



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**DFID Assistance to
Burmese Internally
Displaced People and
Refugees on the Thai-
Burma Border**

Tenth Report of Session 2006–07

Volume I: Report



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Report, together with formal minutes

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Footnotes

In the footnotes for this Report, references to oral evidence are indicated by 'Q' followed by the question number. References to written evidence are indicated by the page number as in 'Ev 12'.

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Summary

One of the most shocking aspects of Burma's political and humanitarian crisis is the forced displacement of its own people. This crisis-stricken country, which suffers from immense poverty and pernicious human rights abuses, receives the lowest aid of all Least Developed Countries. We believe that this level of assistance is unacceptable and that international donors must find ways to increase funding to the growing numbers of very vulnerable people. In particular we believe that UK aid to Burma should be scaled up substantially, in addition to the existing planned increases in funding, given the UK's prominence in this area.

Funding aid work in Burma is fraught with difficulties, but aid can be effectively targeted and implemented, and constraints addressed, if there is sufficient commitment by donors. DFID has quadrupled its budget for Burma over the last six years, from £2.3 million to £8.8 million, and should quadruple its overall aid budget to Burma again by 2013.

As one of only four donors with a staffed office in Burma, DFID is in a leading position to assist Burmese Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and refugees. DFID's support to community-based organisations is particularly important in developing locally 'owned' responses to displacement, and this should be increased.

The UK's expansion of aid for Burma should include specific funding for cross-border assistance. Whilst providing aid in this way is far from ideal in terms of neutrality or safety, it is the only way to reach very vulnerable IDPs located throughout Burma's conflict border zones, including those areas that border Thailand.

DFID's plans fully to relocate management of its Burma programme from Bangkok to Rangoon will impair its work. We believe that, in order to work independently of the Burmese regime, to fulfil a co-ordination role, to support non-governmental organisations (NGOs) based in Thailand and to engage with cross-border and refugee assistance on the Thai-Burma border, at least two senior, full-time members of DFID staff should be retained within the Bangkok Embassy.

An urgent priority is assessing where IDP needs are most critical. DFID needs to support the UN in carrying out a mapping exercise of gaps in the aid provided to IDPs. It should communicate better about its own programmes of support, and promote information-sharing and the development of robust co-ordination mechanisms.

DFID must be a more visible presence at the Thai-Burma border and must engage far more with refugees' needs. The UK Government should step up negotiations with the Royal Thai Government (RTG) on education and employment opportunities for refugees, and with the RTG and third countries on resettlement policies.

Map 1: Thai-Burma border



Source: Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2006.

Background and acknowledgements

In March 2007, the International Development Committee announced an inquiry into DFID assistance to Burmese Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and Refugees on the Thai-Burma border.

Some 35 stakeholders provided us with a substantial volume of written evidence, representing a wide range of development actors, including community-based organisations; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); multilateral aid organisations; researchers; and consultants. We are grateful to all those who submitted written evidence, and to those who supplied us with background papers.

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who gave oral evidence during three evidence sessions at Westminster during June 2007.

We are particularly grateful to those organisations and individuals from developing countries, and especially Burma, who took the time to engage with the inquiry, especially given the sensitivity of much of the information about the current situation in Burma. We greatly value their input.

We visited the Thai-Burma border in May 2007 to observe the assistance being given to Burmese IDPs and refugees. We also met stakeholders, including Burmese individuals and organisations, in Chiang Mai and Bangkok in Thailand. We would like to thank the staff of DFID and representatives from other organisations, especially the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium, who made it such a worthwhile and interesting visit (see the Annex to this Report for the programme for the visit).

We would also like to thank those who took part in informal discussions with the Committee, including Benedict Rogers of Christian Solidarity Worldwide UK, Charles Petrie, UN Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator, Burma and Richard Horsey, Interim International Labour Organisation (ILO) Representative in Burma.

1 Introduction

Burma's humanitarian crisis

1. Behind Burma's displacement crisis lies a political, human rights and humanitarian situation as grim as any in the world today.¹ Millions of Burmese people are suffering from abuses caused by these three inter-related problems, and ethnic minorities in particular see their rights violated on a daily basis in a climate of impunity. Armed conflict continues in eastern Burma, where insurgent groups maintain their independence struggle against the Burmese Army.

2. Military rule, imposed in 1962, has systematically torn apart Burma's economic, industrial and social fabric, transforming it from one of South-East Asia's wealthiest countries to a Least Developed Country by 1987.² Most Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Burma ceased after the refusal of the military junta to recognise the winning of the 1990 elections by the National League for Democracy (NLD), and the subsequent house arrest of NLD leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. Her arrest, renewed for another year by the regime in May 2007, has been accompanied by what the European Parliament has called the "unremitting repression" of Burma's citizens.³

3. The catalogue of human rights abuses perpetrated by the regime includes forced labour, political and religious persecution, conscription of child soldiers and forced displacement. These abuses are closely linked to poverty. 25% of Burma's population currently live below the UN-agreed poverty line of \$1 per day,⁴ but this rises drastically in regions of the country where ethnic minorities are persecuted and displaced from their homes: for example, some estimates suggest that 70% of people in Chin State live below the poverty line.

Forced displacement

4. One particular human rights abuse driving Burma's high poverty rate is forced displacement. Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are described by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as "individuals or groups of people who have been forced to flee their homes to escape armed conflict, generalized violence and human rights abuses."⁵ In Burma's case, conflict is not the only factor in displacement. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement framework highlights that displacement can also be caused by large-scale development projects, and in Burma state-sponsored natural resource extraction and major infrastructure construction have displaced, and continue to displace, communities

¹ UK policy is to refer to Burma rather than 'Myanmar', the current name used by the Burmese regime since 1989. Burma's democracy movement prefers the form 'Burma' because they do not accept the legitimacy of the unelected military regime to change the official name of the country. Internationally, both names are recognised.

² Ev 78 [Ashley South]. Least Developed Country status is a UN categorisation for countries meeting three low income, human resource weakness and economic vulnerability criteria.

³ European Parliament Resolution of 21 June 2007 on Burma.

⁴ Ev 118 [Peace Way Foundation: Burma Issues]

⁵ UNHCR, *Internally Displaced People: Questions and Answers*, p.6. Online at <http://www.unhcr.org/basics/BASICS/405ef8c64.pdf>

and destroy the local environment.⁶ Displacement is also caused by inappropriate state policies that drive people from their homes, such as forced labour; lack of food due to limited productive land and poor access to markets; and a dearth of basic social services such as schools and clinics.⁷

5. Burma's military regimes have used what is known as the 'Four Cuts' counter-insurgency policy since 1974, and this has been sustained under the current regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Through this policy, the regime aims to cut insurgents' access to food, funds, recruits and information. Civilians are also continually caught up in this brutal campaign, which is a primary factor in displacement.⁸ The SPDC and the Burmese Army, the *Tatmadaw*, destroy villages and crops, lay landmines and coerce villagers into working for the Army (often through forced portering of goods across long distances and forced labour to build roads and infrastructure). The *Tatmadaw* maintains the largest number of under-aged soldiers with arms in the world. A 2006 survey by the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium of NGOs (TBBC) found that over 3,000 villages had been destroyed, relocated or abandoned, and over one million people displaced in eastern Burma since 1996.⁹ There is evidence that torture and murder are used routinely by the Army, and that rape is used systematically as a weapon of war.¹⁰

6. While forced displacement is present across the whole of Burma, the situation in the country's remote, mountainous areas bordering Thailand, Laos, China, India and Bangladesh is the most grave. These areas, mostly populated by ethnic minorities, including the Chin, Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mon, Rakhine and Shan peoples, have suffered historically from conflict and neglect—yet they contain more than one third of the country's population and most of its natural resources.¹¹ Written evidence received from Dr Alan Smith of the Thailand-based Centre for Local Development, the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) and the Euro Burma Office all highlighted that displacement is likely to increase in border areas, as the Burmese Army tries to exert control in areas previously controlled by insurgents and state-driven natural resource and other economic development projects are driven forward.¹²

7. Eastern Burma has experienced a recent escalation in violence due to an SPDC offensive in northern Karen State which began in November 2005. There are more than 500,000 IDPs in eastern Burma, including 287,000 people in ceasefire areas, 95,000 in armed conflict areas and 118,000 people in state-controlled relocation sites.¹³ Human rights violations are pervasive and a 2006 survey found that almost one-third of households

⁶ Principle 6.2 (c) *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, 1998, UN Document E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, cited in Thailand-Burma Border Consortium, *Internal Displacement in Eastern Burma 2006 Survey*.

⁷ Ev 81 [Ashley South]

⁸ Ev 59 [DFID] and Ev 107 [Mae Tao Clinic, Back Pack Health Worker Teams and Burma Medical Association]

⁹ Thailand-Burma Border Consortium, *Internal Displacement in Eastern Burma 2006 Survey*, p.3.

¹⁰ Women's League of Chinland, *Unsafe State: State-sanctioned sexual violence against Chin Women in Burma* (2007) and International Committee of the Red Cross, 'Myanmar: ICRC denounces major and repeated violations of international humanitarian law', press release, 29 June 2007.

¹¹ Ev 78 [Ashley South]

¹² Ev 93 [Euro-Burma Office], Ev 126 [Dr Alan Smith] and Ev 137 [Thailand Burma Border Consortium]

¹³ Ev 73 [Christian Aid]

surveyed in the region had experienced forced labour.¹⁴ The abuses perpetrated against displaced populations are contributing to a humanitarian crisis in eastern Burma, particularly with regard to public health. Standard health indicators in eastern Burma conform to those of countries experiencing humanitarian disasters: a 2006 Back Pack Health Worker survey estimated under-five mortality rates to be 221 per 1000 live births, compared to 205 in the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹⁵

8. Many displaced people in eastern Burma have crossed the border into Thailand. Some have managed to join the two million Burmese migrant workers in Thailand. Around 150,000 live in 10 refugee camps along the border (one Shan, four Karenni and five Karen—see Map 1, page 6). A further 15,000 are unregistered in Thailand and live in or near the camps.¹⁶ Since 1984, the camps have been provided with food and—more recently—shelter from the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC). TBBC is run by 10 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from eight countries and is based in Thailand. Health and education services in the camps are more limited and are provided by a separate group of NGOs working under the umbrella Committee for the Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT).

9. There are also more than 60,000 Burmese refugees in India, over 20,000 in Malaysia, several thousand in Bangladesh and an unknown number in China.¹⁷ Refugees on all these borders face numerous vulnerabilities. Refugee camp conditions are generally poor, and unregistered refugees outside camps face huge obstacles in securing their human rights and livelihoods. DFID does not currently fund assistance to Burmese refugees on these other borders, and thus this report will not focus on these groups in depth, beyond a brief discussion at the end of Chapter 5. But it is important to note that, as Benedict Rogers of Christian Solidarity Worldwide told us, these borders are even more “vulnerable and forgotten” than the Thai border and that refugees here deserve far more support from the international community, including DFID.¹⁸

DFID’s response

10. DFID funds work with both IDPs in Burma and refugees in Thailand. This assistance is funded from DFID’s development programme for Burma, which totals £8.8 million in 2007-08. The UK provides assistance to Burma in line with the EU Common Position, which states that non-humanitarian aid should be suspended, with a number of exceptions (see Box 1).

¹⁴ Back Pack Health Worker Team, *Chronic Emergency: Health and Human Rights in Eastern Burma* (2006).

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.33.

¹⁶ Ev 59 [DFID]

¹⁷ Ev 75 [Christian Solidarity Worldwide]

¹⁸ Q 52 [Benedict Rogers]

Box 1: EU Common Position on Burma

The UK provides assistance to Burma in line with the EU Common Position, which states that non-humanitarian aid or development aid should be suspended, with exceptions made for:

Human rights, democracy, good governance, conflict prevention and building the capacity of civil society;
Health and education, poverty alleviation and in particular the provision of basic needs and livelihoods for the poorest and most vulnerable populations;
Environmental protection, and in particular programmes addressing the problem of non-sustainable, excessive logging resulting in deforestation. (Article 5)

Council Common Position 116/77, 27 April 2006, Article 3.

Online at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/obj/2006/il_116/il_11620060429en00770097.pdf

11. DFID has four objectives for its Burma programme:

- reducing communicable diseases. To support this, DFID is contributing £20 million over 5 years to the multi-donor Three Diseases Fund for malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.
- improving access to basic education by contributing funding to, for example, Save the Children and Unicef's education projects;
- development of sustainable livelihoods by funding the work of organisations including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Development Enterprises; and
- support to a process of transition to a democratic society. This includes supporting the improvement of community participation, strengthening governance and helping to build Burmese civil society.¹⁹

12. DFID is supporting refugees with a grant to TBBC of £1.8 million over three years. This represents about 4% of TBBC's total budget. The UK contributes around the same amount again as its share of European Union (EU) funding to TBBC. Following an internal review, DFID announced on 5 March 2007 that it was removing the restriction on the use of its funds for assistance to refugees, so that they can be used for either cross-border or refugee assistance, as need and funding dictates.²⁰ This change of policy was accompanied by an extra £400,000 for community groups within Burma to assist IDPs and other groups affected by conflict.²¹ DFID has also provided emergency assistance to IDPs through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). This totalled £0.5 million in 2006. However, this has been disrupted by the closure of two ICRC offices in Burma in March 2007.

Our visit to Thailand and the Thai-Burma border

13. We visited Bangkok, Chiang Mai and the Thai-Burma border in May 2007 to observe DFID's assistance to Burmese IDPs and refugees first-hand. We visited one of the largest

¹⁹ Ev 66 [DFID]

²⁰ HC Deb, 5 March 2007, col 117WS

²¹ Ev 57 [DFID]

refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border, Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp (also known as Site 1) to talk to refugees about their experiences in Burma, and to hear their views on the assistance they receive in the camp. We also met the Camp Committee and the Camp Commander and visited the Camp's vocational training centre, the Ban Tractor Health Clinic, the Community Agriculture and Nutrition Project and the Provisional Holding Centre. We met Royal Thai Government (RTG) officials to discuss RTG policy towards refugees. Other key interlocutors we talked to about refugee issues included TBBC, the UNHCR's Thailand Field Office, the International Rescue Committee and the Jesuit Refugee Service.

14. In Chiang Mai, we met agencies carrying out cross-border assistance to IDPs in Burma. Because of the sensitive nature of this work, we will use discretion in naming the agencies carrying out this work in both the visit programme (Annex) and the text of this report. In Bangkok, we met the UK Ambassadors to Rangoon and Bangkok and representatives of several organisations working to assist IDPs within Burma, including NGOs, the ICRC and the UN Office of the Co-ordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), whose Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Co-ordinator had visited Burma in April 2007 with a view to improving co-ordination of humanitarian assistance to Burma.

