



HOUSE OF LORDS

European Union Committee

16th Report of Session 2007–08

**Current
Developments in
European Foreign
Policy: Burma**

Report with Evidence

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The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5791.

The Committee’s email address is euclords@parliament.uk

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Oral Evidence

<i>Ms Meg Munn MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State;</i> <i>Ms Louise Lassman, Desk Officer for Burma, International Organisations Department;</i> <i>Ms Ruzina Hasan, Desk Officer for Burma, South East Asia Pacific Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office</i> Oral evidence, 15 May 2008		1
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NOTE: In the text of the report:
(Q) refers to a question in oral evidence

Minutes of Evidence

Taken before the Select Committee on the European Union (Sub-Committee C)

THURSDAY 15 MAY 2008

Present	Anderson of Swansea, L. Boyce, L. Chidgey, L. Crickhowell, L. Hamilton of Epsom, L.	Hannay of Chiswick, L. Jones, L. Roper, L. Selkirk of Douglas, L.
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Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: MS MEG MUNN, a Member of the House of Commons, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; MS LOUISE LASSMAN, Desk Officer for Burma, International Organisations Department, and MS RUZINA HASAN, Desk Officer for Burma, South East Asia Pacific Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: Minister, thank you very much indeed for coming to some of us this morning. We are the Sub-Committee of the European Union Committee which deals with foreign affairs and development policy, and we have been concerned for some time about Burma; we have been in correspondence over the question of the effectiveness of EU sanctions; and we are obviously also concerned about the EU's political impact. We had hoped to see you in any case and it is perhaps useful that your visit has occurred at this time, and we are very glad that you have brought with you Louise Lassman and Ruzina Hasan, both of whom have responsibilities for Burma in the Foreign Office. Do you have an introductory statement?

Ms Munn: At the outset, may I say that I am sure the Committee will understand that we are in an extremely fast-moving situation, although I will obviously give the Committee as best I can the updated information on what is happening on the ground. I am also sure that the Committee will understand, in terms of the officials I have present, that we were not clear who was going to be able to come at the time because obviously officials are extremely busy, and that some of the more senior officials who normally would perhaps have supported a minister in this situation have a great deal on their minds.

Q2 Chairman: Thank you very much. Could you let us know what is the current estimated extent of the human and physical damage to Burma caused by the cyclone?

Ms Munn: Our understanding at the moment, and this is the situation report from yesterday afternoon, is that our best estimate is about 200,000 dead or missing. We believe there are about one and a half million people in need of immediate assistance, of

whom about a quarter of a million to 270,000 are desperately in need. The Committee will also be aware that we are expecting heavy rain in the next five days from a further cyclone, and therefore the problems of getting aid into the country are exacerbated by the natural circumstances, as well as, of course, by the Burmese regime.

Q3 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Minister, good morning. Clearly the situation is desperate: access is vital for the international community, both countries and NGOs. Is it true that foreign aid workers have been ordered to leave the delta by today?

Ms Munn: That is our understanding, that a number of foreign workers have been asked to leave the area.

Q4 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Are they complying?

Ms Munn: I do not have any information in relation to that. Our general understanding is there is a process which the generals in charge are setting out: we understand that in terms of some of the people on the ground there is more flexibility being given, because they are obviously seeing what is happening, but it is far from what we would expect of the government in this situation.

Q5 Lord Anderson of Swansea: The BBC this morning carried a story that six neighbouring countries have now been given access by the Burmese generals. Is that true?

Ms Munn: I have not had confirmation of that. We certainly believe that the countries in the region are enormously important. They are all part of ASEAN, the Association of South East Asian Nations, and therefore they have strong relationships with Burma. I called in the Ambassadors from ASEAN yesterday and we had a very full and frank discussion about that. They are concerned to do whatever will work in

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terms of getting some help and support, so we are hopeful that will be the case.

