HOUSE OF COMMONS

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Bangladesh, Burma and the Rohingya crisis follow-up, HC 1494

Wednesday 12 September 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 12 September 2018.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Mrs Pauline Latham; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Paul Scully; Henry Smith.

Questions 1-81

Witnesses

I: George Graham, Humanitarian Director, Save the Children; Tun Khin, President, Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK; and Orlaith Minogue, Save the Children.

II: Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Minister of State for International Development and Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Gail Marzetti, Head of DFID Burma; and Kate White, Director of Asia Pacific, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: George Graham, Humanitarian Director, Save the Children; Tun Khin, President, Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK; and Orlaith Minogue, Save the Children.

Chair: Good afternoon. This is a one-off further evidence session following up on our three reports published as part of our Burma, Bangladesh and Rohingya inquiry. Today we are focusing specifically on the Rohingya crisis.

I welcome our first panel of witnesses. We have 45 minutes and are seeking to cover five big areas with you during that time. The second panel is the Minister and officials. We will go straight into questions but, please, when you first answer a question, introduce yourself. I ask my colleague Pauline Latham to lead off.

Q1 **Mrs Latham:** That is because I have to go early—apologies.

Will you update us on the situation in Cox's Bazar, particularly in relation to the monsoon season? When we were there, we were extremely concerned about what would happen when the rains came, and they have had a lot of rain. Is the situation much better than anticipated? Was that bit of the work done before the monsoon, and what was it?

Orlaith Minogue: I am Orlaith, and I am advocacy adviser at Save the Children UK, in George's team. Recently, I spent some time in Cox's Bazar, so I have had the opportunity to witness some of this myself at first hand.

As you know, there are two cyclone seasons in Bangladesh, one from April to May and another from October to November, upcoming, bracketed either side with monsoon rains. There was a lot of concern—rightfully so—about the impact that those might have on the conditions within the camp.

In preparation for the monsoon, I would say a huge amount of work went on. Humanitarian agencies alongside the Government of Bangladesh were working round the clock to address some of the issues—the topography of the camp and the density, with the number of people in such a small space not set up for such numbers. It is quite shocking when you see it for yourself, as I believe many of you have seen. We were lucky in that at the start of the cyclone season a cyclone did not hit Cox's Bazar directly. However, the monsoon rains did start as expected in April.

In terms of the work that has been going on, it includes the building of mud-track roads and bridges, and the digging of drains. I saw myself the intensity of the work that was happening. I think such work has gone some way towards increasing the stability of the conditions in the camp, although that is not to say that the damage has not been severe. To date, there have been 3,500 mini-landslides, so when you have got your accommodation, people in tents, up on the hills—you have seen pictures

and in real life yourselves—2,000 shelters were damaged quite severely. Of the 200,000 people identified as being the most at risk from the rains, 40,000 have been relocated to additional land, but 160,000 remain in direct danger of any heavy rains.

What I would say is yes, to answer the question about whether a lot of work has gone on, and yes, it has mitigated some damage. However, every single day living in the camp people are at extreme risk of any further rain or entering the second cyclone season. That risk remains high.

Chair: George, do you want to add anything?

George Graham: Only to emphasise the points that Orlaith has made. I used to work in West Bengal—the Indian side of the border—on cyclone responses, and I saw much better prepared villages being flattened by cyclones, including Cyclone Aila in the case that I was working on. You have been there, I have been there, and we have all seen this incredibly precarious landscape and incredible overcrowding, so to repeat Orlaith's point, a lot of good work has been done, but a lot more needs to be done to guarantee that there will not be a catastrophe if a cyclone hits that part of Bangladesh.

Q2 **Mrs Latham:** Apart from cyclones, what are the current main concerns in Cox's Bazar? Perhaps Tun would like to answer that.

Tun Khin: I am speaking on behalf of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK—thank you for inviting me.

Chair: Thank you for being with us again.

Tun Khin: As far as we can see, there is an increase of danger in the long term. We have already mentioned the 160,000 people who are directly in danger, and I think more support is needed. I worry that there will be another national disaster for the Rohingya to face—that is what we can see, but we need to work a lot more. Landslides happen, and so on, but we need to do more.

Orlaith Minogue: In terms of concrete things that are needed to meet people's needs, first we would urge the Government to use their influence with the Government of Bangladesh. Essentially more permanent structures are needed. I spoke to some people, and they saw some drains going down, and some concreting and sand bags—a huge amount of work—but in essence, in terms of what is currently permitted, that cannot withstand the kind of winds and rains that are expected. Permanent structures are crucial. Add to that the 160,000 people who I mentioned are still in the way of direct danger, and additional land is needed in Cox's Bazar. Some has been allocated but more is needed.

Those are two clear, concrete asks on the monsoon. More broadly, despite the huge amount of work that has gone on, and the generosity of the Government of Bangladesh, we are still looking at a population living in dire conditions, and not just because of the monsoon. The monsoon exacerbates the situation, but essentially it is not set up to be a

permanent structure for people to live in long term. The UK has been at the forefront of funding the response to this crisis with £129 million to date, but we still need a lot more work when thinking about longer-term recovery and more sustainable solutions and so on.

Q3 **Mrs Latham:** We were worried that the latrines would be flooded because they were not particularly well constructed. Is that a problem, or is it something that has not caused a problem?

Orlaith Minogue: The latrines are certainly an issue because, as you have seen yourself, they tend to be built on heights. A lot of work has gone into trying to make them as durable as they can be within what is currently permitted by the Government, but it is safe to say that they remain a concern. Like all the work that is going on, people are mindful of such things—lights have been put up to try to make the latrines safer, particularly at night, so that children and women will be able to use them, but some progress concerns remain.

Q4 **Richard Burden:** When we were there, certainly the message came to us loud and clear that although a number of things could be done by way of mitigation—you mentioned aggregate on the roads, better drainage, and so on—the issue of finding more land was central. They need land that is less prone to landslides in the way that the camps around Cox's Bazar are. You say that 40,000 people have been transferred to other land. Have other parcels of land that could be brought into use been identified, and the problem is just ensuring that it is made available, or is there still work to be done to identify where that extra land could be?

Orlaith Minogue: Some extra land has been identified as suitable—as I say, 40,000 people have been moved. Potential additional land has been identified in Cox's Bazar, but not necessarily through the official channels in conjunction with the Government. There are many groups on the ground and many people are thinking about this issue. There is adjacent land that has been considered—without the necessary inspections—suitable for movement, but a lot of work needs to go into getting the permits for that, bringing the Government on board and making the case that these people need to be moved, because it is in everybody's interest for congestion to be eased and for that land to be utilised. That work is definitely ongoing.

There are two issues, not only the identification of that land but also ensuring that any plans made for the movement of refugees there have all the right conditions in place, including that it is easily accessible to the refugees and the humanitarian community, that it is in close proximity to where those communities are and that freedom of movement exists. All those conditions need to be in place, so it is key that that land is identified, allocated and readied, and there is still work going on to do that.

Q5 **Chair:** You will know that we published a report on education globally, which had a big focus on education in emergencies and the educational needs of refugee communities and internally displaced peoples. When we

visited, we went to see one of the child-friendly spaces that UNICEF runs in the camp. Where are we now in terms of what you might call something that is recognisably a school for Rohingya children, and what are the obstacles to achieving universal education, at least for primary-age children, if not beyond?

Orlaith Minogue: We are sadly still worryingly far from anything that we would recognisably call a school. We currently have around 140,000 Rohingya refugee children who are able to access a form of informal education at the pre-primary and primary level. That is about one in four. We are happy to see that progress. You mentioned learning centres, and Save the Children, for example, has 100 learning centres throughout the camp that give children the opportunity to learn and to recover and that give them all those things we know that education provides in crises like these. However, three out of four refugee children still have no access whatsoever.

Q6 **Chair:** No access whatsoever?

Orlaith Minogue: No access whatsoever, including to basic literacy and numeracy—nothing.

Q7 **Chair:** Is there any distinction between boys and girls, or is it roughly one in four for both? Is there a greater take-up by boys? Is there any kind of gender factor?

Orlaith Minogue: No. Within the camp itself it is both boys and girls who access it. Save the Children runs girl-friendly spaces to address some of the concerns that might pose barriers to girls' education. Others do that as well. In the camps themselves we are seeing equal access across girls and boys, although I do not have the exact figures on that.