The structure of this report

15. Our visit gave us some valuable insights into the plight of IDPs and refugees and the courage of many of those assisting them which we followed up by three evidence sessions held at Westminster during June 2007. The resulting oral evidence, together with the 35 submissions of written evidence and the background papers submitted to the inquiry, form the basis of this report. Chapter 2 assesses the assistance being delivered by DFID within Burma to IDPs. Chapter 3 explores DFID's co-ordination role and its participation in multi-donor approaches to in-country assistance. Chapter 4 looks at cross-border assistance to IDPs in Burma and will explore DFID's possible role in supporting this form of aid delivery. Chapter 5 addresses DFID's support to refugees on the Thai-Burma Border, including the extent to which the Department co-operates with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to implement policy in relation to the refugee situation.

2 DFID's in-country assistance to IDPs

16. DFID is one of only four donors with a staffed office in Burma.²² The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, Gareth Thomas MP, told us that DFID has “the capacity as a result to know what works, who does what and where aid is best deployed” in Burma and that the Department has a “comparative advantage” in working in-country.²³ This chapter will assess the validity of this claim by looking at how effectively DFID reaches and assists IDPs within Burma.

The scale of need

17. Much of the debate about assisting Burmese IDPs focuses on populations displaced by the armed conflict in eastern Burma and other contested border areas. However, there are large numbers of displaced civilians throughout the country. State policies have led to massive dislocation and relocation of people in many areas, including the central dry zone, where seasonal food scarcity is most serious.²⁴ Estimating the total number of displaced people within Burma is very difficult but is likely to be around one million, and includes vulnerable communities that have experienced displacement for decades.²⁵ Part of the problem in accurately assessing the scale and location of need lies in the complexity of displacement. As Ashley South, a consultant specialising in displacement in Burma, states:

“It is rarely the case that an [IDP] used to live in ‘Place A’, fled to ‘Place B’ (as an IDP, or as a refugee to Thailand), and can thus return in a simple manner to ‘Place A’. The original ‘Place A’ may have been occupied by the *Tatmadaw* or other hostile groups, and/or re-settled by other displaced people, and/or planted with landmines.”²⁶

DFID assistance to IDPs is delivered both through its overall development programme for Burma (described in paragraphs 10-11), which it claims is “responsive to the needs of IDPs”, and specific arrangements to fund community groups and provide emergency relief through the International Committee of the Red Cross (described in paragraph 12).²⁷

18. The scale of the need that DFID and other donors are trying to address is extensive. A lack of reliable data complicates assessments of poverty. Burma is almost certainly seriously off-track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).²⁸ The public health situation is particularly worrying. Infectious diseases are approaching epidemic levels: currently 71% of the population is at risk of malaria infection, the country has the third highest rate of HIV prevalence in South-East Asia and there are high rates of drug-resistant tuberculosis.²⁹ Public funding for health is the lowest in the world, at 0.5% of Gross

²² The other donors with staff in Burma are: Australia (AusAID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and South Korea's International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

²³ Q 181 [Gareth Thomas MP]

²⁴ Ev 145 [Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children]

²⁵ Ev 75 [Christian Solidarity Worldwide] and Ev 77 [Ashley South]

²⁶ Ev 81 [Ashley South]

²⁷ Ev 58 [DFID]

²⁸ Ev 61 [DFID]

²⁹ Ev 118 [Peace Way Foundation: Burma Issues], UNFPA State of the World Population, 2006 and Q 57 [Dr Thomas Lee].

Domestic Product (GDP).³⁰ 60% of households have had no education at all.³¹ Food scarcity continues to affect both settled populations and IDPs.³²

19. IDPs are likely to be amongst the most vulnerable. In its written evidence, DFID set out key challenges in reaching IDPs:

- remoteness—IDPs are concentrated in mountainous areas with poor infrastructure;
- security—armed conflict continues in eastern Burma;
- state restrictions on access—especially to conflict areas;
- humanitarian principles—the need to respect independence, impartiality and neutrality, in the face of both a brutal regime and armed opposition;
- limited in-country capacity—Burmese personnel have often had little access to capacity-building;
- co-ordination—complicated by the regime’s unwillingness to assume this role and the difficulties for aid organisations in openly communicating their work; and
- the need to balance development work with humanitarian and protection activities.³³

We recognise the huge challenges facing donors in assisting IDPs within Burma and commend DFID for being one of only four donors to run a staffed development programme within the country.

Funding community-based organisations

20. In an attempt to overcome a number of these challenges facing external donors, DFID is providing £400,000 in 2007-08 for Burmese community-based organisations (CBOs) to assist IDPs. The Department says it also provides training to increase the groups’ ability to deliver aid.³⁴ Given Burma’s public health crisis, Dr Alan Smith, of the Thailand-based Centre for Local Development, considered health awareness training in local languages, capacity-building of local health workers and education about the need for safe water and sanitation to be particularly important for CBOs.³⁵

21. Ethnic, religious and community groups often have relatively open access to government-controlled and ceasefire areas and can provide important development (and some limited protection) assistance to IDPs.³⁶ Such groups can assess IDPs’ needs at first-

³⁰ Figures for 2003. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*.

³¹ Q 182 [Gareth Thomas MP]

³² Ev 118 [Peace Way Foundation: Burma Issues]

³³ Ev 61- 63 [DFID]

³⁴ Ev 57 [DFID]

³⁵ Ev 128 [Dr Alan Smith]

³⁶ Ev 78 [Ashley South]

hand and tailor their response accordingly.³⁷ Another key benefit to assistance provided by local grassroots organisations is their ability to go beyond emergency humanitarian assistance to undertake more sustainable development work with communities.

22. This might include: capacity-building; education; landmine awareness and mapping; health and sanitation promotion; and self-reliance programmes.³⁸ Ethnic women's organisations play a particular role in providing vocational skills and literacy training and specialised health education to women and children.³⁹ **Providing funding to community-based organisations (CBOs), who often manage their own clinics, schools and projects, is a way for donors to assist IDPs without channelling funds through the military regime. Such groups can go beyond emergency assistance to carry out crucial sustainable development work at grassroots level.** Ashley South, a consultant specialising in displacement in Burma, pointed out that CBOs are under-funded, especially in comparison to groups carrying out cross-border assistance to IDPs.⁴⁰ **We recommend that DFID increase substantially the funding it gives to CBOs within Burma. Capacity-building and training of such groups is a crucial complementary strategy if funding is to be used effectively.**

23. Some CBOs are directly linked to pro-democracy resistance organisations.⁴¹ The regime seems to be more tolerant of social and community work done by faith-based groups. So donor funds, if not publicly acknowledged, can be channelled through religious groups to benefit IDPs. **Funding CBOs provides donors with the means to support human rights and democracy work within Burma.**

Exile groups

24. Another channel through which donors can assist IDPs within Burma is the range of Burmese political exile groups based in neighbouring countries. We met a number of these groups during our visit to Thailand, including the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN), the Women's League of Burma and the National Council of the Union of Burma. We heard that most groups work through the collection of information and advocacy, with some also carrying out covert political work and capacity-building (for instance, the training of professionals and journalists). SWAN told us that their network has a particular focus on documenting and assisting victims of sexual violence, to which Shan women, as an ethnic minority, are especially vulnerable. SWAN said that whilst they received support from other donors, they had tried in vain to meet and discuss funding opportunities with DFID. This must change.

25. Support to these groups has the dual benefit of promoting a transition to democracy and the establishment of a civil society within Burma.⁴² One example is the exiled trade union movement. There are no free trade unions in Burma and the right to organise is

³⁷ Ev 78 [Dr Alan Smith]

³⁸ Ev 119 [Peace Way Foundation: Burma Issues]

³⁹ Ev 111 [Mae Tao Clinic, Back Pack Health Worker Teams and Burma Medical Association]

⁴⁰ Q 148 [Ashley South]

⁴¹ Ev 96 [Free Burma Rangers]

⁴² Ev 122 [Peter Sagar]

severely restricted. Forced labour has been reported in Burma since the early 1960s and ethnic minorities and IDPs are particularly vulnerable to this abuse. A 2006 report by the Back Pack Health Worker Teams found that one-third of the IDPs surveyed in eastern Burma had experienced forced labour.⁴³ Maung Maung, General Secretary of the exiled Federation of Trade Unions-Burma (FTUB), described to us the covert training sessions his organisation runs within Burma to create awareness of trade unions, human rights and democracy.⁴⁴

26. Mr. Maung said that the FTUB could, with extra financial support, extend these programmes.⁴⁵ Several pieces of written evidence recommended that DFID should begin funding the FTUB, as well as other exile groups including the Association for the Assistance of Political Prisoners, the Shan Women’s Action Network, the Women’s League of Burma and the Women’s League of Chinland.⁴⁶ **We recommend that DFID begin appropriate funding of exile groups who carry out crucial work both inside and outside Burma to support IDPs and other vulnerable groups. Support to such groups would have the simultaneous benefit of supporting and raising awareness about the plight of IDPs, and of building capacity for a future democratic transition. We believe that the exiled trade union movement and women’s groups are particularly worthy of support.**

International Committee of the Red Cross

27. As mentioned earlier, DFID has also provided emergency assistance to IDPs through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), totalling £0.5 million in 2006.⁴⁷ However, this was disrupted by the closure of two ICRC offices in Burma in March 2007. During our visit, Thierry Ribaux, Deputy Head of Burma’s ICRC delegation, told us that a lack of independent access to sites or permission to work independently was now completely inhibiting the ICRC from carrying out its monitoring and protection work in eastern Burma. He said that the ICRC was standing by to withdraw completely if the situation deteriorated. In February 2006, Médecins Sans Frontières-France withdrew from Burma, stating that increased Government restrictions had made its operations in Mon and Karen States untenable.⁴⁸

28. On 29 June 2007, the ICRC took the exceptional step of publicly denouncing the SPDC’s “repeated abuses” of civilians—abuses that violate international humanitarian law—at a press conference. The ICRC commented specifically on the abuses inflicted by the army on communities living in conflict zones along the Thai-Burma border.⁴⁹ This is the most strident public criticism that the ICRC, which normally remains neutral, has made since it denounced the Rwandan genocide in 1994.⁵⁰ DFID and the FCO issued a

⁴³ Back Pack Health Workers Team survey, *Chronic Emergency: Health and Human Rights in Eastern Burma* (September 2006), p.9.

⁴⁴ Q 167 [Maung Maung] and Ev 71 [Burma Campaign]

⁴⁵ Qq 167 and 169 [Maung Maung]

⁴⁶ Ev 122 [Peter Sagar], Ev 133 [Tony Stokle], Q 33 [Benedict Rogers] and Q 33 [Mark Farmaner].

⁴⁷ See Paragraph 12.

⁴⁸ Ev 89 [Ashley South]

⁴⁹ International Committee of the Red Cross, ‘Myanmar: ICRC denounces major and repeated violations of international humanitarian law’, press release, 29 June 2007.

⁵⁰ BBC Online. ‘Red Cross condemns Burma ‘abuses’’, 29 June 2007.

joint statement in response to the ICRC's denouncement, condemning the Burmese regime's failure to co-operate with the ICRC.⁵¹

29. The ICRC does not identify a separate category of 'IDP'⁵² but evidence we received emphasised the valuable role played by the ICRC in working in remote regions where displacement rates are high, such as Karen, Mon and Shan States, and Tenasserim Division, and its role in witnessing human rights violations.⁵³ In its written evidence, DFID pledged to "continue to lobby the Burmese Authorities hard fully to reopen access for [the ICRC] in eastern Burma."⁵⁴ The then FCO Minister of State, Rt Hon Ian McCartney MP, told us that he had held a recent meeting with the Head of the ICRC to discuss Burma, amongst other issues, and that he hoped to have a fuller meeting at the Human Rights Council later in 2007 on steps that could be taken to facilitate a re-opening of the ICRC's programme in Burma.⁵⁵ **We are deeply concerned by the closure of two ICRC field offices in Burma in March 2007 and the damaging effect this will have on the international community's ability to document abuses perpetrated against IDPs and other vulnerable groups in Burma. We call on the UK Government to continue to make representations to the Burmese authorities on this issue at the highest level.**

Overall levels of aid to Burma

30. We have made clear in this chapter the huge need for development and humanitarian assistance within Burma, and we have identified two particular areas of in-country support that we believe need increased funding from DFID. **It is our strong belief that overall aid levels to Burma need to be significantly boosted.** Burma is one of the world's least aided countries, receiving just US\$2.40 of aid per head in 2004.⁵⁶ This is by far the lowest per capita aid level amongst the UN's list of Least Developed Countries.⁵⁷ Neighbouring countries close to Burma on the UN's Human Development Index receive 15-20 times as much in aid per head: Cambodia receives US\$35 per head and Laos US\$46.50.⁵⁸ If Burmese people were to get as much aid per head as people in Africa, DFID's Burma budget would have to increase from the current level of £8.8 million in 2007-08 to £80 million.⁵⁹

31. DFID's budget of £8.8 million is substantially lower than the Department's funding of other countries with similarly poor human rights records. For instance, Burma receives around a quarter of the annual total given to Zimbabwe by DFID.⁶⁰ However, we appreciate the importance of avoiding channelling funding through Burma's regime,

⁵¹ DFID and FCO joint press release, 29 June 2007.

⁵² The ICRC argues that humanitarian law and principles should not distinguish between IDPs and other conflict-affected people.

⁵³ Ev 78-79 [Ashley South] and Q 71 [Dr Thomas Lee]

⁵⁴ Ev 58 [DFID]

⁵⁵ Q 199 [Ian McCartney MP]

⁵⁶ Figure is for Official Development Assistance (ODA) per capita. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*

⁵⁷ This list is available online at <http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrh/lls/ldcllist.htm>

⁵⁸ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*. The Human Development Index is a summary measure of human development that measures the average achievements in a country in three dimensions of human development: life expectancy at birth, education ratios and GDP per capita.