Q6 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Is there a possible opening for us here? If privileged access were given to the neighbours could we use that as a conduit for our own aid, because obviously we do not worry how the aid is labelled so long as it reaches the people who desperately need it?

Ms Munn: We have certainly said that from the outset. We are very happy to get aid in through whatever means. We are very clear that it should go to organisations such as World Food Programme, Save the Children, et cetera, and, indeed, I am told that the first aid that went in yesterday, which was Department of International Development aid, the plane arrived there and was passed on to the World Food Programme.

Q7 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Finally, on the access point, clearly there is scepticism about the effectiveness of air drops. Now, the French and Bernard Kouchner have put forward the idea of a sea corridor. Is that part of EU policy? Is that something we would favour?

Ms Munn: We are looking at all ways in which we could get help in. We do have a ship in the region, as do the United States and the French, and therefore we would certainly look at that route. What we have to remember is that, without the co-operation of the Burmese authorities, any successful aid distribution is going to be extremely difficult.

Q8 Lord Chidgey: I would like, if I may, to ask some more detailed questions on the same subject as Lord Anderson was asking about. The question of the neighbouring states has been commented on this morning in the BBC news. Does the Foreign Office have any more information on this? One assumes that the neighbouring states have particular relations with Burma, a mutual dependency in some frame or other and one would expect that China would figure very strongly in this. I would like to know whether your office or the Government has made any particular protest to the Chinese counterparts about what they intend to do in regard to the situation. There is also the question of the 23 flights that I think your colleagues mentioned this morning. 23 flights have now been able to get into Burma, but the point was made that 23 flights a day were needed to address the situation. Is it not, frankly, quite traumatic that the adequacy of the international air force is so limited because of the situation, and really it is not something one can brush aside, and I would like to know a little more about what the Government's position is on trying to increase the flow of flights and aid through to the appropriate people? You mentioned Save the Children. They have, I understand, a great many

local staff which is why they are able to be in Burma, because they mainly use local staff in these situations, and I would like to know how that particular facility is being used to best effect, bearing in mind their special situation. I do not know of any other international aid organisations which have that presence on the ground but you may be able to enlighten me.

Ms Munn: In relation to other countries, yes, the Foreign Secretary spoke to his counterpart earlier this week, on Tuesday, and raised the issue very strongly with him and pressed China to press the issue with Burma. We know that the Thai Prime Minister yesterday—I am struggling because of the difference in the hours and the time—the Prime Minister from Thailand went to see the Burmese regime yesterday. Lord Malloch Brown and Shahid Malik, the Minister from the International Development Department, are in Thailand and are due to see today, this afternoon in Thai terms, the Prime Minister, so they will get more information on that. In terms of the 23 flights, we understand the plan is that that number of flights, if not more, should continue. That has opened up the situation but we know it is inadequate. The issue, of course, is not just getting the aid in: it is crucially this issue about having the people on the ground to distribute it. Now, the Burmese Permanent Representative at the UN has said that ASEAN will complete an assessment of the situation within 48 hours and that 160 ASEAN regional relief workers will be allowed to enter the area thereafter, so there will be considerably more than have been in there going in hopefully very shortly. We know it is not adequate, and I said this very clearly to the Ambassadors yesterday.

Ms Hasan: Save the Children is certainly on the ground; World Vision is also on the ground; Merlin, which is a medical relief organisation, is also on the ground. The pattern has been that those organisations which have had presence prior to the cyclone are finding it easier to work now and NGOs who have not had that presence are finding it much more difficult to get visas, but we are pushing for access and for the visas to be issued.

Q9 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Could I just go back to this ASEAN point? I can see why ASEAN are extremely important diplomatic players, and it is very good that they are being mobilised to bring pressure to bear on the Burmese government to be more co-operative, but do they have any capability for dealing with a crisis of this scale? Do they have helicopters? Do they have distribution networks? 160 sounds, frankly, pretty meaningless in an area this size, so what is our information about the capacity of ASEAN to do the job if they are the only people who are allowed to do so? And perhaps I could just add that I know Lord Jay, who is the Chairman of

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Merlin, says that their people there are doing very well because, as you say, they are on the ground and they have not been interfered with in any way, and they have both expatriate and Burmese staff working there in quite large numbers.