We know that those 140,000 who access education are pre-primary and primary age. For those over 14 years of age there is no access to education whatsoever, even to informal education. That causes massive issues, not only in terms of those children's right to access that education but for the future, for feeling hope in the camp and for all the protective factors that it brings as well.

You mentioned barriers. There are multiple barriers. One is funding. At the moment, out of the £47.4 million that has been requested for education in the joint response plan, only £12 million has been received, so pure money, plain and simple, is one issue. The second is space. Even though we have learning centres within the camp, space is limited. Space is obviously at a premium within the camp generally. Although there are learning centres, there is nowhere to progress; there is nowhere else for that next stage to move on and replace them.

There are also issues about the Bangladeshi Government's approach to education. There is no formal curriculum and there are language issues, in that they do not want children to learn in the Bangla language or follow the Bangla curriculum. These are multiple layers that at each stage cause issues.

Q8 **Chair:** Further to that, does an issue also arise from the Bangladeshi Government's reluctance to acknowledge that the refugees are likely to stay for a significant period of time?

Orlaith Minogue: Yes. The sensitivity around some of these issues is playing out in terms of education and the long-term nature of how people see themselves building a life within the camp.

Q9 **Chair:** Tun Khin, can I ask you to comment on this? We are aware that in Rakhine state the Rohingya community did not have the same access to education that other communities might have had in other parts of Burma. Do you want to comment on the two different challenges?

Tun Khin: Yes, there is a particular issue with Rohingya who pass matriculation, after which they can go to university. Matriculation is a kind of O-level. Thousands of Rohingya have been waiting—pending—to go to university. Every time, we have been getting messages about where they have to go and what they can do. After that O-level, they end up not being able to do any profession or get any work in the Government. It is quite systematic. I faced that myself when I was in Rakhine. I left when I was about 17. I could not go to university because of the 1982 citizenship law, which denies Rohingya citizenship. That is one of the main issues.

I have visited refugee camps many times. Of course, the first thing people want is justice, and then they come up and say, "We want education. How can we bring our children up?" The Burmese Government is intentionally, systematically destroying our community. It is important to build up and empower the community, otherwise these children will end up with human traffickers, doing whatever concerning activities that might involve. That is our big worry. Of course, we appreciate the international community's concern, but we have to look at the lives of the children of the almost 1 million Rohingya. As a Rohingya myself, we have been wondering all this time how we can educate our children. We want our children to get education. Our future is in big danger. What will these children do? A lot of people might use them in different ways. We do not want to see that.

Q10 **Chair:** Can I come back to Orlaith or George on the question of the Bangladeshi Government? Is there any sense of movement from them, specifically on education? I will understand if it is hard for you to comment.

Orlaith Minogue: I think there is a feeling that there has been progress on this issue. I was talking to one of my colleagues this week, and they certainly felt there had been some movement. There is work going on on the development of a joint framework across the different education providers within the camp, which would definitely move us a long way towards feeling like we were getting things moving. There is still a way to go, but there is some progress.

Q11 **Chair:** On a roughly related issue that was raised with us earlier in our inquiry, has the position on access to visas for NGOs wanting to work in Cox's Bazar improved, or is it still a challenge?

Orlaith Minogue: It remains a challenge. These infamous FD7 permits authorise the work that goes on around the humanitarian projects. There are lots of delays in the permits being allocated. The permits are quite short—from one to three months. There is a huge amount of work, energy and resource going into those permit applications, and into the applications for visas for the staff themselves.

Tun Khin: I think the Bangladeshi Government is quite concerned that if it provides education, the refugees will live in Bangladesh for a long time. That is one concern. But we cannot see the Rohingya being returned to Burma in the very near future, so we need to look at how to persuade Bangladesh. This is not about the Bangladeshi curriculum; we and our children belong to Burma. We saw 20,000 students join in with the first anniversary remembrance day. They want justice, and they want education and so on. We need to respect what the victims want.

Q12 **Chair:** Just so I understand you correctly, Tun Khin, you are saying that you would want something closer to the Burmese curriculum, rather than the Bangladeshi, so that the children, when we are hopefully in a position for a proper, safe return—

Tun Khin: Yes, if they return one day, that would be good. If they study the Bangladeshi curriculum, the Bangladeshi Government would not want that—it would be a different way. I don't think that would be a good way to go. The Burmese curriculum would be better, and also anything international would be fine.

Chair: Yes, I see.

Tun Khin: International recognition would be good. Particularly, we don't want to go back to the Bangladeshi curriculum. That would be challenged by the Burmese Government. "Look, they're originally from Bangladesh. They're just taking back."

Q13 **Chair:** Fair point. Thank you. George, did you want to add something?

George Graham: I just wanted to make two big picture additions. First, the Committee's focus on education in emergencies and DFID's increasing focus on that, both globally and in the context of the Rohingya, is critical because, as Tun Khin is outlining, and as is so familiar from so many other refugee contexts around the world, nobody wants the situation to be protracted. The Government of Bangladesh doesn't. The people themselves don't. Nobody wants it to be, but we know that situations often become protracted.

The point at which the experience of protractedness is felt most acutely by refugees is, I think, in education. If you miss out on a few years of education, it is game over for your future life chances. That is the most critical bit. I know the Committee knows that, but I want to—

Chair: No, it is really important to emphasise it.

George Graham: Secondly, not only is getting education right absolutely central for the rights, wellbeing and future prospects of those children, but in the context of wider development strategy, if you think about the region and that part of the world, it is in nobody's interest to have tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, of uneducated adults, which those people will become.

Q14 **Richard Burden:** Could I ask you to say a little bit about relations between the Rohingya around Cox's Bazar and the local Bangladeshi community? How are relations developing there? Clearly a great deal of hospitality has been demonstrated. Nevertheless, there were already some signs of strain when we were there.

I wonder where things look like they are developing in relation to work. Again, there has been some ambiguity. The official Bangladeshi Government position is that they are in a kind of legal limbo. However, there have also been some statements, I think from the Commerce Secretary, saying, "Well, actually it should be possible for Rohingya refugees to work outside the camps." Could you say a little bit about the issue of work, and how that overlaps with the atmosphere among the local Bangladeshi community?

Orlaith Minogue: Yes, I can speak to that. Exactly as you said, a huge amount of generosity was shown by local host communities, many of which were first responders as people started to arrive into Bangladesh having fled Myanmar. There is, as you say, a sense that that good will is a bit under strain. When you see it yourself, the massive changes that have taken place in that land and to the local way of life, it is understandable, as happens in many contexts where large refugee camps form like this, that there are some issues outstanding.

In terms of challenges that local communities are facing, they include but are not limited to environmental degradation, competition for firewood and other natural resource, risks to water supplies, food price inflation and labour market competition. I think there are multiple issues there.

In terms of the issues around work, there are a lot of restrictions on livelihood programming for the Rohingya refugees. Certainly humanitarian agencies are keen to see the skills of the Rohingya refugees themselves being utilised within the camp setting to meet so much of the need that is there. However there are certainly restrictions to livelihood programming and to cash transfers, all of which is having an impact on the refugee population's ability to support themselves and to look to any kind of longer-term, sustainable solutions within that.

Despite that, it is fair to say that local economies have sprung up around the camp. You might have seen that yourselves, in terms of markets and so on. I would say we see a lot of resilience among the community and there is still good will between the two, yet the challenges remain. Without moving towards funding solutions and policy solutions that address some of the issues around recovery and longer-term thinking, those will continue to be exacerbated.

Q15 **Richard Burden:** Is the run-up to the elections having much of an effect on the atmosphere around the camp?

Orlaith Minogue: I can't speak to that personally, in terms of seeing it having a direct impact.

Q16 **Chair:** You spoke earlier in evidence about the issues of land. We observed that when the Committee visited earlier this year. We heard a bit about the proposal to locate a proportion of the Rohingya community on an island in the Bay of Bengal. Are you able to update us on where that proposal is? To your knowledge, is it still under consideration? If so, are you able to comment on it?

Tun Khin: As far as I know, the Bangladeshi Government is planning to move about 200,000 refugees to that island. We appreciate that the Bangladeshi Government is showing generous hospitality for about 1 million Rohingya, but as the UN has mentioned, the Rohingya have faced genocide in Burma. These are victims and survivors. How that island would be for the survivors is very important. Because of the danger of natural disasters in that place, I think it would be much better if, instead of that, we look at something near the current place. If that could be improved, it would be much better.