⁵⁹ Ev 67 [The Burma Campaign UK]

⁶⁰ Ev 77 [Christian Solidarity Worldwide]. DFID provides £38 million a year to Zimbabwe (£143 million over five years).

which, as we have said, bears much of the responsibility for poverty and displacement within the country.⁶¹

32. Funding of aid work in Burma is not a case of ‘business as usual’. The risk of funding reaching an illegal and repressive military junta must be absolutely minimised. Political and humanitarian ‘space’ to carry out the process of poverty reduction and humanitarian assistance is highly constrained. Capacity amongst partner organisations to spend aid money effectively is low. The co-ordination of aid efforts is difficult and is currently done poorly. Overall, operating conditions for aid agencies in Burma remain very challenging. We respect DFID’s determination to minimise the risk of any of its funds finding their way into the exchequer of a brutal and illegitimate regime. But as Gareth Thomas told us, “The aid that we spend in Burma is effective [...] there are ways of having a significant impact with one’s aid through working with NGOs and UN organisations.”⁶² DFID has quadrupled its budget in Burma over the last six years, from £2.3 million in 2001-02 to £8.8 million in 2007-08. Whilst there is a need to address the significant constraints, we believe more aid could and should be spent in Burma by DFID. The current UK contribution of £8.8 million represents significant under-spending compared to countries with similar poverty levels and human rights records. DFID has quadrupled its aid budget for Burma in the last six years and we recommend that this trajectory should continue, with a further quadrupling by 2013. We also believe that the UK Government should encourage other countries to provide greater support for work within Burma. This would give Burma the opportunity to make at least some progress towards the Millennium Development Goals by the 2015 deadline.

DFID office relocation

33. DFID’s Burma programme has until now been managed from DFID South-East Asia’s office in Bangkok, where the programme manager and sectoral advisers are based. In addition, one poverty adviser and two members of administrative staff work from the Embassy in Rangoon. We were shocked to learn upon arriving in Thailand for our visit that DFID had decided completely to relocate the management of its Burma programme from Bangkok to Rangoon. The DFID South-East Asia office in Bangkok is scheduled to close and it is planned that the number of staff in Burma will increase from three to 10 by May 2008.

34. During our visit, the Head of DFID South-East Asia, Marshall Elliott, told us that DFID was setting an example and encouraging other donors, for instance the European Commission (EC), to increase their programmes in-country. Gareth Thomas believed that the office relocation would increase staff capacity to understand what works in-country. He also told us that Senior Civil Servant oversight of the programme will move to London, “closer to ministers and closer to the concerns of parliamentarians and [...] the debate [about] what we should or should not do in terms of our aid programme in Burma.”⁶³

⁶¹ See Paragraphs 1-7.

⁶² Q 179 [Gareth Thomas MP]

⁶³ Q 191 [Gareth Thomas MP]

35. A number of witnesses foresaw major problems in locating all Burma programme staff in Rangoon. Mark Farmaner of the Burma Campaign UK spoke positively of the decision to boost staff capacity, but was concerned that DFID staff would become very constrained by restrictions operated by the regime, such as insisting on accompanying staff and controlling their travel outside Rangoon. He told us: “[Rangoon] is a very tight, closed little environment [...] it is very isolated from what is going on in the world and what is happening in most of the country.”⁶⁴ Other interlocutors were concerned that the office move would impair DFID’s capacity to engage with activities on the Thai-Burma border (cross-border assistance and support to refugees) and to play a co-ordinating role.⁶⁵ We will return to this second set of concerns in Chapter 5 when we assess DFID’s assistance to refugees on the Thai-Burma border.

36. Whilst we welcome the increase in staff capacity within Burma from three to 10 officials, we are concerned that if DFID fully relocates management of its Burma programme from Bangkok to Rangoon, it will impair DFID’s ability to engage with activities on the Thai-Burma border and fulfil its proper part in a co-ordination role. We emphasise the importance of DFID working independently and we therefore recommend that DFID retain at least two senior, full-time members of staff within the British Embassy in Bangkok. This will help in providing an external perspective on displacement issues within Burma and in supporting refugees, cross-border assistance and non-governmental organisations based in Thailand.

⁶⁴ Q 9 [Mark Farmaner]

⁶⁵ Q 95 [Ray Hasan] and Qq 9-10 [Benedict Rogers].

3 In-country assistance to IDPs: DFID's co-ordination role

37. Inside Burma, DFID works with and alongside many partner organisations, sometimes as part of multilateral aid mechanisms such as the Three Diseases Fund.⁶⁶ A range of aid organisations work from inside Burma to assist IDPs, including bilateral and multilateral donors, national and international NGOs and UN agencies. Examining DFID's role in these efforts—and, crucially, its contribution to co-ordinating international aid efforts—is an important part of assessing its assistance to IDPs.

NGOs and aid organisations working in Burma

38. Currently there are 48 international NGOs with Memoranda of Understanding with the Burmese government.⁶⁷ For a brief window between November 2003 and September 2004, the space for humanitarian and development actors to operate in Burma opened up a little, due to the relatively co-operative approach of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt. However, since his removal from power in October 2004, NGOs have had to carry out their support to IDPs and other vulnerable groups in an increasingly repressive climate.⁶⁸ Restrictions on their work were made explicit in the draft *Guidelines for UN Agencies, International Organisations and NGO/INGOs*, produced by the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development in February 2006. Conditions include that state officials should accompany UN and international NGO (INGO) staff on all field trips and the enforcement of restrictions on employing Burmese staff.⁶⁹

39. Few international organisations operating in-country have programmes explicitly targeted at IDPs. DFID perceived the reasons for this to lie partly in the sensitivity of the issue and partly in the fact that a large proportion of conflict-affected people in Burma have been displaced at some point, so it is often very difficult to distinguish IDPs from other vulnerable groups.⁷⁰ The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, the Burmese regime) technically prevents all NGOs and UN agencies working inside Burma from giving humanitarian aid to civilians in conflict areas.⁷¹ However, in practice, NGOs—mainly local organisations—do have some limited access to conflict zones, and also have low-profile aid programmes in some SPDC-controlled areas, relocation sites and ceasefire areas in eastern and northern Burma.⁷²

40. NGOs' work provides a crucial lifeline for people without access to healthcare, education, water, sanitation or livelihoods. For example, Merlin has just begun a primary healthcare intervention explicitly aimed at displaced populations in Chin State and Sagaing

⁶⁶ See Paragraphs 49-52.

⁶⁷ Ev 138 [UN OCHA]

⁶⁸ *DFID Assistance for Burmese Refugees and Internally Displaced People*, DFID, March 2007, p 15.

⁶⁹ Ev 89 [Ashley South]

⁷⁰ Ev 62 [DFID]

⁷¹ Ev 117 [Peace Way Foundation: Burma Issues]

⁷² Ev 62 [DFID]

Division. Save the Children said that, although they do not currently record which citizens are displaced, they know that IDPs are present in “almost all the villages [they] are working in” in south-eastern Burma.⁷³ Their projects here include a DFID-funded child protection and anti-trafficking programme in Karen and Mon States.⁷⁴ Such projects are clearly of major importance in protecting children’s rights in areas affected by displacement. Save the Children told us that they could “of course do more” if funds permitted.⁷⁵

41. Several NGOs told us they made use of what they termed “plausible deniability” in terms of adhering to the SPDC’s guidelines. Dr Thomas Lee of the University of California told us that “there are groups inside that quietly push the borders of where they are actually allowed to work quite effectively. Some organisations are more aggressive about that than others.”⁷⁶ Linda Doull of Merlin said, “You can achieve much more at community level than perhaps is necessarily talked about [...] finding inventive ways to then work with existing structures.”⁷⁷ Discussions we had in Thailand indicated that, whilst 10 years ago INGOs were only present in Rangoon and the north, the gradual pushing of boundaries set by the regime has resulted in an increased INGO presence across the country (although coverage is still far from even). In their submission, the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) noted that in recent months, some INGOs have begun to gain direct access to conflict areas and that, as a result, “real opportunities exist to further expand in-country assistance.”⁷⁸ **It is clear to us that NGOs working from inside Burma can reach IDPs who would not otherwise receive assistance. Their work is crucial to providing basic social services such as education and health to vulnerable populations, and we believe that they deserve increased support from donors.**

Co-ordination and communication

42. Throughout the inquiry, interlocutors have stressed to us the need for clear communication and robust co-ordination over the assistance provided to IDPs within Burma. Co-ordination is actively discouraged by the regime and NGOs work in a more isolated way than they do in other countries.⁷⁹ UN OCHA calls Burma “a complex humanitarian landscape.”⁸⁰ Aid organisations working *in-country* have restricted access to SPDC-controlled, relocation and ceasefire zones, as well as some conflict areas, as discussed in the previous sub-section. Aid organisations working *cross-border* have access to contested border areas and neighbouring conflict zones, but less access to SPDC and ceasefire sites. **Ideally, a situation would exist where two complementary approaches, in-country and cross-border, ensured even coverage in assistance to IDPs across Burma. But unfortunately this complementarity remains elusive at present. A key reason for this is the difficulty experienced by organisations in communicating—and hence co-**

⁷³ Ev 123 [Save the Children (Burma)]

⁷⁴ Ev 123 [Save the Children (Burma)]

⁷⁵ Ev 123 [Save the Children (Burma)]

⁷⁶ Q 75 [Dr Thomas Lee]

⁷⁷ Q 123 [Linda Doull]

⁷⁸ Ev 138 [UN OCHA]

⁷⁹ Ev 112 [Mae Tao Clinic, Back Pack Health Worker Teams and Burma Medical Association]

⁸⁰ Ev 138 [UN OCHA]

ordinating—their work. Cross-border work is prohibited by the Burmese regime and is dangerous, and cannot be advertised. In-country work is more overt but NGOs inside Burma are very careful about describing their activities, due to concern that the Burmese authorities will learn of their projects and close them down.⁸¹

Co-ordination

43. Several witnesses told us that confusion as to who was working where in Burma is problematic. They argued that an urgent mapping exercise is required to assess the needs of IDPs in Burma, where they are located and what the most appropriate mechanisms are for reaching them. They believed that DFID should play a leading role in this exercise.⁸² The Burma Campaign UK stated, “Neither DFID nor the UN has made any commitment to undertake a comprehensive review to tackle what is one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world.”⁸³ Christian Aid’s written evidence states:

“Given the very difficult working environment it is essential for priority to be given to the development of robust co-ordination mechanisms between groups working cross-border and those operating inside Burma [...] Given DFID’s presence in both Thailand and Burma they are well placed to play a much more proactive leadership role in developing these opportunities which will ensure a stronger complementarity of approaches.”⁸⁴

It is clear to us that DFID’s office relocation from Bangkok to Rangoon is likely to impair its ability to fulfil its proper part in a co-ordination role, as we stated above (see paragraphs 35-36). We also believe that DFID is not currently fulfilling its responsibility as a lead donor to tackle the problems of co-ordination.

44. Witnesses believed that the UN was also failing adequately to fulfil its co-ordination role.⁸⁵ The Burma Campaign went so far as to argue that the that UN Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Burma, Charles Petrie, was polarising the divisions between those working in-country and cross-border rather than bringing them together.⁸⁶ UN OCHA’s Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Co-ordinator, Margareta Wahlström, who visited Burma in April 2007, defended the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator’s record of reaching out to and engaging with aid organisations.⁸⁷ But she admitted that “better humanitarian information-sharing frameworks” for Burma were crucial and welcomed “efforts to develop and harmonise geographical area co-ordination mechanisms in order to [...] provide a more coherent and effective response to local needs.”⁸⁸

⁸¹ Ev 63 [DFID]

⁸² Ev 68 [Burma Campaign], Ev 77 [Christian Solidarity Worldwide] and Q 92 [Ray Hasan].

⁸³ Ev 68 [Burma Campaign]

⁸⁴ Ev 73 [Christian Aid]

⁸⁵ Q 93 [Ray Hasan]

⁸⁶ Q 40 [Mark Farmaner]

⁸⁷ Ev 138 [UN OCHA]

⁸⁸ Ev 138 [UN OCHA]

45. Several witnesses, including Gareth Thomas, felt that UN OCHA, rather than DFID, should lead on co-ordination of assistance to IDPs, as OCHA is the designated UN agency for humanitarian co-ordination, and is newly-established in Burma and therefore more likely to be neutral.⁸⁹ Margareta Wahlström indicated that OCHA was in the process of assuming this co-ordination role, saying they had “noted the need for a common analysis of the situation in Burma” and had “agreed to OCHA’s provision of assistance” through the deployment of resources to the Humanitarian Co-ordinator in Rangoon.⁹⁰ **We agree that the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), rather than any of the main bilateral donors, should take the principal role in co-ordinating aid assistance but believe that DFID should engage more wholeheartedly in helping to co-ordinate assistance to IDPs. We welcome the appointment of a UN OCHA Co-ordinator for Burma and believe that international NGOs should support his work. We recommend that DFID support UN OCHA to carry out an urgent mapping exercise of which IDPs are receiving assistance and where gaps exist between in-country and cross-border assistance.**

Communication

46. Several witnesses expressed concern that DFID does not share information about its assistance to IDPs sufficiently, even within confidential meetings.⁹¹ This included communication with cross-border groups, who could help to develop complementary approaches to reach IDPs in border areas.

47. Linda Doull of Merlin believed that a distinct co-ordinating mechanism would also reassure aid organisations about discussing their work more safely: “I think if people are clear why information is being presented and to what aim [...] if there was a clear focus for particular discussions led by a stronger co-ordinating body, [...] then perhaps that might encourage people to say more.”⁹² Ray Hasan from Christian Aid told us that the UN and DFID currently faced a problem in gaining the trust of all groups. Mr Hasan said that DFID could play a significant role in organising private meetings of aid organisations assisting IDPs. He also thought DFID could help by being more open itself in these contexts.⁹³ He accepted that it would not be practical for DFID—or others—to share information in public forums, but believed that there were many opportunities to bring people together in closed environments.⁹⁴

48. Gareth Thomas told us that DFID is “trying to step up not only the co-ordination but the communication more generally between those who work in Burma.” However, he was “pretty hesitant” about more communication within Burma “because of the relationships of individuals, often very trusted people who have worked for a very long time together” and the need “to place the utmost priority on maintaining the security of the organisations

⁸⁹ Q 137 [Ashley South]

⁹⁰ Ev 138 [UN OCHA]

⁹¹ Q 99 [Ray Hasan] and Q 10 [Benedict Rogers].