Ms Munn: In terms of ASEAN, it varies. Different countries have different ranges of support. I am just trying to remember which specific countries were saying this but Singapore, for example, has offered quite a significant amount of aid and I think Thailand were in the same position, so support does vary. The other thing that the ASEAN Ambassadors said to me yesterday is that, where they previously had experience of help and support, particularly Thailand, Indonesia, obviously with the Tsunami and Philippines with other general disasters, they were happy to press the Burmese saying that these people coming in are humanitarian workers and this is not a political situation, and this was a point I stressed—the Burmese Ambassador was also present—that we are not looking to exploit this politically in any way. This is about getting humanitarian support in and preventing people dying. So that is where we are. I do not know whether we have any more specific information on the capacity of the ASEAN countries.

Ms Hasan: All I can add is that Thailand is emerging as a hub obviously for the region and therefore has a crucial role to play and in terms of equipment we look to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia. How we are seeing it is that the West needs to be working strongly with ASEAN for a massive scale-up, and it is about working together and ensuring that we put pressure on them, because they have a greater influence on the regime than we do.

Q10 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: To follow up on Lord Hannay's point, if it comes to the effective distribution of aid you need helicopters, because the areas you are dealing with are absolutely vast, firstly, and, secondly, roads and so on do not work any more. Normally, where this has been effectively done, the military have been involved because they have the helicopters and the organisation to distribute. What is the attitude of the Burmese to having foreign soldiers on their soil?

Ms Munn: Well, we know that the Burmese are very reluctant to have any foreign workers generally coming in, and I am sure that is a particular problem. The United States have offered significant numbers of helicopters: we have a helicopter with the ship that is in the region. We need to keep pressing them, again, to be very clear that this is humanitarian support, and this is where I think the other ASEAN countries, who have experienced military assistance in a humanitarian way, are important and that is why the meeting of the ASEAN foreign ministers next

Monday will be very important in them putting that information across.

Q11 Lord Crickhowell: I am really pursuing the same point. You talk about getting aid in and you talk, understandably, about the importance of having people on the ground otherwise you do not know quite what happens to it, but the fact is you cannot get aid into the delta area where most of these people are lying dead in the water or in appalling conditions without the combination of a large number of helicopters and probably flat-bottomed boats as well. In the Tsunami disaster the Americans had a large aircraft carrier just offshore and a continual flow of helicopters day and night going in. I do not see there is any possibility of getting aid into where it is needed, even with people on the ground and so on, unless there is the provision of adequate physical equipment. Now, presumably the Chinese, who might have been able to help, are now fully engaged and using most of their helicopters on their own appalling disaster. How far are we really pressing the ASEAN governments or the Burmese government for some co-operative effort that will enable these facilities, because without these facilities we are, frankly, merely playing at the game?

Ms Munn: We are entirely focused on that very matter. There is a huge amount of effort going on to press the ASEAN governments to move on that, and we have been speaking directly to foreign ministers and to other ministers in governments. Obviously our posts overseas are doing exactly that. I know a number of flat-bottomed boats have arrived, that was information I had yesterday and, again, I am not sure of the number but we know that is what is needed. We know there is a huge problem and that proper assessment has not been done, but we do have estimates, as I said at the outset. We are in no doubt about the scale of the need here. The primary push has to be to get that access otherwise, as you rightly say, nothing will happen and people are dying—and they are dying today.

Q12 Lord Crickhowell: But if they will not let the Americans in, and that may be their biggest point of resistance, there are very large numbers of civilian and other helicopters that could be made available around the world so are we discussing with the ASEAN governments how those might be made available to those other countries on loan or some other basis, so they can bring the helicopters in if there are countries who are being banned from crossing the frontier with helicopters?