Q17 **Chair:** Are you able to comment at all? Is there any engagement between the Bangladeshi authorities and NGOs about the idea of the island?

George Graham: My understanding—Orlaith, come in if you have better information—is that there is very little engagement. That is part of the challenge here. Obviously, as Tun Khin has said, we welcome any Government of Bangladesh decision to relocate refugees to places where their life conditions could be improved, but any relocation needs to be done in the context of consultation with that population. It needs to be free, informed and voluntary. In the case of the island, there would clearly need to be an assessment of its viability.

Obviously, everybody who has heard about it has question marks about the likely viability of locating people to an island that has historically been subject to repeated flooding, including total submersion during monsoon season. It is an idea that would need fully rigorous assessment before being one that anybody could get behind. If the idea proceeds, we are calling for UN agencies and humanitarian actors to be involved in the independent assessment of its viability.

We would recommend to the UK Government that it declines financing any programmes related to relocation unless the conditions for voluntary, dignified and safe relocation are very explicitly met and that it is clear from rigorous and independent assessment that the best interests of children will be met, including unaccompanied or separated children, and that all the issues around protection, health and education can be met, as well as, critically, freedom of movement—it is an island, so there is a big question mark around whether that would be possible. Those would be the concerns that we are laying out. But to answer your question, there is not much dialogue happening on that.

Orlaith Minogue: No, I think that is exactly right.

Tun Khin: It is very important that the UK and other members of the international community support safe and dignified relocation as a priority, instead of the island. When I last met the refugees a few months ago, they were quite worried because natural disasters are highly likely in that place. We have to put it as a top priority if they move; we have to persuade the Bangladesh Government that it is a very important issue. We do not want to see another disaster, a natural one, with flooding, affecting animals and others. This is quite isolated. Currently, the Rohingya victims are happy that they have proper communication with the survivors, their relatives and others from Burma and in other countries, so isolation would be a big blow. You would be openly rounding people up and putting them in a place. That is quite dangerous.

Q18 **Chair:** One of the central points of the reports we have published as a Committee has been to say that the Rohingya voice must be heard, in terms of both—we hope—ultimately a settlement in Burma that gives citizenship and enables the Rohingya to return safely, and the Rohingya voice being heard now on the situation for the refugees in Bangladesh. Do you feel there are opportunities for the Rohingya who are living in Cox's Bazar to have their voices heard about their own future?

Tun Khin: It is important, as many victims have told us. We have made some points, but particularly—I have to dig up the issue—if you look at the recent UN deal, although it is not openly a deal that the UNDP, UNHCR and the Burmese Government signed, they did not consult with any Rohingya. We have seen a leaked document, and they did not use the word Rohingya. There is no talk of restoring full citizenship, no consultation and no rights of the Rohingya. How could that happen? Even though the international community is raising our issue, we are very disappointed with that UN deal by the UNDP and UNHCR with the Burmese Government.

These are the people who fled mass atrocities. The UN has mentioned that they face genocide. That is why about 1 million Rohingya refugees fled from Burma. They did not simply leave. We have our own land, our culture and our civilisation. Our grandfathers' grandfathers were there. We have our land. We have had everything taken by the Burmese Government. They have taken our ethnic rights, stripped away our citizenship and put restrictions on movement, restrictions on marriage, restrictions on education, and they have created popular violence. They burn down our houses, they push us to the camps and finally they are cutting off the aid, which is happening in Sittwe. Now the mass killings happen. That is systematic. That is what we have been facing for decades.

How can we return in this way? We are not facing this time. My parents fled in 1978, and because of international pressure they were sent back and repatriated, but we saw it in 1991-92 and 2016. Three times the Rohingya have fled, but there is no such agreement or anything concretely restoring their rights. This is the time. We Rohingya are appealing for solidarity and support from the international community to restore the rights before our return to Burma. At the same time, we need

international protection, no matter how, because as a whole, in the Burma NLD military security forces, a strong hatred against the Rohingya is going on. How could this happen? These mass atrocities could happen at any time. We have seen thousands of Rohingya women raped and so on.

The point is that a Rohingya voice is needed whenever and wherever any international community is dealing with that. We are a manageable minority. We have our culture. We are a people who belong to our country, but the international community has neglected our voice. This is important. Without consultation, nothing can happen.

Chair: Thank you. We will return in a moment to the issues in northern Rakhine state.

Q19 **Paul Scully:** I apologise for coming in late. I will have to leave early as well—such is the nature of Parliament—but thank you very much for coming back. I wanted to ask a specific question and apologise if it has come up before. Following on from what you are talking about with the Rohingya voice, you have clearly been campaigning for the Rohingya people for a long time now, as have activists such as Wai Wai Nu and people like her, who have been a really great voice. What I noticed, from the time I was in Cox's Bazar last year to the six-month anniversary when we went as a Committee, was a sense that there was a hardening of opinions from ordinary people in the refugee camps. Last September, they were saying, "Yes, we want to go back when it's safe." In February it was, "I can't see it being safe; I want to make a life here." Have any of you seen or been able to track that sense of a hardening of opinion? Am I coming down the right line? Is there any change that you have seen in the ordinary people—not necessarily activists, but ordinary people—in Kutupalong and the other camps?

Tun Khin: The thing is, I was there last in April. When I was there in April, I met refugees fleeing, who were new arrivals at that time. I also met the people who fled in September last year. I met some different refugees. Generally, as far as I learned, the people are still fleeing and they are only looking at what is happening in Rakhine state right now. They have been receiving information. For example, people are still being arrested on false allegations. Some Rohingya people thought they could go to the paddy fields, as they are mostly farmers, but they could not go to farm their land.

As far as we have seen, the refugees are looking at the situation as impossible. Generally, most people survive by fishing, but they cannot go fishing. They go to the town to buy things and they sell them in the village, but they cannot go there. They cannot go to their towns, such as Buthidaung town or Maungdaw town. If you go to the town you need to get a pass. Of course, last time we were there you needed to have a pass, but this time it is harsher and you have to pay extra money. A lot of things are going on. On that concern, I feel that generally they do not want to return.

Chair: I will move on to Lloyd, because we only have five more minutes.

Q20 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** When we visited, refugees were still arriving in Cox's Bazar. Do you know if there is still a steady stream, or still refugees arriving from northern Rakhine? Generally, how are the conditions now for the Rohingya who have remained in Rakhine state?

Tun Khin: First, we have seen extortion increasing. They are not burning houses—

Q21 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** They are not burning houses?

Tun Khin: They are not burning houses, but indirectly they are arresting the Rohingya on false allegations. On the other hand, they cannot go to the paddy fields. They have no access to medical care, they cannot go to the hospital and they cannot go fishing. Harassment from local Rakhines is increasing, because the security forces are supporting that. That is one of the main issues going on. The military is threatening them. Whenever they see someone, they say, "Why are you still here? This is not your land." Psychologically, physically—they are using different methods.

Q22 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** So it is intimidation. Are people in the IDP camps? Amnesty talked about camps that they described as cages, but said they were not really occupied by many people. They were built, but they were not hugely occupied. Are they now becoming occupied?

Tun Khin: Do you mean in the Sittwe IDP camps?

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Yes.

Tun Khin: Yes, they have been there for six years now. We still do not see people getting proper aid. We have not seen their lives improve at all. Kofi Annan recommended that they closed down these IDP camps. We have not seen anything happen. We cannot see anything improving at all. People are trying to flee by boat from IDP camps because their lives are too bleak. They cannot go to their original place. I learned that in the past few weeks some people have tried to flee by boat to Thailand. That is what some people are trying to do.

George Graham: The number we have is that nearly 129,000 people are still in IDP camps. Some 80% of those are women and children. As Tun Khin described, these were built six years ago. They were never intended—at least not formally—to be places where people lived for so long. Conditions are absolutely appalling. Save the Children and other organisations are operating there. We have quite an extensive programme there, providing child protection, education, food security, water and sanitation, but obviously it is a sticking plaster for a really nasty and very protracted situation.

Q23 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Are many people trying to cross the border still?

George Graham: I don't know month by month, but more than 11,000 people have crossed the border this year, so there is still a flow of people coming across. Tun Khin described people taking other routes. We have seen increasing attempts to flee Rakhine state by sea.