⁹² Q 101 [Linda Doull]

⁹³ Q 93 [Ray Hasan]

⁹⁴ Q 99 [Ray Hasan]

we work through.”⁹⁵ **We believe that DFID should do more to share information about its assistance to IDPs, and more to encourage other organisations to do the same. We accept the importance of maintaining the security of the work being done, but believe it would be possible for DFID to enhance communication by organising more ‘closed door’ meetings with trusted partners.**

The Three Diseases Fund

49. The Three Diseases Fund (3D Fund) has been developed by a group of donors—Australia, the EC, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK—to address HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria within Burma. The 3D Fund follows the withdrawal of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in 2005 because of restrictions placed on the UN and INGOs by the Burmese authorities. The Burmese regime agreed the proposal to establish the 3D Fund in June 2006 and a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the United Nations Office for Projects and Services (UNOPS)—the Fund Manager—in October 2006. The Fund is not aimed specifically at IDPs but DFID pledged that, “As Three Diseases Funded projects are developed, DFID and our partner donors will work hard to ensure that IDPs suffering from tuberculosis, malaria or HIV/AIDS are able to benefit from international assistance.”⁹⁶ DFID’s commitment to the Fund totals £20 million over 5 years, or £4 million per year—nearly half of DFID’s current annual budget for Burma of £8.8 million.

50. Witnesses acknowledged that DFID had played a leading role in developing the 3D Fund and welcomed it as a desperately needed effort to fight infectious diseases in Burma.⁹⁷ However, a major concern was articulated about the Fund in relation to its ability to reach IDPs. Witnesses doubted that the Fund would reach the most vulnerable people, many of them IDPs, in Burma’s border areas.⁹⁸ Dr. Thomas Lee, who has worked for the last decade on Burma’s borders, pointed out that Burma’s malaria burden is highest on its four borders (see Map 2, page 26). A 2006 survey found that nearly half of all deaths in eastern Burma are due to malaria, and that adult malaria incidence in the region is nearly twice as high as the national average.⁹⁹ Christian Aid told us that on the Burma-China border, HIV prevalence is “at crisis point.”¹⁰⁰ Whilst no independent mapping of services provided by INGOs working in Burma has been conducted—which adds further urgency to our recommendation in paragraph 45 that a review of assistance should be carried out—it is clear that these border zones, many of them conflict areas, are the very areas that NGOs are least likely to reach and hence where populations are most in need of assistance.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Q 188 [Gareth Thomas MP]

⁹⁶ Ev 66 [DFID]

⁹⁷ Ev 69 [Burma Campaign] and Q 92 [Ray Hasan].

⁹⁸ Q 6 [Benedict Rogers] and Ev 98 [Burma Campaign].

⁹⁹ Ev 110 [Mae Tao Clinic, Back Pack Health Worker Teams and Burma Medical Association] and Back Pack Health Worker Team, *Chronic Emergency: Health and Human Rights in Eastern Burma* (2006), p.10.

¹⁰⁰ Q 91 [Ray Hasan]

¹⁰¹ Q 62 [Dr Thomas Lee] and maps submitted by Dr. Thomas Lee (unprinted background paper).

51. Funding from the 3D Fund is unlikely to reach the border areas. Grant recipients are required to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the SPDC, but as the regime does not allow aid to reach many ethnic and conflict areas, it is unlikely to agree an MoU with local groups working in these areas. Cross-border groups will also not be permitted to sign an MoU.¹⁰²

52. Several witnesses believed that the priority now is to create a complementary strategy to the 3D Fund that is capable of reaching the most vulnerable people, including IDPs. The Burma Campaign UK and Christian Solidarity Worldwide were concerned that, to their knowledge, none of the NGOs working on the ground were consulted on alternative mechanisms that could be used to reach people that the 3D Fund is going to miss.¹⁰³ Dr Thomas Lee told us that there is capacity to provide healthcare in the border areas, were funding opportunities available: “On all three borders there are substantial indigenous local health organisations that do have the infrastructure and the capacity to provide standard interventions for infectious disease.”¹⁰⁴ Dr Lee described the woeful underfunding of essential healthcare services on the eastern border, with 80% of the costs for the malaria programme on which he works near the border used up by simply providing drugs and diagnostic tests, leaving hardly any funds for salaries, transportation and logistics.¹⁰⁵ **Whilst we welcome the Three Diseases Fund, and believe that DFID deserves credit for helping to develop it, in its current form it will not reach sufficient numbers of IDPs or other vulnerable groups living in border and conflict areas. We recommend that DFID build on its leadership role in helping to develop the Fund by supporting the creation of a complementary mechanism that makes funding available to organisations providing healthcare in the border areas.**

Developing a humanitarian dialogue with the regime

53. If in-country assistance to IDPs is to improve, it will be necessary to develop a humanitarian dialogue with the regime. A number of stakeholders that we spoke to during our visit to the Thai-Burma border told us that the Burmese authorities—especially at senior levels—were currently in denial about poverty. (There were some exceptions to this: for instance, the Minister of Education had shown some awareness of the poor education situation.) This made the kind of dialogue or shared analysis of poverty that DFID and other members of the international community would normally undertake with a government very difficult. In turn, this means that taking development and humanitarian programmes to any kind of scale is a real challenge for donors.

54. We wholeheartedly endorse the need to avoid showing support for the SPDC. However, we believe that undertaking limited, narrowly-focused discussions on poverty and humanitarian concerns with the regime could help develop a shared understanding of how best to assist IDPs. As Ashley South, a consultant specialising in displacement in Burma, told us:

¹⁰² Ev 69 [Burma Campaign UK]

¹⁰³ Q 10 [Benedict Rogers] and Q 6 [Mark Farmaner].

¹⁰⁴ Q 58 [Dr Thomas Lee]

¹⁰⁵ Q 58 [Dr Thomas Lee]

“I think the idea of the SPDC engaging with the international community on discussions on democratisation in the broadest sense is not very realistic, but perhaps one or two specific issues could be identified, for example humanitarian dialogue, and [...] forced migration and displacement.”¹⁰⁶

Mr. South pointed out that there are examples of successful dialogue with the SPDC, notably regarding forced labour, as a result of which a trial victim complaints system for forced labour has been established between the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the regime.¹⁰⁷

55. Dr. Zarni from the University of Oxford thought that DFID should “definitely take any opportunity to engage in policy discussion with the regime at all levels”, but that the UK’s “difficult historical relationship” made it problematic for DFID to take a leading role and that it would be more effective for DFID to support other actors, possibly the UN, to develop a humanitarian dialogue with the regime.¹⁰⁸ **The UK Government needs to tread very carefully before beginning any kind of dialogue with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). However, we believe limited engagement on specific poverty and humanitarian issues should begin and that the most sensible approach would be for DFID to do this as part of a group of international actors, under the banner of the UN.**

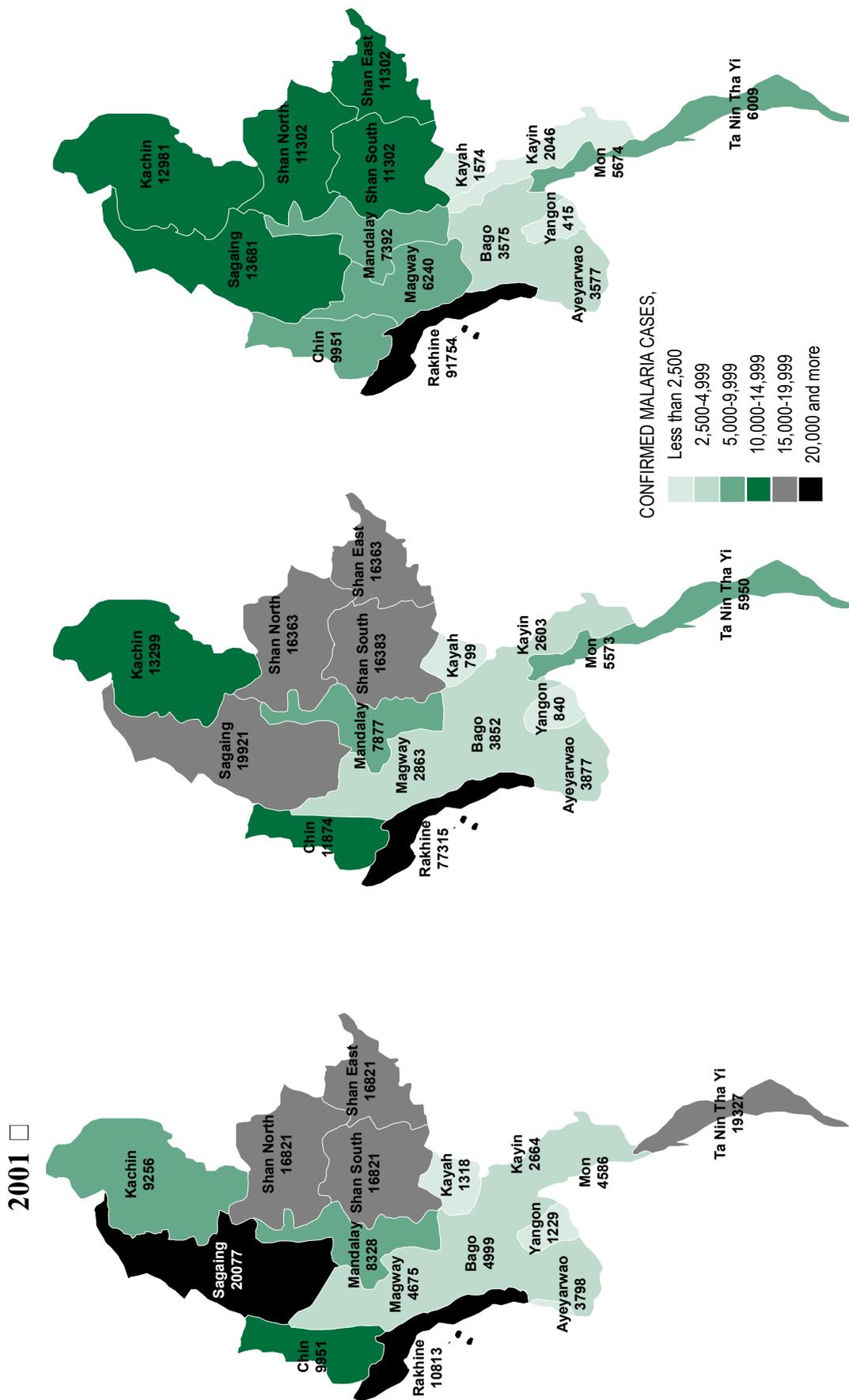
¹⁰⁶ Q 132 [Ashley South]

¹⁰⁷ Q 132 [Ashley South]

¹⁰⁸ Q 151 [Dr Zarni]

Distribution of Malaria Cases in Burma

Map 2: Distribution of Malaria Cases in Burma



Source: WHO/SEARO, 2007

4 Cross-border assistance to IDPs

56. Whilst human rights abuses and high poverty levels exist across Burma, the situation along the eastern border with Thailand is of particular concern. Karen State, eastern Tenasserim Division, southern Mon State, southern and eastern Karenni State and southern Shan State are all witnessing conflict-induced displacement of populations. The Burma Army began a new offensive in Karen State in 2006, the worst in a decade. This is continuing into 2007.¹⁰⁹ Border states are also subject to state ‘development’ activities such as infrastructure construction and natural resource extraction, which may also displace local populations.¹¹⁰

57. Because NGOs and community groups within Burma have only very limited access to conflict zones, a number of Thailand-based organisations bring emergency relief supplies and humanitarian support over the border to IDPs in eastern Burma. In March 2007, DFID reversed its policy position and lifted the restriction on its funds being used for cross-border assistance from Thailand.¹¹¹

58. As we discuss below, cross-border work is very sensitive.¹¹² Crossing the Burma border from Thailand is prohibited by the Burmese regime and if the Burmese Army catches cross-border workers they run the very high risk of being imprisoned or killed.¹¹³ Much of the written evidence we received on cross-border assistance was submitted to us in confidence which we will respect.

Cross-border assistance to IDPs

59. Substantial numbers of civilians within conflict areas in the states along Burma’s eastern border cannot be reached by aid agencies working within Burma. Several relief organisations travel into areas within these states to deliver emergency assistance—cash, food, healthcare and some limited education services—to IDPs.¹¹⁴ A number of these groups go beyond provision of humanitarian relief to record and document human rights abuses, carry out advocacy work and help build capacity of opposition groups.¹¹⁵ These teams consist of indigenous Karen, and less often Karenni or Shan people, sometimes with assistance and training from international aid workers.¹¹⁶

60. The Burmese authorities believe cross-border assistance legitimises insurgency. Thailand does not officially condone cross-border assistance (although in practice the Thai authorities generally “turn a blind eye” to it).¹¹⁷ During our visit to the border, agencies

¹⁰⁹ Ev 77 [Christian Solidarity Worldwide]

¹¹⁰ Ev 79 [Ashley South]

¹¹¹ HC Deb, 5 March 2007, col 117WS

¹¹² See Paragraph 14.

¹¹³ Ev 119 [Peace Way Foundation: Burma Issues]

¹¹⁴ Ev 125 [Dr Alan Smith]

¹¹⁵ Ev 84 [Ashley South]

¹¹⁶ Ev 77 [Christian Solidarity Worldwide]

¹¹⁷ Ev 136 [Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC)] and Ev 86 [Ashley South]

working cross-border told us their work was justified by international law, citing the Geneva Conventions, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the principle affirmed in the *Responsibility to Protect* framework that, where sovereign authorities are unable or unwilling to respond to humanitarian needs, “the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.”¹¹⁸ As Dr Alan Smith of the Thailand-based Centre for Local Development pointed out, whilst it is certainly not a neutral mode of delivering assistance, cross-border work is the only way to reach certain groups inside Burma.¹¹⁹

61. The assistance is provided by organisations who often have long-standing relationships, mutual trust and common languages with IDP communities.¹²⁰ Cross-border assistance can be cost-efficient when relief provisions are purchased in Thailand and currencies are exchanged at market rates rather than Burma’s inflated rates.¹²¹ Due to donors’ concerns about impartiality and distributing aid in a war zone, most groups use rigorous monitoring and evaluation techniques, including photographic and video documentation, and simultaneously collect health and human development data that otherwise would be very difficult to record.¹²² Cross-border aid also offers the benefit of flexibility: Thailand-based community-based organisations (CBOs) have the freedom of working outside the Burmese military bureaucracy and it is easier to hire and train staff.¹²³ Aid recipients also benefit from flexibility: they are often given cash, rather than food or medical provisions and can then spend the money according to their needs.

