formal basic education for nearly 9,000 Rohingya children, aged between three and 14, in the official refugee camps. DFID Bangladesh agreed funding mid-year this year to support early learning and pre-school programmes and non-formal basic education. The Education Cannot Wait initiative is now the major global response to conflict, and I was pleased to attend the steering group meeting in New York, because we are the major donor to this initiative to support children caught up in conflict. Education Cannot Wait plans to commit \$2.5 million for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and we are developing an education strategy and review options for further funding as part of our medium-term response plan. Education in the camps is a key issue for us.

**Q103 Richard Burden:** You mentioned sexual violence before and rightly see it as a priority for this area of work. Will you comment on the scale of the issue there? The IOM's humanitarian response plan reckons there could be 448,000 incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, but the evidence we have had from DFID says that funding is going to 13 women's centres that offer psychosocial support for 10,292 women and girls and case management for just over 2,000 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. While that is welcome, I just wonder if the scale of the response needs to match the scale of the problem.

**Dr Montgomery:** Can I make a quick comment?

**Alistair Burt:** You can, but let me say something first. I am fortunate to have two such engaged colleagues, which I hope is a help to the Committee. Let me put the politics on the record first. Our ability to respond at present cannot possibly match the scale of the problem. As I mentioned earlier, a deeply distressing factor now is attacks on vulnerable people, whether it is the conflict or their engagement as refugees who find themselves in these vulnerable situations.

However, it is clear that, over recent times, much more attention has been paid to this. If you now go to any of the camps, some of the first questions you ask are what the arrangements at night are, how do women get to the toilet at night, what the lighting might be and how they are protected in

those circumstances. There is an awareness that women in the camps are targeted and may be made more vulnerable. All that is much higher up the agenda than it used to be. I get the impression that, some years ago, caring for their needs was a useful add-on; it is now absolutely up-front.

You have the list of things we are doing, so for reasons of time I will not repeat them, but we have people there who are qualified in dealing with gender-based violence and setting up the things for the children—the psychosocial support that is necessary because of their horrendous experience. The short answer to “Is it enough?” is no. You cannot always manufacture the people to go and deliver this support, but we are looking at new ways in which to do it. I know that the new Secretary of State has this very much in her mind and she really wants to make sure that, if there is more we can do, we are doing it.

**Dr Montgomery:** I would just say that we do not downplay the huge and incredibly appalling evidence that has emerged about this. There is still a big gap between need and provision. However, I would just like to say that the figures you are quoting are the UK contribution to a larger effort by UN agencies, such as UNFPA and UNICEF. There are a lot of really important NGOs—including many of the UK NGOs, such as Save the Children, Oxfam and others—that are trying to help with psychosocial support.

That is another reason why we would very much welcome assistance from the Government of Bangladesh, who have asked us to start planning a bit longer term. However, for that type of specialist support to come in and boost these services, that makes it even more important that we are able to have longer permissions—annual permissions rather than the three-month permissions that the Government of Bangladesh has options to provide for NGOs.

Particularly given the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty and, more recently, Save the Children reports that are documenting and building a body of evidence of these testimonies of not only women but also children who have been sexually abused, this is an area that we are giving a big boost to.

Q104 **Richard Burden:** Do you think there is potential to scale up the effort? I accept what you say about the figures I gave being DFID’s contribution to a broader effort, but even in terms of the UK’s contribution, is there potential to scale up?

**Alistair Burt:** I suspect the answer would be yes.

Q105 **Chair:** Can I ask a final question? The scale of this is clearly enormous and the speed at which it has developed over recent months is also such. We know from other crises that often there will be a big international focus on something, and then the world’s attention moves elsewhere. How confident are you that we can sustain the sort of effort that will be needed for years, frankly, and in particular that other donors will rise to the challenge in the way that we generally do?

**Alistair Burt:** That question is as broad as it is long. There are so many other areas with long-term protracted problems to be sorted—the recovery and reconstruction in Syria, for example; Yemen; and areas where we will be asking the international community to do more. What we in the UK can be proud of—I do not say this from the Government, I mean all of us—is that the 0.7% contribution means that when we go to places, very often in international meetings they will say, “We know that the British will continue to support us. What about the rest of you?” We can be proud of that because we have a national consensus, I believe, on the importance of staying involved long-term in crises such as this.

Will there be a drop-off? There may be—who knows what is round the corner somewhere else? Will there be a determination from the United Kingdom to do all we can to encourage other donors to live up to promises? Absolutely—you will never see a drop-off. We recognise the scale of this, and we also recognise the impact on the United Kingdom from communities here who feel a connection with those who have been driven out. A number of Members here from different parties have been over to look at this. We have that, so you can be sure that both the FCO and DFID are very well seized of that, and we will be doing all we can to ensure that this misery is tackled. As long as it needs to be in the international eye, it will be so, but we must not lose sight of the fact that caring for those who have been moved is only one part of the answer. There are longer term answers to look after those people in the future, and to give them the sort of future that they and their children deserve.

**Chair:** On that note, I thank all three of you for your evidence today. We have covered a lot of ground in the past 60 minutes.