Tun Khin: In northern Rakhine, the people have almost fled. In terms of the people you are seeing now, there are 129,000 IDPs in Sittwe and some in Kyauktaw, and there are some Rohingya in Buthidaung Township. Now, the people who are fleeing are particularly from IDP camps and some people from Buthidaung. Maungdaw as a whole town has almost gone to the camps already. Three weeks ago 200 people fled from northern Rakhine. We are not getting information. It is such a remote area nowadays. A lot of people flee in a different way, not by boat but through the mountains—the May Yu mountains and others. As far as we know from our reliable sources, people are fleeing daily. At least 10 families a week flee.

Chair: Thank you all very much indeed. We are going to move on to the second panel, but please feel free to stay to listen to them. Thank you all for your evidence.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Minister of State for International Development and Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Gail Marzetti, Head of DFID Burma; and Kate White, Director of Asia Pacific, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Chair: Welcome to our second panel. Thank you very much for joining us. We have an hour with you, and we are seeking to cover 10 questions in that hour—so roughly five or six minutes for each question. Paul Scully will lead off.

Paul Scully: Thank you, Minister, for coming to update us. I know the Foreign Secretary intends to go as soon as he can, and I dare say there will be questions later on—forgive me as I have to leave early—about the political situation. Can you give us an update on what you have learned from the visit and whether your visits have led to any changes in what DFID is doing in Cox's Bazar?

Alistair Burt: If you will permit me on this occasion, I have brought a prop, because it is really quite symbolic and it will not take a second and detract much from our time.

Chair: Of course.

Alistair Burt: While I was in Cox's Bazar there was a photographic exhibition put on, and I was given this photograph by the curator of the exhibition. I will pass it round. As you can see, it is a picture from the camp, and it is very colourful.

The note on the back says this, and I do think this is important. The curator, Patrick Shepherd, said, "There are many reasons to be hopeful in this place. When I think about the Rohingya community here, I think of bright colours and eyes brimming with love, strength, compassion and pain. It exists everywhere, in people's homes and in what people wear and in the landscape itself. This exhibition is in many ways about the relationship between the Rohingya community and the agencies that

support them, but it is the humanity, colour and resilience that I really wanted to share, because once you have seen that you can never forget it." I suspect that will have great resonance with those who were there.

My sense in visiting, and what I gained from it that I would not have got had I not been there, is this. I am deeply impressed with what has been achieved at the camp. A massive humanitarian disaster has been averted. There are now about 1 million people there—as you know, 700,000 people moved at the end of 2017. If it had not been handled well, if the Government of Bangladesh had not been accommodating, and if the agencies had not worked as effectively together as they have, by this stage we might have had a terrible crisis. The monsoon has been relatively kind. The work that was done to improve the shelter, which is what you wanted to see, has certainly been done. You could see dwellings that had been moved to a higher level and work done to strengthen them and everything else.

The sense I had was that there is not malnutrition. There is not disease. The agencies have structured the work that they do well. There are services that just weren't there before, with reproductive health services being, I suspect, among the most important, together with the psychological counselling and the child-friendly spaces.

We think the children are in a better position than they were before. Those who have more experience of the camp said that the children seemed happier, that some of the initial trauma had gone away. Again, they had done some drawings, which I will pass through. All of that is on the positive side.

Interestingly, of course, the real problems are about what to do next. Just before I was there—I thought it was significant—it was the anniversary of the first year and, if you remember, the protests were, "We've had 365 days of tears. Now we are angry." Most of the agencies believe that the issues to come are connected not with external threat but with others. Their top four were: domestic violence, which is their biggest worry in the camp; trafficking and taking people out of the camps for abuse outside; the need for education; and idleness. What do you do once people have settled and decided they will live and are now looking for something to do? A certain amount of work could be done in the camps, but it is limited.

So I think the political issues are not just looking after people but: what are we all going to do next? People want to go home, as the Committee knows very well, but they are not going to go home unless there are at least two things. First, they have got to be safe. Secondly, they want to be recognised for their identity. My sense was that a remarkable job has been done. DFID has played a great part along with other agencies in delivery. The United Kingdom's population can be proud of the £129 million of their money that has been spent in doing the work. The relationship with the Bangladeshi Government is strong. They now want to see some degree of movement—there are elections coming up—but it is not going to be quick. We have therefore moved into a different mode in the camp of

sustainability, which will become most important. There will be new challenges for those in the camps.

Saying that the conditions are as we see is not to say that the camps are a place that anyone would wish to go. I do not wish to make that out. We are not at the end of the cyclone season yet, which may yet be difficult, but compared with what might have happened, our sense is that what the Committee would've wanted from agencies and from DFID—to do as much as possible to protect people when they arrived and to sustain them—has been done. We will now go on to the next phase, which throws up new challenges.

Q24 **Paul Scully:** Funnily enough, it was only yesterday in a Bill Committee that I realised why we are not supposed to use prompts—they cannot be recorded in the transcripts. However, the photo showed a load of roofs and shelters coloured very vibrantly. As you say, it is nowhere that people would want to settle, but there is none the less a vibrancy.

Similarly, there is vibrancy in the pictures you are passing around that young children have drawn. When we went, we spoke to some of the teachers and psychologists who were working with the children. They explained how, when they first got there, the children had been drawing some very dark images of what they had obviously picked up on. If these are the first pictures that they are drawing, or even if they are developing, they are colourful, vibrant and positive, and they are what a normal child in abnormal circumstances would draw, which is welcome.

Alistair Burt: My props were designed to show progress and a sense that things that could be even more tragic than they obviously already are. It could have been so much worse. However, that prompts questions for the future.

The Committee will know that this community did not previously live together in the same way. They were scattered and were prevented from contacting each other because of the activities of the Burmese military and everything else. They now live together in a different way and are able to communicate in a different way. New political issues will arise from that, because they will need their own representatives to speak for them. The camp will very much be a place of transition in the next year, I'm sure.

Q25 **Paul Scully:** I absolutely commend what DFID has done with the £129 million. They have raised and spent that money incredibly well in difficult circumstances. Moving forward, what do you see as the biggest challenge for DFID and the agencies that it works with?

Alistair Burt: I think it will be maintaining, in some way, a sense of hopefulness when we are actually likely to be planning for a longer period of time in the camp than people would have wanted or expected. That is the reality of it. Our mind is very much turning to sustainability and the things needed to build long-term assistance and protection for the people there and how the camp will sustain itself. People will not go back just because Bangladesh and Myanmar have signed an agreement. Their rights are there too.

As I indicated, dealing with the problems of a lot people living together in circumstances in which there is not much to do throws up issues. The agencies have told us of domestic violence and of people coming in and taking people out, and you will know yourselves of the lighting issue and the security issue. It cannot be done easily. There is just too much space and it will not all be lit.

There are practical problems in running the camp, and I think that education will be the significant problem, particularly for those youngsters moving beyond obvious primary age. How will they get skills? As we know from Grand Bargain and Wilton Park, the job of looking after people in these circumstances is to prepare them for what is coming next. That means making sure that chances to learn transferable skills are available and to do the education work and things like that.

Q26 **Paul Scully:** Can I quickly ask, with your indulgence, the same question I asked the last panel? You talked about the fact that everyone wants to go back. Have you seen any change in attitude with the ordinary refugees—not activists but refugees there—about whether they want to go back? Clearly, they want to go back if it's safe. Or do they want to stay in Bangladesh and would rather their future were there?

Alistair Burt: Clearly, the number of refugees with whom I could have had serious contact was limited. All the evidence would appear to be that people want to go back; they are not looking to stay in Bangladesh. When people speak of home, they are speaking of Burma/Myanmar. They want to go back; they want their identity. I got no sense that even in the year there had been some sort of acceptance that this was to be their future life. Clearly, for other reasons as well, we know that there are the local needs of the community around Cox's Bazar, who again have been extraordinarily welcoming. The sense that people want to go back is the overwhelming one in the region.

Q27 **Richard Burden:** Could I take you back to the issue of the monsoons and the cyclone? As you said, the fears that we had when we visited have not been borne out. It was predicted that there would be a substantial loss of life from mudslides, landslips and so on. Clearly, the aid agencies and the international community need to be commended on the mitigation work that has been done.