62. As the Back Pack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT), Mae Tao Clinic and the Burma Medical Association highlighted, all of whom work on or across the border, their work is laden with risk, as most medical and relief supplies have to be transported on foot through the jungle.¹²⁴ The BPHWT told us when we met them during our visit that there are currently 76 backpack teams of three to five medics and support staff working cross-border. These 300 workers risk their lives to provide healthcare to IDPs; indeed, seven BPHWT staff have been killed during cross-border trips over the last decade and two members of staff are currently in prison within Burma. The Free Burma Rangers, another group carrying out cross-border relief work with IDPs, reported three deaths during the last year alone. The most recent victim had been tortured and murdered. **Cross-border aid may not be considered to be a neutral form of assistance and it is highly dangerous. However it is the only way to reach IDPs in several of Burma’s conflict-affected states and we believe that it can provide a cost-efficient and flexible way of delivering emergency relief where no other options exist, but it must be continually and robustly reviewed. Such funding must not detract from the key humanitarian objective of ending conflict.**

¹¹⁸ International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (2001), International Development Research Centre, Canada p.XI.

¹¹⁹ Ev 130 [Dr Alan Smith]. See also Ev 139 [VSO].

¹²⁰ Ev 104 [International Rescue Committee]

¹²¹ Ev 104 [International Rescue Committee]

¹²² Ev 86 [Ashley South], Q 64 [Dr Thomas Lee] and Ev 107 [Mae Tao Clinic, The Back Pack Health Worker's Team and Burma Medical Association].

¹²³ Ev 140 [VSO]

¹²⁴ Ev 108 [Mae Tao Clinic, The Back Pack Health Worker's Team and Burma Medical Association]

DFID's policy change

63. DFID announced in a Written Ministerial Statement on 5 March 2007 that it was removing the restriction on the use of its funds for assistance to refugees on the Thai-Burma border, so that they can be used for either cross-border or refugee assistance, as need and funding dictates. The Department acknowledged “the importance and value of cross-border aid, especially in supporting many of the 100,000 internally-displaced people living in conflict areas in eastern Burma.”¹²⁵ This followed an internal review, published in September 2006, of DFID’s assistance to Burmese IDPs and refugees. The policy change was not accompanied by an increase in funds for cross-border work.

64. Benedict Rogers of Christian Solidarity Worldwide told us that because DFID’s change in policy was not accompanied by extra funding, “there has been no meaningful change on the ground.”¹²⁶ Mark Farmaner from the Burma Campaign UK concurred with this, saying that the lack of new funding meant that the outcome of the policy change was “effectively a cosmetic one.”¹²⁷

65. Gareth Thomas acknowledged that DFID may need to follow up its policy change with financial resources for cross-border work, “particularly in the context of [DFID’s] rising aid budget”.¹²⁸ However, he said that this would depend on an indication from OCHA that more cross-border aid is needed.¹²⁹ The Minister was cautious about how successful cross-border aid can be in reaching large numbers of IDPs in Burma. He told us that, based on DFID’s calculations, “Even the most wildly optimistic scenario suggests that 4.5% of the Burmese community could be reached cross-border.”¹³⁰

A comparative advantage?

66. The Minister emphasised the need to balance UK commitments with what the international community was already providing: he said there is already “a range of donors providing aid cross-border” whilst “there is a very small number of donors based in country and who therefore have knowledge of what works in country” and that therefore he would “suggest to the Committee that we have a comparative advantage in working in country.”¹³¹ Whilst Mr Thomas agreed that this “comparative advantage” did not rule out funding for cross-border work, the paper that DFID produced to accompany its policy change in March 2007 expressed other reservations about funding cross-border assistance:

“In general, groups working cross-border are much better-funded, and have more capacity, than those working inside Burma. Money provided by DFID for these groups will add little extra value. Nor does DFID have a particular expertise on cross-border humanitarian work to input to these programmes. DFID’s main comparative

¹²⁵ HC Deb, 5 March 2007, col 117WS

¹²⁶ Q2 [Benedict Rogers]

¹²⁷ Q3 [Mark Farmaner]

¹²⁸ Q 180 and Q 181 [Gareth Thomas MP]

¹²⁹ Q 180 [Gareth Thomas MP]

¹³⁰ Q 192 [Gareth Thomas MP]

¹³¹ Qq 181 - 182 [Gareth Thomas MP]

advantage in Burma lies in the range of programmes it implements through international organisations and local NGOs and CBOs ‘inside’ the country.”¹³²

The DFID Paper also identifies as a key risk of funding cross-border work “increased suspicion and suppression of existing DFID projects by the Burmese authorities.”¹³³ This was refuted by the Burma Campaign UK, who argued that:

“the UK has been at the forefront of international criticism of the regime ruling Burma [...] and most recently co-sponsored a resolution at the United Nations Security Council that produced a near hysterical response from the regime, including condemnations of the UK from regime officials and in state-run newspapers. None of this has resulted in any restrictions on DFID operations inside Burma. In this context providing funding for cross-border aid is unlikely in the extreme to have any negative consequences for DFID operations.”¹³⁴

67. DFID’s view that its funds “will add little extra value” to cross-border assistance is divergent from what some other witnesses told us. Mark Farmaner of the Burma Campaign UK estimated that 150,000 extra IDPs could be reached if financial assistance was increased.¹³⁵ Both groups administering cross-border assistance and other stakeholders told us that funding for cross-border assistance is too low¹³⁶ and many supported the case for DFID to begin funding aid delivered in this way.¹³⁷

68. Mark Farmaner said that DFID’s assertion that it had a comparative advantage in working in-country would only hold up if there was effective donor co-ordination, a “division of labour [...] where other governments were showing that aid was reaching parts of particularly eastern Burma.” But, he said, “This has not happened to any degree at all.”¹³⁸

69. Some countries, including the USA which is the biggest donor in the region, focus their direct bilateral aid effort on cross-border assistance.¹³⁹ Norway and the EC fund both in-country and cross-border aid. A number of witnesses said that DFID should also fund both forms of assistance.¹⁴⁰ Burma is a complex problem that cannot be dealt with through a one-sided approach; it requires a co-ordinated effort from within the country and across its borders to address the scale of poverty and displacement.¹⁴¹ As Ray Hasan of Christian Aid put it, “Either/or is not an option; it has to be both.”¹⁴² VSO strongly believed that choosing

¹³² *DFID Assistance for Burmese Refugees and Internally Displaced People*, DFID, March 2007, p 23.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p 23

¹³⁴ Ev 68 [Burma Campaign UK]

¹³⁵ Q 18 [Mark Farmaner]

¹³⁶ For example, Ev 96 [Free Burma Rangers], Ev 133-134 [Paul Sztumpf] and Ev 142 [VSO]

¹³⁷ For example, Q 78 [Dr Thomas Lee], Ev 117 [Peace Way Foundation: Burma Issues] and Ev 105-106 [Karen Human Rights Group].

¹³⁸ Q 4 [Mark Farmaner]

¹³⁹ The USA does not have an in-country team and as a matter of policy provides in-country aid only indirectly, through multilateral bodies.

¹⁴⁰ Q 87 [Leo Bryant], Q 88 [Linda Doull], Q90 [Ray Hasan]

¹⁴¹ Q 90 [Ray Hasan]

¹⁴² Q 115 [Ray Hasan]

only to support in-country assistance risked reinforcing the Burmese regime's mistreatment of ethnic minorities living near the Thai border:

“Giving aid only through Rangoon not only lets people in ethnic states suffer abuse and die without help or concern, it also reinforces SPDC efforts to exclude these people from all aid and political processes and will therefore ensure continued marginalisation and civil war, even if democracy comes. The only valid option is therefore an approach of providing support through both directions.”¹⁴³

70. We believe that DFID's policy change to allow its funds to be spent cross-border, but with no extra funds currently committed, has exacerbated the existing problems in engaging productively with agencies carrying out cross-border work and has unsurprisingly been perceived by them as an empty gesture. As we have stated previously, there is an urgent need for DFID, working closely with the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), to establish comprehensively the needs of IDPs who can only be reached by cross-border work, particularly in relation to the control of infectious diseases. DFID must not hide behind its argument that it has a 'comparative advantage' in working in-country. At the same time UN OCHA must also address the failure of a significant number of bilateral donors to properly fund in-country work, which has hindered an effective, comprehensive approach. Cross-border assistance to Burmese IDPs could be extended if more financial resources were available. We recommend that DFID contribute to providing effective relief to IDPs in eastern Burma and that it should commit funds for cross-border assistance as part of an overall rise in aid to Burma. We believe that, as a high priority, DFID should maximise relief to IDPs in eastern Burma.

Reaching the most vulnerable IDPs

71. Several witnesses emphasised that certain IDP groups were particularly vulnerable and in need of support. The majority of Thailand-based cross-border groups work in Karen, Mon and Karenni states. Security concerns and local capacity constraints mean that substantially less work is undertaken in Shan State.¹⁴⁴ Christian Solidarity Worldwide believed that DFID should help to ensure that assistance to IDPs is directed towards Shan IDPs, as well as other ethnic groups.¹⁴⁵

72. Women IDPs were identified as another very vulnerable group, particularly with regard to sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Maternal mortality rates are startlingly high: a 2002-03 survey of households in eastern Burma found that 27% of adult female deaths were pregnancy-related.¹⁴⁶ Reasons for this high rate include lack of access to contraception, emergency obstetric care, safe abortion services and post-abortion care.¹⁴⁷ An unpublished 2002 Back Pack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT) survey found that 94%

¹⁴³ Ev 140 [VSO]

¹⁴⁴ Ev 86 [Ashley South]

¹⁴⁵ Ev 77 [Christian Solidarity Worldwide]

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Lee et al, 'Mortality rates in conflict zones in Karen, Karenni and Mon states in eastern Burma', *Tropical Health Medicine and International Health* Vol. 11 No.7 (July 2006), pp.1125.

¹⁴⁷ Ev 145 [Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children]

of deliveries in eastern Burma took place in the home or jungle.¹⁴⁸ Limited medical facilities do exist in IDP-populated areas and the BPHWT provide mobile health assistance to women, but these services are constrained by resources and women must often travel long distances in order to benefit from them.¹⁴⁹

73. The Karen Women's Organisation told us that girls' education was another priority for cross-border assistance.¹⁵⁰ VSO described the education services offered to IDPs by ethnic women's groups as very worthy of support. It said the benefits of cross-border assistance to teachers were particularly significant.¹⁵¹ In some IDP areas, temporary schools have been established but support in the form of teachers' stipends, internships for Burmese teachers to train across the Thai border, books and materials is needed.¹⁵² **We believe that, in addition to funding cross-border work, DFID should help to ensure that assistance is focused on the most vulnerable IDPs, including Shan populations and women. Women's sexual and reproductive health needs to be prioritised. Cross-border health assistance and clinics in IDP areas both require extra financial resources. We recommend that education, especially for girls, should be another priority for DFID and that it should fund cross-border assistance to teachers and schools in IDP areas.**

74. A number of witnesses told us that the Burma Army uses rape as a weapon of war on a widespread and systematic basis.¹⁵³ The Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN), whom we met during our visit to the Thai-Burma border, told us that Shan women were often victimised because they were an ethnic minority, and that girls as young as six were raped. SWAN works on and across the Thai border to document rape and other human rights abuses and to provide health and education services. As discussed below, SWAN said that whilst they received support from other donors, they had tried in vain to meet and discuss funding opportunities with DFID.¹⁵⁴ Other civil society groups said the same.¹⁵⁵ **Rape is used as a weapon of war by the Burmese Army and we call on the UK Government to make high-level representations about this atrocity to the Burmese regime. We reiterate our recommendation (see paragraph 26) that DFID should fund women's groups working on and across the border who document rape and other human rights abuses, and provide women's health and education services. The Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) is one group particularly worthy of support.**

75. Displacement is by no means limited to Burma's eastern border states. IDPs in Chin State, along the Indian and Bangladeshi borders, live in extreme poverty.¹⁵⁶ The Women's League of Chinland conveyed the desperate situation within Chin State:

¹⁴⁸ Cited in Lee et al (2006), p 1125.

¹⁴⁹ Ev 146 [Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children]

¹⁵⁰ Ev 106 [Karen Women's Organisation]

¹⁵¹ Ev 141 [VSO]

¹⁵² Ev 141 [VSO] and Ev 115 [Mon Relief and Development Committee]

¹⁵³ For example, Ev 75 [Christian Solidarity Worldwide], Ev 144 [Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children] and Ev 124 [Lisa Smeaton].

¹⁵⁴ See Paragraph 24.

¹⁵⁵ Q 188 [Maung Maung]

¹⁵⁶ Ev 149 [Women's League of Chinland] and Q 52 [Benedict Rogers]

“The UNDP and some other NGOs inside Burma are providing a limited amount of development aid in Chin State, but it is only reaching villages near the bigger towns. The majority of the villages are not getting any aid, except for some cross-border medical aid provided by the Chin backpack health worker programme.”¹⁵⁷

76. Cross-border assistance carried out from Bangladesh, India and China is far more limited than that from Thailand, and consists of small-scale relief and human rights documentation.¹⁵⁸ Benedict Rogers of Christian Solidarity Worldwide said that, whilst access is sometimes more restricted, “All three of these borders are even more vulnerable and forgotten than the Thai border”, and that DFID should “investigate the possibilities” of funding work here.¹⁵⁹ Mr Rogers noted the valuable work done by the Women’s League of Chinland on the India-Burma border.¹⁶⁰ Dr Thomas Lee, who has worked on Burma’s borders for a decade, believed that DFID should fund cross-border assistance on the Chinese and Indian borders.¹⁶¹ DFID has begun to fund healthcare work across the Chinese border.¹⁶² **We recommend that DFID scale up its funding of cross-border assistance over the Chinese border. The Department should also look at the options for starting to fund assistance over the Indian border. Support to the Chin backpack health worker programme, operating over the Indian border, would be one step towards assisting the many IDPs facing dire poverty in Chin state.**

¹⁵⁷ Ev 149 [Women’s League of Chinland]

¹⁵⁸ Ev 86 [Ashley South]

¹⁵⁹ Q 52 [Benedict Rogers]

¹⁶⁰ Q 33 [Benedict Rogers]

¹⁶¹ Q 78 [Dr Thomas Lee]

¹⁶² Q 208 [Gareth Thomas MP]

5 DFID's assistance to Burmese refugees on the Thai-Burma border

77. This chapter will assess current modes and levels of assistance to Burmese refugees provided by DFID and partner organisations. The last two decades have seen a continuing flow of refugees across the Thai-Burma border. By the end of 2006, 151,300 refugees were officially registered in 10 camps (one Shan, four Karenni and five Karen) along the Thai-Burma border. There are also around 15,000 refugees over the Thai border but outside the camps,¹⁶³ as well as two million Burmese migrant workers in Thailand. We visited one of the largest camps, Ban Mai Nai Soi (Site 1 on the map, with a predominantly Karenni population), in May 2007.

The Thailand-Burma Border Consortium's assistance to refugees

The running of the refugee camps

78. The Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) comprises 10 NGOs from eight countries, based in Bangkok and with field offices in Thailand near to the Burmese border. The Consortium has assisted Burmese refugees since they began to arrive across the border in 1984. It now provides food, shelter and other provisions such as clothing to all the refugee camps along the border. The Royal Thai Government (RTG) maintains ultimate authority over the refugee camps. Until recently, the RTG banned income-generation or employment for the refugees, and even now opportunities are only offered on a case-by-case basis, although there is evidence of unofficial employment. Refugees are therefore almost completely dependent on external services provided by TBBC, other NGOs and the UN.¹⁶⁴

79. TBBC is part of an umbrella group of NGOs working on health, education, community services and protection as members of the Committee for the Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT). The total annual budget for the NGOs' work in the camps is US\$30 million, of which TBBC's share is around half.¹⁶⁵ At Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp, we visited the Ban Tractor Health Clinic, which is run by International Rescue Committee and the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand, members of CCSDPT. TBBC told us during our visit that there is a sophisticated co-ordination mechanism involving regular meetings to ensure complementarity between the CCSDPT members and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), who run protection and resettlement programmes for the camps. Ashley South, a consultant specialising in displacement in Burma, said that the CCSDPT is considered "a model of best practice in humanitarian governance."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Ev 59 [DFID]

¹⁶⁴ Ev 136 [Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC)]

¹⁶⁵ Figure given by TBBC in discussions during the Committee's visit to the Thai-Burma border.

¹⁶⁶ Ev 84 [Ashley South]

TBBC: DFID funding and engagement

80. DFID supports Burmese refugees with a £1.8 million grant (over 3 years) to TBBC, channelled via Christian Aid. Christian Aid told us that having a three-year—rather than an annual—funding agreement was a positive step because it adheres to the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative principles of predictable and accountable financing.¹⁶⁷ DFID funding to TBBC has increased annually over the past few years, from £535,000 in 2005 to £611,050 in 2006 to £672,155 in 2007. This represents about 4% of TBBC’s total budget.

81. During our visit, we were concerned to hear that TBBC believed there to have been a “communication breakdown” with DFID. TBBC’s Executive Director, Jack Dunford, said that DFID had shown little interest in activity in the refugee camps, prioritising instead work inside Burma. Mr Dunford could only recall four visits by DFID to the camps since DFID funding had begun around 12 years previously. He met the Head of DFID South-East Asia for the first time during our visit in May 2007, despite TBBC being one of DFID South East Asia’s biggest grant recipients. TBBC’s view was that all other donors did better, in terms of visits to camps and broader policy engagement. This is a matter of concern to us. The FCO appeared to be a far more recognisable presence on the border: the UK Ambassador to Bangkok said that there had been 20 visits to the border in the last four years alone, although the exact balance of FCO and DFID visits within this was unclear. Ray Hasan from Christian Aid said, “There has certainly been more activity from the Foreign Office than DFID with regard to visits to the border.”¹⁶⁸

82. This low level of DFID engagement led us to probe DFID’s arrangement to fund TBBC indirectly. Ray Hasan of Christian Aid said that channelling DFID funding through his organisation saved TBBC, a small organisation which has 14-15 bilateral donors, valuable time.¹⁶⁹ No major donors fund TBBC directly; for instance, the European Commission funds through the Dutch agency ICCO and other NGO members of the consortium. Mr Hasan said that Christian Aid’s arrangement with DFID is clear: the Department does not have staff resources situated on the border, but Christian Aid has always offered to support DFID in playing a stronger role in engaging first-hand in the camps’ administration, should DFID approach them about wishing to do this.¹⁷⁰ We were concerned, however, that despite a substantial increase in funding and calling for these sums to be further increased by DFID, Christian Aid had failed to address robustly the cash-flow problems or capacity issues experienced by TBBC in the last financial year. It has also failed to offer any permanent staff presence in the region to support the need to address the strategic changes required in the way services are provided to refugees.¹⁷¹ TBBC registered as a UK charity in 2005 which may make a direct funding arrangement between DFID and TBBC more straightforward. **We were astonished to hear that DFID has visited the refugee camps it funds so infrequently. We believe that funding TBBC directly might improve**

¹⁶⁷ Q 106 [Ray Hasan]. The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative was agreed in 2003 by a number of donor governments working towards achieving efficient and principled delivery of humanitarian aid.

¹⁶⁸ Q 96 [Ray Hasan]

¹⁶⁹ Q 109 [Ray Hasan]

¹⁷⁰ Q 111 [Ray Hasan]

¹⁷¹ Qs 97-98 [Ray Hasan]

communication and encourage stronger engagement on DFID's behalf. We therefore recommend that DFID reassess the continued value of funding TBBC indirectly via Christian Aid.

83. Gareth Thomas told us that “whether it is DFID staff or the political section [...] there are regular visits to the refugee camps and there is regular sharing of information.”¹⁷² **Although we accept that the FCO has played a valuable role in visiting refugees, allowing DFID and the FCO to have an interchangeable presence at the camps is not the most effective way of overseeing the delivery of aid. We were struck by the lack of developmental analysis of the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp and believe strong DFID engagement is needed to rectify this.** For instance, nearly £5 million of food aid was delivered to the refugee camps between January and June alone in 2006.¹⁷³ Yet in Ban Mai Nai Soi camp, which has existed for nearly 20 years and has been in its current location for over a decade, a cash economy clearly exists with a variety of food and other shops in operation. **We recommend that DFID carries out a developmental analysis of the camps; this is essential both to meet refugees' needs appropriately and to provide value for donors' funds.**

84. **Our concern about DFID's lack of engagement with the camps on the Thai-Burma border is heightened by the decision to relocate the management of DFID's Burma programme from Bangkok to Rangoon.** Co-ordination between the FCO and DFID over refugees clearly needs improving. Guy Horton, a researcher who has spent a lot of time in the region, told us, “The Rangoon embassy cannot get access to the IDP areas and the refugees in Thailand may not appear its responsibility. The Bangkok embassy tends to see [...] the refugees as marginal to its major concerns.”¹⁷⁴ Ray Hasan of Christian Aid said, “I am not entirely convinced that [...] [the FCO and DFID] are talking to each other as effectively as they should be.”¹⁷⁵ Gareth Thomas told us that the two Departments had agreed to draw up a Memorandum of Understanding to co-ordinate their different roles in relation to the refugee camps after DFID's office relocation.¹⁷⁶ **We reiterate the concern we expressed earlier about DFID's office relocation from Bangkok to Rangoon and repeat our recommendation that at least two senior, full-time members of DFID staff should be retained within the British Embassy in Bangkok (see paragraph 36). This staff presence will be crucial to enhancing DFID engagement with the camps, carrying out a developmental analysis of the camps' administration, co-ordinating assistance to refugees with the FCO and supporting NGOs based in Thailand.**

UN OCHA

85. During our visit, we met with the UN Office of the Co-ordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), whose Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Co-ordinator, Margareta Wahlström, had visited Burma in April

¹⁷² Q 194 [Gareth Thomas MP]

¹⁷³ Thailand-Burma Border Consortium, *Programme Report for January to June 2006*, p 35.

¹⁷⁴ Ev 103 [Guy Horton]

¹⁷⁵ Q 96 [Ray Hasan]

¹⁷⁶ Q 194 [Gareth Thomas MP]

2007.¹⁷⁷ OCHA told us that their priority was to build up a balanced picture of the humanitarian needs both at the border and in-country and then to co-ordinate the international effort. TBBC said that they were open to the idea that OCHA could become a useful co-ordinator of activity both at the border and in Burma. **We reiterate that we welcome the appointment of a UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Co-ordinator for Burma. We anticipate that this step will help strengthen co-ordination of international humanitarian assistance to refugees at the Thai-Burma border.**

Refugees' skills and employment

86. The Royal Thai Government (RTG) Ministry of Interior, through provincial and district authorities, is responsible for enforcing refugee policy and controlling the day-to-day running of the camps. RTG policy remains, officially, that refugees are not permitted to move outside the camps.¹⁷⁸ However, during our visit to the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp we heard that in practice a significant number of refugees do travel locally in Thailand and find informal employment. A minority even work for extended periods outside the camps.¹⁷⁹

87. Whilst the RTG has recently relaxed restrictions on education and skills (see paragraph 89), and has agreed to allow income-generation activities in principle, TBBC told us that in practice progress has been slow, especially regarding income-generation opportunities. Working outside the camps is very difficult. Benedict Rogers of Christian Solidarity Worldwide told us, "The Karenni camps in particular are suffering very severe restrictions at the moment and refugees who are found out of the camp are now being warned that they face the very real possibility of deportation."¹⁸⁰ The Karenni Refugee Committee has produced a list of refugees' requests for intervention from the UK Government, and at the top was help in obtaining a legal work pass.¹⁸¹ Without official work permits, refugee workers do not qualify for Thai health entitlements or legal protection.¹⁸² This heightens risks of abuse and ill-health, particularly within exploitative work environments in factories and the sex industry. An estimated 80% of the commercial sex worker population in northern Thailand is Burmese, with 40,000 Burmese girls and women entering Thailand's sex industry each year.¹⁸³

88. UNHCR and the CCSDPT are advocating for official refugee employment opportunities with the Thai authorities. They have prepared a Comprehensive Plan for 2007-08 (following a 2005-06 Plan) that focuses on a longer-term approach to the refugee crisis, including people's freedom to move and work outside the camps and undertake secondary education.¹⁸⁴ Ray Hasan of Christian Aid said in relation to the preparation of

¹⁷⁷ See Paragraph 14.

¹⁷⁸ Ev 74 [Christian Aid]

¹⁷⁹ Ev 80 [Ashley South]

¹⁸⁰ Q 48 [Benedict Rogers]

¹⁸¹ Unprinted paper submitted by the Karenni Student Development Programme, p.4

¹⁸² Ev 145 [Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children]

¹⁸³ Ev 147 [Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children]

¹⁸⁴ Q 106 [Ray Hasan]

these Plans, “It is those groups on the border that are doing that work with UNHCR and not the donor community, so we would certainly want DFID to get more involved in that.”¹⁸⁵ **We believe that opening up official employment opportunities for refugees in Thailand would be mutually beneficial to refugees and the Thai economy. We recommend that DFID and the FCO increase their engagement with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and NGOs in negotiations with the Royal Thai Government on expanding employment opportunities.**

89. In late 2005, the RTG reversed its long-standing policies and allowed aid agencies working with refugees to expand education and vocational skills training, and income-generation schemes.¹⁸⁶ During our visit to the camp, we met refugees participating in vocational and non-formal education, including motorbike repair, mechanical, electrical and computer training, small-scale agriculture, spinning, weaving, cookery and crocheting. DFID was optimistic that these developments may result in refugees gaining legal access to parts of the Thai labour market, and eventually lead to some options for sustainable local integration.¹⁸⁷ Christian Aid also welcomed the RTG’s increased flexibility on training and hoped that it will help decrease the current dependency on internationally co-ordinated assistance.¹⁸⁸ **However, we were disappointed to witness the total gender imbalance in the various refugee vocational and training schemes, with women confined to crafts which are likely to have much less income earning potential. This is unacceptable. DFID should engage proactively with all organisations involved in training to ensure that this disparity is robustly addressed.**

90. During our visit to the camp we heard that formal education opportunities were lacking, especially at tertiary level, and this was reiterated by witnesses. Mark Farmaner of the Burma Campaign UK told us that the thousands of children who grow up in the camps currently face very limited opportunities for further education.¹⁸⁹ The Karenni Student Development Group said that the restrictions on students leaving the camps prevented them from taking up learning opportunities in Thailand¹⁹⁰ and several witnesses emphasised that the RTG restricts teachers’ and educators’ access to the camps, constraining on-site learning.¹⁹¹ **We recommend that DFID and the FCO seek the agreement of the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to increase formal education opportunities, especially at tertiary level. Restrictions on refugees’ freedom to leave the camps, and for teachers and educators to enter the camps, are a key factor in limiting educational opportunities. DFID and the FCO should negotiate with the RTG for more flexibility in entering and leaving the camps, so that refugees’ education and employment opportunities can be improved.**

¹⁸⁵ Q 113 [Ray Hasan]

¹⁸⁶ Ev 85 [Ashley South]

¹⁸⁷ Ev 60 [DFID]

¹⁸⁸ Ev 74 [Christian Aid]

¹⁸⁹ Q 45 [Mark Farmaner]

¹⁹⁰ Unprinted paper submitted by the Karenni Student Development Programme, p.2

¹⁹¹ Ev 103 [Guy Horton], Ev 122 [Peter Sagar] and Unprinted paper submitted by the Karenni Student Development Programme, p.2

Resettlement and long-term strategies

91. As we heard during our visit, UNHCR and the RTG are overseeing a resettlement programme under which substantial numbers of Karen and Karenni refugees currently in camps will achieve the ‘sustainable solution’ of resettlement to third countries. However, we heard during our visit from a number of witnesses that DFID has not contributed to the policy debate with the RTG or engaged in any meaningful way with resettlement issues. It concerned us that DFID was not contributing to a developmental analysis of refugee resettlement. Hanne Mathieson, Head of the UNHCR Field Office in Thailand, told us that whilst resettlement had been slow to date—just 440 of Site 1’s population of around 20,000 had been resettled in May 2007—a new wave of resettlements was coming up with the majority going to the USA and some to the UK, Australia and other countries. Ellen Sauerbrey, US Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration was quoted in August 2006 as saying that “there will be no cap (for the resettlement of Karen refugees).”¹⁹² Ashley South, a consultant specialising in displacement in Burma, told us that up to 40,000 people would be leaving the camps by the end of 2008. 10,000 refugees would depart in 2007. He believed that if maintained, this annual rate would mean all refugees currently in the camps would be resettled within a decade.¹⁹³

92. Many of the Karen and Karenni refugees eligible for resettlement during 2006-07 were teachers, medical workers, administrators, and from other elite sectors of the refugee community.¹⁹⁴ A number of witnesses were concerned that resettlement of ‘elite’ refugees would leave a void in the running of the camps.¹⁹⁵ During our visit, TBBC told us they anticipated that the camps would lose 40% of their skilled workforce as the resettlement programme was rolled out. The then FCO Minister of State, Rt Hon Ian McCartney MP, told us that UK policy on resettlement “does not have criteria on educational standards or issues around that because we are acutely aware our standards are based on the vulnerability of the refugee concerned”. He said that the UK had assessed three camps in April and May through the Home Office’s Gateway Protection Programme and hoped for a first resettlement of 150 refugees later in 2007.¹⁹⁶ **We recommend that the UK Government take steps to ensure that resettlement of refugees through the Home Office’s Gateway Protection Programme does not create a sudden diminution in capacity amongst the camp populations and leave camps with gaps in their skilled workforce. The UK Government must also advocate on this issue in co-ordination with other governments, particularly the USA. DFID should actively engage with the Royal Thai Government in the policy debate on resettlement issues to contribute to a developmental analysis of refugees’ needs.**

¹⁹² Ev 85 [Ashley South]

¹⁹³ Q 152 [Ashley South]

¹⁹⁴ Ev 85 [Ashley South]

¹⁹⁵ Qq 46-47 [Benedict Rogers], Ev 138 [VSO] and Q 152 [Ashley South].