However, one point that was put to us time and time again was the importance of finding other land that would be less susceptible to landslip. I understand that some land was identified and about 40,000 refugees were transferred there. With the second phase of the cyclone season coming, is there work being done to identify more land? Are there discussions taking place with the Bangladeshi Government, not just to identify it but to ensure that it is made available?

Alistair Burt: Yes. It was certainly evident to see the work that had already taken place, and that work was still ongoing. Even on the day that I was there we were able to see people who were physically moving from one place to another. We saw the new shelters that had been built, that

were more substantial than the tents and tarpaulins that were elsewhere, but there is a limit to what they can do with the space they have.

The Bangladeshi Government remain very set on the idea of the island, as we are aware, but have agreed that, before they take that further forward, it will be subjected to review by a panel of experts. They still maintain that is something that they wish to see and we have reservations, as I think the Committee has. There is a limit to the amount of space that can be found in the immediate area of the camp but those efforts are genuinely ongoing and you can see it.

The sense I got is that, if there is an ordinary season, people are about as well protected as they could be but, if there is an extreme of weather, very little can protect them, if something is really bad. That would be the case even if they were moved somewhere. But that work is certainly ongoing.

Q28 **Richard Burden:** Has the Government of Bangladesh been responsive on that? I don't mean in relation to the island, which I think is a separate issue, but on the identification of other land in the vicinity that they could be moved to.

Alistair Burt: My understanding is that that co-operation is in a good state. My sense was that confidence in UNHCR, for example, in running the camp had grown from the Government. UNHCR takes a very strong degree of leadership there and relations were good with the Government in that respect. So, yes, my understanding is that that is correct.

Q29 **Richard Burden:** You emphasise that the next challenge is the question of long-term planning for what is likely to be—already is—a protracted crisis, with the refugees to be in Bangladesh for a long time. Could you say a bit more about the actual discussions that have taken place with the Government of Bangladesh on that? How far do you feel they are responding to the demands of that long-term planning?

Alistair Burt: I had the opportunity to speak to my counterpart, the Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr Shahria Alam. Understandably, the Bangladeshi Government are still very committed to the return of refugees. Of course, there are elections coming forward in December. None of us knows quite how long refugees, the Rohingya people, are going to be there. I still think there is a degree of caution because nobody can put a date on it.

Clearly, there are some difficulties in creating a situation that looks as though long-term establishment has been set up. It is finding that line between accommodating people's needs without giving a sense of permanence, which neither the Rohingya people nor the Government of Bangladesh wish to see. However, you can't ignore the reality and that is what we are planning for and realising that we have to do.

These are the sorts of things that we must consider. We have to secure long-term international financing. There was one worry that WFP had about the food there. It looked as though the transmission channels were very good but they

said locally, "If the money runs out, we don't have the money for food." Keeping the international community focused needs to be done.

We have to plan longer term to ensure a more joined-up international response. We have to be very clear with the Bangladeshi Government that, in doing that, we are not diverting other resource from Bangladesh itself. Again, that sense was very clear. While we were there at the exhibition, the local MP made a passionate plea for greater assistance for his community in Cox's Bazar, such as a new road and that sort of thing, and that is being done.

We have got to try to ensure that a plan does not imply acceptance of the status quo, but also to recognise that we have to do what we have for the time being, but keep that sense of hope alive both for the Government and the refugees. That is the area that we are working in at the moment.

Q30 **Richard Burden:** You mentioned that education in schools is going to be important in terms of long-term planning and, presumably, on top of that would be the question of livelihoods. It is recognised that both of those things are important, but what is your sense of what is actually happening in those areas? Perhaps you could also address the question of the legal status of the refugees, which certainly impacts on the livelihoods issue.

Alistair Burt: I will ask Gail to say something as well. My sense was this. Clearly, some people do leave the camp and are working locally. That has issues both ways, of course. If they can sell their labour more cheaply than others in the area that produces an impact on the local population.

There is another influx, coming in the other way, for example. If there is going to be more education and more teachers are needed, those who are recruited locally will likely be paid more by the agencies working in the camp than they would locally. There are all sorts of issues like that. There is only so much work that can be done outside; only so much work that can be done inside.

Gail Marzetti: Part of the latest thinking on humanitarian work is to use development tools as well just humanitarian tools in these protracted crises, which would mean working on livelihoods. Prior to this emergency, the Rohingya who were already there had livelihoods and were working on farming and trading. It is hoped that these groups would be able to do that.

On the Burma side, we are certainly looking at giving loans to people in camps, so that they can follow through trading livelihoods, for example. Education is going to be really vital, to ensure that the children get education, including on the Burmese curriculum, and that they speak Burmese and Rakhine languages, so that they are equipped when they go back. We are looking at how we can work cross-border as one, as DFID Bangladesh and DFID Burma, to ensure that they are prepared to return to Burma.

Alistair Burt: We will be looking at a longer-term programme, the aim of which will be to build resilience and self-reliance of the refugees and local

populations, to foster economic participation and social cohesion, strengthen the protection framework for refugees and support the protracted crisis approach. We are working on the basis that we will be there for some time, and we are working up the strategy, in the company of other agencies, to help to deliver the support that will be necessary.

Q31 **Richard Burden:** You mentioned the island in the Bay of Bengal earlier. Do you get the sense that that is still being actively pursued by the Government of Bangladesh?

Alistair Burt: Yes.

Q32 **Richard Burden:** What are we saying about that to them?

Alistair Burt: It is very much in their minds, but my understanding, as I indicated earlier, is that they have accepted that, before they move forward and take a final decision, they are happy to submit it to experts for a review, but without any conditions as to how they would respond. Clearly, they see this as a potential answer, but have asked others to have a look at it and make an evaluation as well. No decision has been made on it yet, but in answer to the gist of your question—are they still interested in pursuing that?—my understanding is yes.

Q33 **Chair:** Would that be external experts?

Alistair Burt: It is external experts to review it, yes—not just their own teams.

Q34 **Richard Burden:** Have we been saying anything so far on that issue to them?

Alistair Burt: We have expressed reservations, but it has not come up for a final decision yet. Clearly, it is low lying, and there are obvious worries that I think the Committee understands as well. We have to work with the Government of Bangladesh, and if this is not an answer, what is? We are working with the Government of Bangladesh on this, but we understand the concerns that those who have experience in this area, and our DFID teams, have about it.

Q35 **Chair:** Can I take you back to education and schools? We heard in the first panel, from Save the Children, that only about one in four of the Rohingya children in Cox's Bazar are in some form of education, which is hugely concerning. Do you recognise that statistic, and is there a sense of urgency around trying to increase the number of children getting education in the camp?

Alistair Burt: Yes, that is right. As I said, I have brought out four key issues that were stressed to me while I was there. Education was one, but there are practicalities. How do you get them together? What sort of skills will you need in terms of the teaching? Who is physically going to do it—can you bring everyone in from outside, or will you use local people? Once you have settled the children to a degree, how do you keep that beneficial curve going in the right direction? At some stage, of course, for those who have purely camp experiences, their world gets limited by what they are

seeing. The play space is obvious. As you know, I am a keen football fan, and wherever you go in the world, you find kids kicking a ball anywhere. Fortunately, I did see them, but it was not on a pitch. It was a bit of space like this, but at least they were knocking a ball around. There is no space for the sort of extra-educational activities that you would like to see. There is some urgency, and we will want to contribute to that.

Q36 **Chair:** We heard from Save the Children that the education component of the appeal fund is massively below par. Can we do more to press other donors, or even to give more of our own funds to the education element?

Alistair Burt: The whole plan is currently underfunded, as we know. From memory, about 34% or 35% has been funded so far. We use what we hope is our leadership in this to encourage others, which is why the generosity of the British people is so important. By demonstrating that we are making a commitment, we encourage others to do the same. We will certainly pursue that in the future and we recognise the importance of the education element.

Chair: We are going to move to questions that relate more to Burma itself, both in terms of the situation in Burma and the responsibilities of the Burmese Government.

Q37 **Henry Smith:** With regard to the Burmese side of the border, what access is being made available to DFID and other aid agencies in the northern Rakhine province? What sort of discussions are we having with the Burmese authorities with regard to access in terms of those Rohingya who remain on the Burmese side of the border?

Alistair Burt: It is still very limited. I am just trying to find the accurate note.

Gail Marzetti: The Red Cross has had access since October. They have said that they have been able to reach everybody in northern Rakhine, which is about 350,000 people, with food aid. The World Food Programme has also had access since about October and has been able to work with about 70,000 people with food drops. It has been difficult for them. They get access for two weeks and they have to fill in enormous amounts of bureaucracy in order to get in for the next two weeks—sometimes up to 50 pages' worth of details of vehicles, personnel and who is going there. Access is given for only a short period of time. It is hugely bureaucratic and slow.

The specialised agencies have had quite good access—Habitat and the ILO of the United Nations for training—but it has taken a long time for UNDP and UNHCR to get access. They have good access now, not to the full 31 village tracks as they had hoped—they were agreed initially in the memorandum of understanding signed on 6 June—but to 13 of them. Again, it is the same process as with the Red Cross. They are having to fill in a lot of bureaucracy and get a couple of weeks.

Access is quite intermittent. We had access last week, and the British ambassador went up with a group of DFID colleagues. DFID colleagues

were up about a month ago to look at how we might get education and training restarted. I would say that access is intermittent and unpredictable for a lot of major donors.

Q38 **Henry Smith:** As a follow-on, you mentioned about 350,000 remaining Rohingya in northern Rakhine. What is known about the conditions that they are in? For example, are they still facing action by the Burmese military against them, or has that situation stabilised?

Gail Marzetti: The situation against them by the Burmese military has stabilised. I would note that about 12,000 people have gone over the border since January this year—people are still trickling over the border.

Alistair Burt: We reckon about 70 a day arrive in the camp.

Gail Marzetti: And that is due to restrictions on their movement. It is difficult for them to farm or fish.

It is not 350,000 Rohingya; it is about 250,000 Rohingya people and about 100,000 or 200,000 ethnic Rakhine. Both communities are fearful of each other, but some education is going on. The Burmese Government is very keen that any education is non-segregated. Some of the schools have both Rohingya and Rakhine children—that is restarting.

Slowly the situation is improving. I would say that, nutritionally, the reports we have are that people are in quite bad shape. Some healthcare has been able to go up there; mobile health clinics are beginning to work and are concerned to reach people that need it. I think the situation is a lot better than it was before the end of December, but improving slowly.

Henry Smith: May I just ask one more question and impinge on everyone's time?

Chair: Of course.

Q39 **Henry Smith:** When I was with the Committee in Cox's Bazar, or near Cox's Bazar, in March, I spoke to one boy who reported seeing his father murdered several weeks beforehand. Of those Rohingya that remain in northern Rakhine province, what is the mix in terms of the numbers of children? Are many of them men because of the military action against them and because of fleeing across the borders of Bangladesh? How sustainable is that mix of the community in terms of numbers of children who require particular support, and the number of men and women?

Gail Marzetti: As the international community get in to work with them—the United Nations now has access—there is an issue of "protect through presence of humanitarians". As more humanitarians are going in, that is stabilising the community and dampening down the inter-community tensions on both sides. It's probably building up more sustainability as there is more international presence.

Q40 **Chair:** Can I take us to some of the issues around the conditions for return? Minister, the Committee would concur with the two key priorities you set—safety and identity—and that accords with the evidence we took

earlier from Tun Khin from the UK Rohingya community. What discussions is the UK having with the Burmese Government about this? Where do you see Aung San Suu Kyi's position now? Is she in any sense independent of the military, or has that hope really been extinguished?

Alistair Burt: I remind the Committee of the five objectives that we set out at the beginning of this: an immediate end to the violence; full humanitarian access granted to northern Rakhine; conditions exist for safe, voluntary, dignified and independently monitored returns; Rakhine advisory commission recommendations being implemented; and access for, and co-operation with, the UN fact-finding mission.

In terms of those, we do not believe at this stage that the conditions exist for that safe, voluntary, dignified and independently monitored return. As Gail has said, access is extremely limited still to Rakhine state. There have been reports of villages having been demolished. Some camps have been set up in order to accommodate people who return, but no one is going to return in those conditions. As you are aware, the Foreign Secretary is looking to go quite soon, and he will take up all those issues.

The position of Aung San Suu Kyi has caused some major concern. She has been a central part of the advisory commission's recommendations, and the work of Kofi Annan's commission, of which she has been very supportive. She has taken decisions in relation to access that clearly have not been decisions that the military would have taken. I think there is a strong sense that there is a military component to the Government and a civilian component to the Government, and Aung San Suu Kyi is not in charge of the military component of the Government. The Foreign Secretary said last week in answer to oral questions that there was a desire from many for her to do more and to speak out more in terms of what can be done. I think the United Kingdom remains in the position that we recognise the limitations on her position within Government, and her very strong determination to stay in office because of all the hopes invested in her by the many millions of people in Burma who saw her as the response to the years of military dictatorship and decline. That remains very much in the balance. Decades of that rule can be balanced with just a couple of years of change in Burma, and the situation is far from being stable yet.

We know we also have to confront the awful suggestion that the vast majority of the Burmese public supported the actions of the military or see the Rohingya people in the way in which the military have portrayed them. The United Kingdom absolutely rejects that but, in terms of handling this inside Burma, this means putting pressure on the civilian side of the Government.

I know the Foreign Secretary is very keen to explore those areas. What is the best process that we can take both for the safety and security of the people, which is paramount, but also for the security of democracy in Burma, which is clearly at a very tentative stage? Difficult questions arise. At what cost can that democracy be supported? We must also bear in mind the conclusions of the fact-finding mission and the things that will

flow from that, about which you might want to ask me in a moment. That is the understanding and sense of Aung San Suu Kyi's position, and that is what the Foreign Secretary will be keen to explore.

Q41 **Chair:** What is the UK's assessment of the new Manolo commission and how its role will interrelate with the Annan commission's recommendations? *[Interruption.]*

Kate White: Minister, it is the domestic commission of inquiry.

Chair: Have I given it an unusual name by calling it the Manolo commission?

Kate White: Yes. Manolo is the chair of that committee.

Alistair Burt: As always, an internal inquiry, particularly in relation to something as major as this, starts with a disadvantage as to credibility, particularly in relation to what the fact-finding mission revealed in its summary report and the immediate reactions to that and previous actions. I think the United Kingdom remains of the view that the independent inquiry can constitute an element of understanding of what has happened but, clearly, judgments have to be made in relation to what it finds.

As we all know, the fact-finding mission and what it said is remarkably tough and straightforward. It names. It makes very clear the concerns about genocide and crimes against humanity. It speaks about the need for the Security Council to consider this and to consider references to the judicial agencies that will cover this. This would indicate the degree of seriousness that the United Kingdom absolutely shares about what has happened, what we know about what has happened, and why we want to investigate still further what and who has been responsible for what is at least ethnic cleansing and, of course, has the ability to be considered as much worse.

So the role of an internal inquiry in relation to that will have to be measured against the concerns of the international inquiry and what has already been established by a wider international inquiry. Of course, that is still to be considered further by the Security Council. The summary has been produced, and initial reactions have been that there is a UN Security Council meeting on this later this month.

Q42 **Chair:** We will return to that with Lloyd in a moment. Just one more question from me. You know there has been widespread concern in the House and more widely about the sentencing of the Reuters journalist to seven years behind bars. Is this an issue that the Foreign Secretary will raise when he visits Burma?

Alistair Burt: Very much so. I think he was asked that question in the House last week as well, and he expressed his concern. He said that the sentences and the action undermine the freedom of the media, democracy and the rule of law in Burma. He very much intends to take the issue up, as of course has already been done by our officials there.

Q43 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I am going to come on to the ICC and the UN, but

first I want to follow up on what you said. You have mentioned a number of times the mission that the Foreign Secretary is about to undertake. Less than 12 months ago, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, when he was Foreign Secretary, went there. He stood in one of the areas where a village was meant to have been burned down, scratched his head, looked bemused, said it was all horrible and came back, but the British position did not seem to change at all in terms of how we push this at the UN. Is there going to be a fundamental difference from that trip to this trip? Are we expecting Aung San Suu Kyi to suddenly be convinced by a different Foreign Secretary now? Are his persuasion skills going to be much better? Or is Aung San Suu Kyi going to persuade our Foreign Secretary to do something differently? I don't understand what the difference in 12 months will be with a new Foreign Secretary going there. What is he going to do?