¹⁹⁶ Q 203 [Ian McCartney MP]

93. Ashley South told us that large numbers of new refugees are still entering the camps and saw resettlement as a “pull factor” in this.¹⁹⁷ Christian Aid said that refugees who have left for third countries have simply been replaced by new arrivals from Burma.¹⁹⁸ This implies that the refugee camps along the border will be necessary for some considerable time to come, regardless of resettlement policies. Rurik Marsden, DFID’s Poverty Adviser in Rangoon, told us that TBBC has been helping to develop a strategy for dealing with resettlement over the last few months.¹⁹⁹ This raised questions for us about whether it was appropriate for TBBC to be involved with refugee resettlement. **What started as a temporary refugee influx on the Thai-Burma border has become a long-term humanitarian problem. The Thailand-Burma Border Consortium and the NGOs working under the Committee for the Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand umbrella deserve credit for the food, shelter and health services they provide within the camps. But we believe they cannot be—and cannot reasonably be expected to be—responsible for or involved in all refugee needs, especially training, employment, policy development and resettlement strategies.**

94. **We believe a strategic reassessment is required of the appropriate mechanism for dealing with the long-term interests of refugees. A clear delineation is needed between TBBC and other NGOs’ work in providing food and basic services to refugees on the one hand, and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Royal Thai Government and third country governments’ sustainable solutions for the refugee crisis, including employment and resettlement, on the other.**

95. Engaging with the RTG on refugees’ employment, education and resettlement, as set out in the last few sub-sections, will require inputs from the FCO, the Home Office and from DFID. **We are concerned that the relocation of DFID staff from Bangkok to Rangoon will risk DFID being isolated from negotiations concerning refugees in Thailand. This adds further weight to the case we have made for retaining at least two senior, full-time DFID staff members within the Bangkok Embassy to provide support to refugee issues and NGOs based in Thailand.**

Refugees on other borders

96. Our terms of reference for this inquiry focused on refugees on the Thai-Burma border. However, we also received evidence on the dire situation faced by refugees on Burma’s other borders. There are more than 60,000 refugees in India, over 20,000 in Malaysia, several thousand in Bangladesh and an unknown number in China.

97. As we have stated, we heard that refugees on the Chinese, Indian and Bangladeshi borders are highly vulnerable.²⁰⁰ The situation on the Indian border is of particular concern. As the Women’s League of Chinland highlighted in their written evidence, the Government of India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and accordingly Burmese refugees—many of whom have fled from one of Burma’s poorest states, Chin,

¹⁹⁷ Q 152 [Ashley South]

¹⁹⁸ Ev 74 [Christian Aid]

¹⁹⁹ Q 204 [Rurik Marsden]

²⁰⁰ Q 52 [Benedict Rogers]. See paragraphs 75-76.

across the Indian border—receive little assistance in terms of food, healthcare or education. It is difficult for donors to access many areas of the Indian border states. **We recommend that the UK Government begin a dialogue with the Government of India about the status of and the assistance given to Burmese refugees in India and we reiterate our recommendation that DFID look at the options for starting to fund assistance to Burmese refugees over the border with India.**

Other states' engagement with Burma

98. We are also concerned about India's investments within Burma. During our visit, we heard that India sells arms to Burma and invests in its natural resources—but that it never criticises the regime or seeks to engage with the SPDC about their terrible human rights record. We heard that China's public relationship with Burma was similarly uncritical, but that it was "asking some questions behind the scenes."²⁰¹ Benedict Rogers of Christian Solidarity Worldwide said that the UK's historical relationship—and the fact that India calls itself the world's largest democracy—indicated that the UK should negotiate with India to encourage it to engage responsibly with Burma.²⁰² Mark Farmaner of the Burma Campaign UK told us:

“One of the first things that needs to happen is that the UK needs to start talking to [the Indian and Chinese] Governments about this issue at a high level. There is some embassy to embassy contact, some junior ministers have raised the issue in passing [...] but the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister are not raising these issues with their counterparts at all.”²⁰³

99. Rt Hon Ian McCartney MP told us that he had met with the Indian and Chinese Foreign Ministers in May 2007 and had, for the very first time, secured a common agreement with India and China, in which they “supported [...] our very firm statement of what needed to happen in Burma.”²⁰⁴ **We recommend that the UK Government, at the highest levels, regularly raise the subject of India's engagement in Burma with the Government of India. India's uncritical relationship with the regime, and its appetite for arming and investing in the country, risks perpetuating Burma's illegal and brutal regime.**

100. Burma also has an important bilateral relationship with Russia, whose atomic energy agency announced in May 2007 that it had agreed to build a nuclear research reactor for Burma.²⁰⁵ **We were extremely alarmed to hear that Russia has agreed to build a nuclear research reactor for Burma. We call on the UK Government, together with the international community, to bring pressure to bear on the Russian Government not to proceed with the reactor and to acknowledge the hardships the initiative would impose on the Burmese people.**

²⁰¹ Q 53 [Benedict Rogers]

²⁰² Q 53 [Benedict Rogers]

²⁰³ Q 53 [Mark Farmaner]

²⁰⁴ Q 199 [Ian McCartney MP]

²⁰⁵ BBC Online, 'Russia and Burma in Nuclear Deal', 15 May 2007. Online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/6658713.stm>

6 Conclusion

101. The litany of human rights abuses taking place in Burma, the country's ongoing conflict, its dire poverty and the resultant displacement crisis create a complex and highly challenging environment in which to deliver aid. Yet providing assistance to Burma's displaced populations and refugees is an imperative, and can be done without sustaining the country's brutal regime. As one of only four donors with a staffed office in Burma, DFID is in a leading position to build on its current programmes of support to IDPs and refugees. The Department should substantially increase its aid to Burma and maximise its impact by a dual focus on in-country and cross-border assistance from Thailand.

102. Burma is one of the world's forgotten crises; its people, and particularly its ethnic minorities, struggle daily to protect their security and health. The displaced are forced into the countries' margins, into border regions where infectious diseases and conflict rage. Their future, like the country's, lies in the balance. It is beyond the scope of our report to find answers to Burma's political and social nightmare. But we believe that with efficient targeting and implementation, UK aid can make a real difference to the humanitarian situation of Burma's displaced peoples and refugees.

103. We intend to review within 12 months, including by taking further oral evidence, the extent to which the Government has responded to and implemented our recommendations.

Recommendations

1. We recognise the huge challenges facing donors in assisting IDPs within Burma and commend DFID for being one of only four donors to run a staffed development programme within the country. (Paragraph 19)
2. Providing funding to community-based organisations (CBOs), who often manage their own clinics, schools and projects, is a way for donors to assist IDPs without channelling funds through the military regime. Such groups can go beyond emergency assistance to carry out crucial sustainable development work at grassroots level. We recommend that DFID increase substantially the funding it gives to CBOs within Burma. Capacity-building and training of such groups is a crucial complementary strategy if funding is to be used effectively. Funding CBOs provides donors with the means to support human rights and democracy work within Burma. (Paragraphs 22-23)
3. We recommend that DFID begin appropriate funding of exile groups who carry out crucial work both inside and outside Burma to support IDPs and other vulnerable groups. Support to such groups would have the simultaneous benefit of supporting and raising awareness about the plight of IDPs, and of building capacity for a future democratic transition. We believe that the exiled trade union movement and women's groups are particularly worthy of support. (Paragraph 26)
4. We are deeply concerned by the closure of two ICRC field offices in Burma in March 2007 and the damaging effect this will have on the international community's ability to document abuses perpetrated against IDPs and other vulnerable groups in Burma. We call on the UK Government to continue to make representations to the Burmese authorities on this issue at the highest level. (Paragraph 29)
5. It is our strong belief that overall aid levels to Burma need to be significantly boosted. (Paragraph 30)
6. Funding of aid work in Burma is not a case of 'business as usual'. The risk of funding reaching an illegal and repressive military junta must be absolutely minimised. Political and humanitarian 'space' to carry out the process of poverty reduction and humanitarian assistance is highly constrained. Capacity amongst partner organisations to spend aid money effectively is low. The co-ordination of aid efforts is difficult and is currently done poorly. Overall, operating conditions for aid agencies in Burma remain very challenging. We respect DFID's determination to minimise the risk of any of its funds finding their way into the exchequer of a brutal and illegitimate regime. (Paragraph 32)
7. Whilst there is a need to address the significant constraints, we believe more aid could and should be spent in Burma by DFID. The current UK contribution of £8.8 million represents significant under-spending compared to countries with similar poverty levels and human rights records. DFID has quadrupled its aid budget for Burma in the last six years and we recommend that this trajectory should continue, with a further quadrupling by 2013. We also believe that the UK Government should

encourage other countries to provide greater support for work within Burma. This would give Burma the opportunity to make at least some progress towards the Millennium Development Goals by the 2015 deadline. (Paragraph 32)

8. Whilst we welcome the increase in staff capacity within Burma from three to 10 officials, we are concerned that if DFID fully relocates management of its Burma programme from Bangkok to Rangoon, it will impair DFID's ability to engage with activities on the Thai-Burma border and fulfil its proper part in a co-ordination role. We emphasise the importance of DFID working independently and we therefore recommend that DFID retain at least two senior, full-time members of staff within the British Embassy in Bangkok. This will help in providing an external perspective on displacement issues within Burma and in supporting refugees, cross-border assistance and non-governmental organisations based in Thailand. (Paragraph 36)
9. It is clear to us that NGOs working from inside Burma can reach IDPs who would not otherwise receive assistance. Their work is crucial to providing basic social services such as education and health to vulnerable populations, and we believe that they deserve increased support from donors. (Paragraph 41)
10. Ideally, a situation would exist where two complementary approaches, in-country and cross-border, ensured even coverage in assistance to IDPs across Burma. But unfortunately this complementarity remains elusive at present. A key reason for this is the difficulty experienced by organisations in communicating and hence co-ordinating their work. (Paragraph 42)
11. It is clear to us that DFID's office relocation from Bangkok to Rangoon is likely to impair its ability to fulfil its proper part in a co-ordination role, as we stated above (see paragraphs 35-36). We also believe that DFID is not currently fulfilling its responsibility as a lead donor to tackle the problems of co-ordination. (Paragraph 43)
12. We agree that the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), rather than any of the main bilateral donors, should take the principal role in co-ordinating aid assistance but believe that DFID should engage more wholeheartedly in helping to co-ordinate assistance to IDPs. We welcome the appointment of a UN OCHA Co-ordinator for Burma and believe that international NGOs should support his work. We recommend that DFID support UN OCHA to carry out an urgent mapping exercise of which IDPs are receiving assistance and where gaps exist between in-country and cross-border assistance. (Paragraph 45)
13. We believe that DFID should do more to share information about its assistance to IDPs, and more to encourage other organisations to do the same. We accept the importance of maintaining the security of the work being done, but believe it would be possible for DFID to enhance communication by organising more 'closed door' meetings with trusted partners. (Paragraph 48)
14. Whilst we welcome the Three Diseases Fund, and believe that DFID deserves credit for helping to develop it, in its current form it will not reach sufficient numbers of IDPs or other vulnerable groups living in border and conflict areas. We recommend that DFID build on its leadership role in helping to develop the Fund by supporting

the creation of a complementary mechanism that makes funding available to organisations providing healthcare in the border areas. (Paragraph 52)

15. The UK Government needs to tread very carefully before beginning any kind of dialogue with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). However, we believe limited engagement on specific poverty and humanitarian issues should begin and that the most sensible approach would be for DFID to do this as part of a group of international actors, under the banner of the UN. (Paragraph 55)
16. Cross-border aid may not be considered to be a neutral form of assistance and it is highly dangerous. However it is the only way to reach IDPs in several of Burma's conflict-affected states and we believe that it can provide a cost-efficient and flexible way of delivering emergency relief where no other options exist, but it must be continually and robustly reviewed. Such funding must not detract from the key humanitarian objective of ending conflict. (Paragraph 62)
17. DFID's view that its funds "will add little extra value" to cross-border assistance is divergent from what some other witnesses told us. (Paragraph 67)
18. We believe that DFID's policy change to allow its funds to be spent cross-border, but with no extra funds currently committed, has exacerbated the existing problems in engaging productively with agencies carrying out cross-border work and has unsurprisingly been perceived by them as an empty gesture. As we have stated previously, there is an urgent need for DFID, working closely with the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), to establish comprehensively the needs of IDPs who can only be reached by cross-border work, particularly in relation to the control of infectious diseases. DFID must not hide behind its argument that it has a 'comparative advantage' in working in-country. At the same time UN OCHA must also address the failure of a significant number of bilateral donors to properly fund in-country work, which has hindered an effective, comprehensive approach. Cross-border assistance to Burmese IDPs could be extended if more financial resources were available. We recommend that DFID contribute to providing effective relief to IDPs in eastern Burma and that it should commit funds for cross-border assistance as part of an overall rise in aid to Burma. We believe that, as a high priority, DFID should maximise relief to IDPs in eastern Burma. (Paragraph 70)
19. We believe that, in addition to funding cross-border work, DFID should help to ensure that assistance is focused on the most vulnerable IDPs, including Shan populations and women. Women's sexual and reproductive health needs to be prioritised. Cross-border health assistance and clinics in IDP areas both require extra financial resources. We recommend that education, especially for girls, should be another priority for DFID and that it should fund cross-border assistance to teachers and schools in IDP areas. (Paragraph 73)
20. Rape is used as a weapon of war by the Burmese Army and we call on the UK Government to make high-level representations about this atrocity to the Burmese regime. We reiterate our recommendation below (see paragraph 26) that DFID should fund women's groups working on and across the border who document rape

and other human rights abuses, and provide women's health and education services. The Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) is one group particularly worthy of support. (Paragraph 74)