Alistair Burt: It was really important that the former Foreign Secretary went to Burma in order to confront some of these issues with which we all wrestle, particularly the situation between the civilian and the military Government and what happened. We knew that bit less then. I think he must have been one of the first senior Ministers from the west to get access, and he had to push extremely hard to do that and to try and get an opportunity to see something of what happened. I think the policy has been consistent, first, in trying to understand fully the distinction in Government and to make an assessment of the civilian role in this and Aung San Suu Kyi's role. We are aware of the debate surrounding her and what she could or could not have done. Some relationships can only be established in a personal way, and of course the Foreign Secretary will follow that up.

The situation at the UN is slightly different, because that is not subject to quite the same degree of personal relationship. There the issue is what can actually be achieved through the UN Security Council in terms of action. As the House has discussed recently, when we looked at issues affecting global Britain and the international rules-based order—I have certainly said it from the Dispatch Box and probably in here—the UN and multilateral bodies now face a challenge, a dilemma. If the UN Security Council is to do its job, it needs to prevent conflict. When a conflict has started, it needs to end it, and it needs to take a role in determining accountability and ensuring accountability for what has happened. On all these things, it is challenged at the moment, and it is challenged principally by the use of veto by powers that seek to protect others. The reason why the United Kingdom has not sought to run a resolution in relation to this is that a resolution of the Security Council has to be achieved by consensus. There are perfectly sound reasons for that, because that does involve the work of getting all the major powers to agree on a sense of direction, and, as we know, the relationship between China and Burma is a particularly close and intense one. We know China's view of what it considers to be external influences in other states, and its general view that it views this with a degree of concern. The reason why the UN has not produced a resolution is that it just would not get through. Yes, there are times, then, that you run a resolution because if

somebody vetoes it, it is a public occasion—absolutely.

Q44 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** So why not that one?

Alistair Burt: Because it is question of what it would achieve. If you put another nation on the spot in those circumstances, there is a consequence—and there is a consequence for some considerable time afterwards, because a state will have come and said, "Please don't do this; we are working on this in our own way. If you put a resolution down that we are forced to veto, vote against or whatever, then it makes our job all the harder." That is the hard fact of life.

Q45 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** That line of thinking works if you have got an element in a country that is, hopefully, working to reverse some of the disaster that has happened. So the thinking there, if I would project, is that Aung San Suu Kyi's elements in Burma are trying hard, despite the military influence, to turn that ship around and to quell what has happened; but earlier on you said that the population of Burma is in favour, really, of the military action. Aung San Suu Kyi is a democratically elected representative of the population of the country—not of the military Government. If she is reflecting the view of the population, she is also in favour, therefore, of what has happened. If she is not agreeing with the view of the population of her country, as a leader she would be speaking out, or at least making some slight moves, to say, "I am not really in favour of this." Are there any examples of where she has shown leadership to try and change the narrative in her country, or is she just a bit of an irrelevance now?

Alistair Burt: Absolutely not the last point. The way in which she is seen, and the fact-finding mission and the criticism of Aung San Suu Kyi internationally, were registered in Burma—the population responded quite strongly against that. With that one proviso, the rest of your analysis would indicate you have a future role in the Foreign Office writing analysis papers, because it was bang on. It is an exceptionally difficult situation because of exactly what you said—a democratically elected leader. You said it could be taken that she approved of it. We do not know that. I am absolutely not going to put that upon her.

Q46 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Did she whisper to the Foreign Secretary when he last met her, "I am really unhappy with this, but my hands are tied"? Did she give any indication—kind of "Aung San Suu Kyi, blink twice if you don't support what's happening"? Was there anything, because I have not seen anything?

Gail Marzetti: If I could just jump in here: very soon after the whole Rohingya situation started, she held a number of interfaith meetings on tolerance and ethnic cohesion. There were four of those that were held, until the military asked her to stop, saying that she was using religion as a political tool, but lots of people came—the heads of the Christian church, the Muslim church, the Buddhist religion went to those—and the population was very interested in them. The football stadiums where they were held were packed out with people looking for ways of doing that. I think she would also say that she asked Kofi Annan to do his report. She

has asked for the commission of inquiry. She has made a number of speeches; she has asked the international community for support. So I think there is quite a lot showing that her hands are tied and that she would like to see some changes.

Alistair Burt: She established the commission of inquiry without seeking the military's agreement.

Gail Marzetti: And the memorandum of understanding.

Alistair Burt: Yes. I do not think in any way we can go into the sort of conversations suggested or anything like that. You asked about the purpose of the Foreign Secretary's trip and what would be different. It is to explore what scope or space there is for shift. Coming back to the Rohingya for a second, if they are to go back and be safe, it is not just a physical change, but a cultural change that is needed. How is that to be effected and recognised? That is the purpose for which the Foreign Secretary is seeking to go.

To go back to what you said about the UN—I separated the two—we think a resolution has been difficult for the reasons I outlined, but that does not mean we have been inactive in that space. We co-led the trip by UN permanent representatives to Bangladesh and Burma earlier this year. We produced the EU listings, travel bans and asset freezes. Lord Ahmad chaired a meeting at the UN on 28 August on the issue. Sometimes people get very fixed on the idea that there must be a resolution from the UN and things will flow. One of the tragedies in recent years is that when the UN has spoken, action has not necessarily followed. We have seen that in Syria, for example. The UN said, "There must be humanitarian access and a ceasefire." People signed it and then nothing happened.

Q47 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** On the Security Council, it is well recorded that there are problems there. We could have another whole session on that, couldn't we? One of the things that the UN report came up with was that it looks like genocide has happened, but that the worst elements of the genocide look like they are probably over now. It spoke about "ethnic cleansing" and "genocidal elements". They were cautious in the words they used, but that was the direction they were going. They said that happened and that there needed to be some criminal accountability for some of the people—military leaders—that had encouraged it and ordered it.

Sweden and Canada have backed a referral. We know that there is a difficulty with the referral of the Security Council element, but there is now talk about a referral via the disruption and the population that is now in Bangladesh. A small window has opened up with the number of ICC judges saying that they think a referral could come as Bangladesh is a signatory. Why have we not joined voices with Canada and Sweden to say that a referral needs to be made?

Alistair Burt: Because we are still talking to others about what the best course of action should be. We have had just the summary from the fact-finding mission. There is a full meeting of the Security Council to come,

and the full report will be reported on later this month. A variety of options are open, one of which is the ICC, but there are others. We want to discuss with others what the best course of action is. UK Ministers have made it very clear that we hold the military to blame for the atrocities that took place. There must be accountability. There must be no impunity, otherwise injustice exists. We are absolutely clear on that. We accept what the summary has said, which is that there are sufficient findings that there should be a referral so that judicial processes can consider the allegations that have been made. It is a question of finding the best route. It doesn't necessarily—

Q48 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** So we accept that there should be a referral.

Alistair Burt: We do not quite yet know what the best option is. If a referral would be blocked, that might not be the right way to do it. We are very interested in what the ICC has said about what they believe is their excellent jurisdiction. We want to see the right process. As I said, we need to wait and consider with others the full report at the UN Security Council. This is ongoing work in progress. We do not need to make a decision now.

Q49 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Canada and Sweden clearly have to go through the same process that we have to go through, and they have come to a conclusion quicker.

Alistair Burt: They are more than entitled to do that.

Q50 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** There were reports on the BBC only last week that the Foreign Secretary said he would support an ICC referral. My understanding is that the Foreign Office has asked for those reports to be taken down, because he has not quite got to that stage. It seems to be a very muddled message. Why can't we just say we support an ICC referral? How we get there is what we are going to debate and discuss, but at the end, we want a referral to the criminal courts.

Alistair Burt: What we want in the end is accountability for what has happened, no impunity and for justice to be done.

Q51 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Isn't the justice done through the criminal courts?

Alistair Burt: It might be, but there might be other options and we are waiting to see what is best. We do not need to make an immediate decision. The UN Security Council has got to consider this further. You name two states that have made their minds up; others have not. We think it right to consider the options. There is no muddle. It is just that some things take time, in company with other members of the Security Council, to make sure that we get the right decision.

Chair: Before we come to the next question, I will ask Henry if he wants to come on this. Are you still on the ICC or are you going to move on? I am just conscious we have got eight minutes.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I was going to move on to bilateral relations.