21. We recommend that DFID scale up its funding of cross-border assistance over the Chinese border. The Department should also look at the options for starting to fund assistance over the Indian border. Support to the Chin backpack health worker programme, operating over the Indian border, would be one step towards assisting the many IDPs facing dire poverty in Chin state. (Paragraph 76)
22. We were astonished to hear that DFID has visited the refugee camps it funds so infrequently. We believe that funding TBBC directly might improve communication and encourage stronger engagement on DFID's behalf. We therefore recommend that DFID reassess the continued value of funding TBBC indirectly via Christian Aid. (Paragraph 82)
23. Although we accept that the FCO has played a valuable role in visiting refugees, allowing DFID and the FCO to have an interchangeable presence at the camps is not the most effective way of overseeing the delivery of aid. We were struck by the lack of developmental analysis of the Ban Mai Nai Soi Camp and believe strong DFID engagement is needed to rectify this. We recommend that DFID carries out a developmental analysis of the camps; this is essential both to meet refugees' needs appropriately and to provide value for donors' funds. (Paragraph 83)
24. Our concern about DFID's lack of engagement with the camps on the Thai-Burma border is heightened by the decision to relocate the management of DFID's Burma programme from Bangkok to Rangoon. We reiterate the concern we expressed earlier about DFID's office relocation from Bangkok to Rangoon and repeat our recommendation that at least two senior, full-time members of DFID staff should be retained within the British Embassy in Bangkok (see paragraph 36). This staff presence will be crucial to enhancing DFID engagement with the camps, carrying out a developmental analysis of the camps' administration, co-ordinating assistance to refugees with the FCO and supporting NGOs based in Thailand. (Paragraph 84)
25. We reiterate that we welcome the appointment of a UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Co-ordinator for Burma. We anticipate that this step will help strengthen co-ordination of international humanitarian assistance to refugees at the Thai-Burma border. (Paragraph 85)
26. We believe that opening up official employment opportunities for refugees in Thailand would be mutually beneficial to refugees and the Thai economy. We recommend that DFID and the FCO increase their engagement with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and NGOs in negotiations with the Royal Thai Government on expanding employment opportunities. (Paragraph 88)
27. We were disappointed to witness the total gender imbalance in the various refugee vocational and training schemes, with women confined to crafts which are likely to have much less income earning potential. This is unacceptable. DFID should engage proactively with all organisations involved in training to ensure that this disparity is robustly addressed. (Paragraph 89)

28. We recommend that DFID and the FCO seek the agreement of the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to increase formal education opportunities, especially at tertiary level. Restrictions on refugees' freedom to leave the camps, and for teachers and educators to enter the camps, are a key factor in limiting educational opportunities. DFID and the FCO should negotiate with the RTG for more flexibility in entering and leaving the camps, so that refugees' education and employment opportunities can be improved. (Paragraph 90)
29. We recommend that the UK Government take steps to ensure that resettlement of refugees through the Home Office's Gateway Protection Programme does not create a sudden diminution in capacity amongst the camp populations and leave camps with gaps in their skilled workforce. The UK Government must also advocate on this issue in co-ordination with other governments, particularly the USA. DFID should actively engage with the Royal Thai Government in the policy debate on resettlement issues to contribute to a developmental analysis of refugees' needs. (Paragraph 92)
30. What started as a temporary refugee influx on the Thai-Burma border has become a long-term humanitarian problem. The Thailand-Burma Border Consortium and the NGOs working under the Committee for the Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand umbrella deserve credit for the food, shelter and health services they provide within the camps. But we believe they cannot be—and cannot reasonably be expected to be—responsible for or involved in all refugee needs, especially training, employment, policy development and resettlement strategies. (Paragraph 93)
31. We believe a strategic reassessment is required of the appropriate mechanism for dealing with the long-term interests of refugees. A clear delineation is needed between TBBC and other NGOs' work in providing food and basic services to refugees on the one hand, and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Royal Thai Government and third country governments' sustainable solutions for the refugee crisis, including employment and resettlement, on the other. (Paragraph 94)
32. We are concerned that the relocation of DFID staff from Bangkok to Rangoon will risk DFID being isolated from negotiations concerning refugees in Thailand. This adds further weight to the case we have made for retaining at least two senior, full-time DFID staff members within the Bangkok Embassy to provide support to refugee issues and NGOs based in Thailand. (Paragraph 95)
33. We recommend that the UK Government begin a dialogue with the Government of India about the status of and the assistance given to Burmese refugees in India and we reiterate our recommendation that DFID look at the options for starting to fund assistance to Burmese refugees over the border with India. (Paragraph 97)
34. We recommend that the UK Government, at the highest levels, regularly raise the subject of India's engagement in Burma with the Government of India. India's uncritical relationship with the regime, and its appetite for arming and investing in the country, risks perpetuating Burma's illegal and brutal regime. (Paragraph 99)
35. We were extremely alarmed to hear that Russia has agreed to build a nuclear research reactor for Burma. We call on the UK Government, together with the

international community, to bring pressure to bear on the Russian Government not to proceed with the reactor and to acknowledge the hardships the initiative would impose on the Burmese people. (Paragraph 100)

Formal minutes

Wednesday 18 July 2007

Members present:

Malcolm Bruce, in the Chair

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| John Battle | James Duddridge |
| John Bercow | Ann McKechin |
| Richard Burden | Mr Marsha Singh |
| Quentin Davies | Sir Robert Smith |

The Committee considered this matter.

Draft Report (Department for International Development's Assistance to Burmese Internally Displaced People and Refugees on the Thai-Burma Border), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 103 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Annex [Programme for the Committee's Visit to Thailand] agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Tenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Several Memoranda were ordered to be reported to the House for printing with the Report, together with certain Memoranda reported and ordered to be published on 26 April, 12 June, 20 June, 21 June and 4 July 2007.

Several Papers were ordered to be reported to the House for placing in the Library and Parliamentary Archives.

[Adjourned till Thursday 11 October at 2.00 pm.]

List of Acronyms

| | |
|---------|--|
| BPHWT | Back Pack Health Worker Teams |
| CBO | Community-Based Organisation |
| CCSDPT | Committee for the Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand |
| DFID | Department for International Development |
| FCO | Foreign and Commonwealth Office |
| FTUB | Federation of Trade Unions-Burma |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Persons |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organisation |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goal |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NLD | National League for Democracy |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| RTG | Royal Thai Government |
| SPDC | State Peace and Development Council |
| SRH | Sexual and Reproductive Health |
| SWAN | Shan Women's Action Network |
| TBBC | Thailand-Burma Border Consortium |
| UNDP | UN Development Programme |
| UNHCR | UN High Commissioner for Refugees (The UN Refugee Agency) |
| UN OCHA | UN Office of the Co-ordinator of Humanitarian Affairs |
| UNOPS | UN Office for Projects and Services |

Annex: The Committee's visit programme, Thailand 15-17 May 2007

The group consisted of:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Malcolm Bruce (Chairman) | Ann McKechin |
| John Battle | Mr Marsha Singh |
| John Bercow | Sir Robert Smith |
| Richard Burden | |

Accompanied by: Matthew Hedges (Clerk) and Chlöe Challender (Committee Specialist)

TUESDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2007

Chiang Mai

Briefing from Department for International Development (DFID) and Foreign and Commonwealth (FCO) officials

Mae Hong Son

Briefing by Thailand-Burma Border Consortium, UNHCR, International Rescue Committee and Jesuit Refugee Service

Meeting with Royal Thai Government local authorities:

- Mr Chana Naksuriya, Deputy Governor of Mae Hong Son
- Mr Vajira Chotirosserani, Camp Commander of Ban Mai Nai Soi Refugee Camp
- Mr Varitchart, Foreign Liaison Officer, Ministry of Interior

WEDNESDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2007

Thai-Burma border near Mae Hong Son

Visit to Ban Mai Nai Soi Refugee camp ('Site 1'):

- Meeting with the Camp Committee
- Visit to Ban Tractor Health Clinic
- Visit to vocational skills training centre
- Visit to provisional holding centre
- Visit to Community Agriculture and Nutrition (CAN) project office

Chiang Mai

Meeting with Back Pack Health Worker Teams; Thailand-Burma Border Consortium; and the Burma Relief Centre

Briefing from Free Burma Rangers

Roundtable with stakeholders including Burmese exiles living in Chiang Mai: Shan Women's Action Network; Women's League of Burma; Democratic Party for a New Society; National Council of the Union of Burma; Federation of Trade Unions-Burma; and Shan Herald Agency for News.

THURSDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2007

Bangkok

Working lunch with UK Ambassadors to Rangoon and Bangkok and DFID and FCO staff

Roundtable with donors:

- Alex Arvizu, Deputy Head of US Mission in Thailand
- Richard Whelden, USAID Deputy Mission Director
- Michael Stievater, USAID
- Jessica Adler, US State Department
- David Yasui, Counsellor, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
- Andrew Jacobs, and Isobell Poppelbaum, European Commission
- Liselott Martynenko Agerlid, First Secretary, Swedish Embassy
- Helene Storm, First Secretary, Danish Embassy
- Mariann Ruud Hagen, First Secretary, Norwegian Embassy.

Meeting with UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Burma; Médecins Sans Frontières, Switzerland; International Committee of the Red Cross Burma; and UN Office of the Co-ordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA).

Roundtable with Hope International; Save the Children; and International Development Enterprises (all based in Burma).

Witnesses

Thursday 7 June 2007

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Mr Benedict Rogers, South Asia Research & Advocacy Officer, Christian Solidarity Worldwide UK and **Mr Mark Farmaner**, Acting Director, Burma Campaign UK Ev 1

Dr Thomas Lee, Associate Professor of Medicine, University of California at Los Angeles School of Medicine Ev 12

Tuesday 12 June 2007

Mr Ray Hasan, Asia Programme Manager, Christian Aid, **Ms Linda Doull**, Health and Policy Director, Merlin, and **Mr Leo Bryant**, Marie Stopes International Ev 18

Mr Ashley South, Independent Consultant, and **Dr Maung Zarni**, Visiting Research Fellow, Department of International Development, Oxford University Ev 32

Thursday 21 June 2007

Mr Maung Maung, General Secretary, National Council of the Union of Burma, and President, Burma Institute for Democracy and Development Ev 43

Mr Gareth Thomas MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development, **Mr Rurik Marsden**, First Secretary, DFID, British Embassy, Burma; **Mr Ian McCartney MP**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and **Mr Nick Alexander**, Head of Burma and Mekong Team, FCO Ev 47

List of written evidence

Written evidence submitted by witnesses who also gave oral evidence:

| | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Department for International Development | Ev 57 |
| 2. Burma Campaign UK | Ev 66 |
| 3. Christian Aid | Ev 72 |
| 4. Christian Solidarity Worldwide | Ev 74 |
| 5. Ashley South | Ev 77 |
| 6. Dr Maung Zarni | Ev 89 |

Other written evidence:

| | |
|---|--------|
| 7. Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People | Ev 91 |
| 8. Euro Burma Office | Ev 92 |
| 9. International Campaign: Federation of Trade Unions Burma | Ev 93 |
| 10. Free Burma Rangers | Ev 94 |
| 11. Guy Horton | Ev 98 |
| 12. Karen Human Rights Group | Ev 103 |
| 13. Karen Women's Organisation | Ev 104 |
| 14. Mae Tao Clinic, The Back Pack Health Worker's Team and Burma Medical Association | Ev 105 |
| 15. Mon Relief and Development Committee | Ev 112 |
| 16. Peter E Mulligan | Ev 114 |
| 17. Oxfam GB East Asia | Ev 114 |
| 18. Peace Way Foundation: Burma Issues | Ev 115 |
| 19. Peter Sagar | Ev 120 |
| 20. Save the Children (Burma) | Ev 121 |
| 21. Lisa Smeaton | Ev 122 |
| 22. Dr Alan Smith | Ev 122 |
| 23. Tony Stokle | Ev 131 |
| 24. Paul Sztumpf | Ev 131 |
| 25. United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) | Ev 133 |
| 26. Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) | Ev 134 |
| 27. Women's Commission for Refugee Woman and Children | Ev 138 |
| 28. Women's League of Chinland | Ev 141 |

List of unprinted evidence

The following memoranda have been reported to the House, but to save printing costs they have not been printed and copies have been placed in the House of Commons Library, where they may be inspected by Members. Other copies are in the Parliamentary Archives, and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to The Parliamentary Archives, Houses of Parliament, London SW1A 0PW (tel. 020 7219 3074). Opening hours are from 9.30 am to 5.00 pm on Mondays to Fridays.

Unprinted memorandum:

Karenni Student Development Programme

Other papers:

Maps submitted by Dr Thomas Lee

Directors and Trustees Annual Reports and Financial Statements, Thailand-Burma Border Consortium, 2005 and 2006

DFID Assistance for Burmese Refugees and Internally Displaced People, DFID, March 2007

Reports from the International Development Committee since July 2005

The Government Responses to International Development Committee reports are listed here in brackets by the HC (or Cm) No. after the report they relate to.

Session 2006–07

| | | |
|----------------|---|---------------------------|
| First Report | DFID Departmental Report 2006 | HC 71 (HC 328) |
| Second Report | HIV/AIDS: Marginalised groups and emerging epidemics | HC 46-I & II (HC 329) |
| Third Report | Work of the Committee in 2005–06 | HC 228 |
| Fourth Report | Development Assistance and the Occupied Palestinian Territories | HC 114-I & II (HC 430) |
| Fifth Report | EU Development and Trade Policies: An update | HC 271 (HC 622) |
| Sixth Report | Sanitation and Water | HC 126-I & II (HC 854) |
| Seventh report | Fair Trade and Development | HC 356-I & II |
| Eighth report | Department for International Development's Programme in Vietnam | HC 732 |
| Ninth report | Prospects for sustainable peace in Uganda | HC 853 |

Session 2005–06

| | | |
|----------------|--|--------------------------|
| First Report | Delivering the Goods: HIV/AIDS and the Provision of Anti-Retrovirals | HC 708-I&II (HC 922) |
| Second Report | Darfur: The killing continues | HC 657 (HC 1017) |
| Third Report | The WTO Hong Kong Ministerial and the Doha Development Agenda | HC 730-I&II (HC 1425) |
| Fourth Report | Private Sector Development | HC 921-I&II (HC 1629) |
| Fifth Report | Strategic Export Controls: Annual Report for 2004, Quarterly Reports for 2005, Licensing Policy and Parliamentary Scrutiny | HC 873 (Cm 6954) |
| Sixth Report | Conflict and Development: Peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction | HC 923 (HC 172) |
| Seventh Report | Humanitarian response to natural disasters | HC 1188 (HC 229) |