Chair: Great. I'll come to that in a moment. I think Henry wants to come

in on ICC.

Q52 **Henry Smith:** Related to ICC, we have been talking about possible co-ordinated international action. However, with regard to direct British engagement with the Burmese regime, there are obviously a lot of aid projects going directly to people in that country, but there are also some projects that are linked to the Government and the Parliament, and the Parliament, of course, has a significant military element to it. What reviews are taking place of the direct assistance that Britain has been providing?

Alistair Burt: Let me tell you what we have done already in relation to that. We have obviously shifted our programme as a result of events. There are things that we have stopped because they were too closely connected with Government. These include: we have stopped working on a reform of state-owned agricultural machinery and construction factories; we have a closed a project with the Ministry of Energy; we are working less at central Government level and more at sub-national level; we have changed the city work from infrastructure to services to the poor, and from Mandalay to the cities in the border regions.

The elements that we have kept are to continue to work in areas where people have been most disadvantaged, and to shift the focus of our work to those who have been left behind by the Burma Government, making sure that our work is focused on the populations, not the Government. That has been the determination and we have made clear shifts in the programme in order to accommodate those.

In relation to Parliament, that is a difficult one. There are elements in Parliament—newly elected individuals—who were elected on the back of the changes in the country in the past few years and who completely lack any skills to hold Government to account, but want to. We are all very familiar with this. Most of us have been on similar projects, whether with the Westminster Foundation or any of the agencies that work in this area. We have almost all worked with Members of Parliament who do not have the resources of independent officials to work with and do not really know how a committee works to hold people to account and things like that. We need to think about whether that work benefits the Government or the country. There are one or two areas where difficult judgments still need to be made. We have closed things that are too close to the Government, but have kept projects going where we think they benefit the sort of people who would otherwise continue to be marginalised by the Burmese Government. We do not think it is time to turn our back on them.

Gail Marzetti: I would add that we are continuing to review our programme. We are getting some fresh eyes looking at it this month, including from ODI, to see how the shifts have really made a change, and what we should be doing next, so that we are really supporting those affected by conflict, those in the ethnic areas and those who have been persistently ignored by the Government, so that we are helping them and moving away geographically from the Burma heartlands towards those border areas.

Chair: Thanks, Gail. We are going to return to that with Richard in a moment, but Lloyd had one more in his line of questioning.

Q53 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** The other side of the coin to targeting aid is about us taking economic and diplomatic sanctions against people. It is carrot and stick. The final question I wanted to touch on is about what actions we are taking to look at further sanctions, whether they are broader economic sanctions or targeted sanctions against individuals. I see reports that the EU is considering some discussion, so it would be interesting to know what we have fed in to those EU discussions around EU action, whether it is targeted at individuals or, as I say, at sectors in the economy.

Alistair Burt: We have already done some individuals, as you know, over the past year, but Kate may have some more detail on that for you.

Kate White: Absolutely. The Minister has already mentioned that we await the full fact-finding mission report next week, which it seems will have further details. They have already named some individuals, but we expect more individuals and concerns to be named in that.

We will be very actively discussing matters further with the EU. There is obviously the need to gather the right sort of evidence and compile that, in order to justify further listings, but we will be very much looking at the fact-finding mission for that.

As the Minister said earlier, there are a number of stages. So, once we have that full mission report, it will report to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva first, and we have made it clear that we think that that is of such seriousness that it is worthy of consideration by the UN Security Council. So we would absolutely be advocating for that to be further considered. And as the Foreign Secretary announced last week in Parliament, he will be convening a meeting alongside him as part of the high-level week of the UN General Assembly, with counterparts from a number of key countries.

So, those are some of the immediate next diplomatic steps, to supplement what the Minister has already said.

Q54 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Can I just confirm something? When this fact-finding report and details come out, are we confirming that we—as the unofficial penholder on Burma at the Security Council—will convene and put forward a debate, and possibly even a resolution or a chair statement if a resolution is not forthcoming, on the findings of the fact-finding mission? You said you would push for one, but we are the penholders; we are the ones who are meant to convene these areas around Burma in the Security Council. So it's not a case of whether we will push for one. It is a case of will we call one?

Kate White: As a result of all of the diplomatic efforts that we have taken, there is a very, very high level of international attention on this issue. This is, I think, the most serious or grave report that has been

produced of this nature recently, so I am sure there would be widespread support for that.

Alistair Burt: Let me jump in. I cannot see that it would be possible to proceed on this without the UN Security Council taking a further serious option. I just cannot physically see it not happening.

Q55 **Richard Burden:** Could I take you back to UK policy and these four shifts of emphasis? In light of the fact-finding report, even in its draft form, and given the kind of picture it presents, do you really think that those shifts of emphasis are adequate in the current situation? You say that a number of programmes have been terminated and that is significant, but I suppose the question is this: have any new programmes been created that reflect those shifts of emphasis, particularly in support of ethnic minorities?

Also, you mentioned the question of parliamentary strengthening, and the different pressures and considerations involved there, but what about the peace process? I mean, there are a number of programmes focusing on a peace process between the military and ethnic groups, which a number of people say is just illusory, not only because of what has been happening in northern Rakhine but in Kachin state and in Shan state as well?

Alistair Burt: Let me put on the record some answers to that, Mr Burden, if I may. We have been working very hard to ensure that the four shifts, which are more focus on inclusivity, ethnic and conflict areas, displaced populations and Government reform, are embedded within all our programmes. Newly agreed programmes and extensions, such as on rural livelihoods and health, focus strongly on conflict-affected states and regions.

We are planning an external review in September, facilitated by DFID's better delivery unit, to validate that the programme shifts are being put into effect. As I indicated earlier, we have decided not to take forward some planned activities to support the Government's economic development work. We are currently developing a new business case on inclusion that will focus squarely on the most marginalised communities, including ethnic minorities and those with disabilities.

In terms of the peace process, we are concerned about the slow progress being made. The third Panglong peace conference took place in July, but only after repeated postponements. None the less, we know that these processes are often slow and that we have to be both patient and persistent.

Peace is a specific programme area for DFID in Burma, as well as a cross-cutting theme across work on health and education, civic engagement, better governance and humanitarian assistance. The four shifts that we have made in our overall portfolio allow us to address those immediate needs while supporting the longer term aims of peace, inclusive democracy, and a more open and fairer society.

Q56 **Richard Burden:** When is the external evaluation you mentioned being

done? Is that happening now?

Alistair Burt: September—later this month.

Gail Marzetti: Yes, it is happening the week that ends on 28 September, so I think it starts on 23 September. We will include ODI as well, as a better delivery unit.

Q57 **Richard Burden:** Will you clarify what they are evaluating? Are they evaluating whether the four shifts of emphasis have been reflected in the programmes, or are they doing that and also asking whether those four shifts of emphasis are enough?

Gail Marzetti: They are doing both. They are looking at how far we have actually shifted, at what impact that has had and at how the existing programmes can do more, and then at whether we should do more in the future, perhaps looking towards the next five years and how our new programming can be in that area. It is going back towards the earlier programme—back towards humanitarian programming, and more towards working with the most disadvantaged, poverty alleviation. We are still doing economic development, but less of that, and it is more about empowering citizens and individuals.

Q58 **Richard Burden:** Will we be able to find out what that evaluation has produced?

Gail Marzetti: You, the Committee? I imagine so, yes.

Q59 **Chair:** That would be very welcome. It is in line with what we asked for, so it is welcome that you are doing it. We will be very keen to hear the outcomes and liaise with you about that. Richard, thank you.

I thank you all for your evidence here this afternoon. This is a big priority area for us as a Committee. I think we all wish the Foreign Secretary well on his visit, and we look forward to the outcome of that visit and to continuing to work closely with both DFID and the Foreign Office on this, because we must not forget the Rohingya people who are there in the camps in Bangladesh, as well as the importance of support for development in both Bangladesh and Burma. Thank you very much.

Alistair Burt: I am grateful for your interest. I would simply close by reminding you of what I said earlier about the fears of WFP. The worry is that, once again, the world will look away, because so much is going on, so your engagement is particularly important and effective. It bolsters what we do and I appreciate very much what you said, because my overwhelming impression seeing DFID at work in the area was of the extraordinary things it is doing for us there. I am sure that you would agree, having made a visit yourselves.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.