Ms Munn: Well, the United States are getting in in terms of planes and providing aid, so it is not quite as clear-cut as your question might suggest. Our whole approach is precisely to press diplomatically to try and get the movement which would then allow the

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support to come in, and at the same time to mobilise the support so that it is there as soon as it is needed. Now, in the UN there are discussions going on around that, and there has been a meeting yesterday on these very issues to look at what needs to happen chaired by the Secretary General and there is going to be a further meeting precisely to look at further donations, because while we are all very frustrated at the failure to get in to deal with the immediate situation, we know from experiences with the Tsunami and the like that the help and support that is needed is going to go on for a long time, so there is a requirement to look at that as well, and so bringing donors together is something that will happen as well in the near future.

Q13 Lord Anderson of Swansea: On the question of helicopters, the Russians and the Ukrainians are countries which are thought, for example, in Darfur to have spare capacity. Are the Russians and the Ukrainians engaged at all, and are you aware of any conditions which the regime is imposing even on their neighbours in terms of access?

Ms Munn: The regime itself is imposing conditions on everybody at the moment, and is giving a little in certain areas. I do not know specifically in relation to those two countries about helicopter provision.

Ms Hasan: I am not aware of any information on the situation with Russia and the Ukraine. I think our immediate lobbying has been with those countries who are direct neighbours of Burma whom we feel have the most leverage, but we can check on that.

Q14 Lord Crickhowell: Now, this is a European Committee so can I bring you to Europe? How is the EU responding to the disaster, and is the response adequate? I read I think that there was a meeting two days ago on the 13th. What has been the outcome of that meeting and what is your latest information about the European participation in all this?

Ms Munn: I have the Council's conclusions with me and, as you say, the Council met; Douglas Alexander represented the Government; and obviously it set out its deep concern and its strong support. There have been financial donations, both from the European Commission and from the ECHO. In addition to that, Louis Michel, the Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, is travelling to Burma and my latest information—and my officials will correct me if I am wrong—is that he has a visa and is going to press on this issue.

Q15 Lord Crickhowell: And the scale of the aid that Europe has voted so far?

Ms Munn: I said on the floor of the House yesterday that ECHO has given 2 million euros. I believe the Commission has given more than that, something like 5 million euros.

Ms Lassman: That is the figure I had.

Q16 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: The French Foreign Minister thinks we should go in any way, whether we are asked or not. Is there a Plan B of Europe's so that when the Burmese remain completely obdurate and will not have anything to do with us, we go in anyway?

Ms Munn: We obviously have to keep the situation under review and people are working round the clock on this, but when we say we have to go in any way, the question is what do we mean by that? I think the Prime Minister was quite right yesterday at Prime Minister's Question Time that we would be wrong to suggest to the British public that there is any easy way round this. What are we talking about? It is extremely difficult to get into the region even with unfettered access; we know that there are problems. Without the co-operation of the Burmese regime, the Burmese military, it would be extraordinarily difficult to see how we would achieve that. So I think we are not ruling anything out and we are keeping the situation under review, but our best assessment at the moment is to seek the co-operation of the Burmese regime and to do that through the neighbouring countries, and that was very much confirmed by Ambassadors yesterday from the ASEAN countries who I was left in no doubt are personally as concerned as we are, and are seeking the best way forward. I do not think anybody is happy about this situation at all. We find ourselves in an unprecedented situation where we have a humanitarian catastrophe and a regime not accepting outside help, but there are no easy answers.

Q17 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: There are relatively simple answers in that the surrounding ASEAN countries could certainly establish air supremacy—the Burmese are not famous for the effectiveness of their Air Force—and then you could move freely in the country anywhere you wanted.

Ms Munn: I do not believe that is easy to accomplish.

Chairman: I gather Lord Boyce is rather sceptical about that too!

Q18 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Clearly it is people on the ground—goods, tents, boats—which are most important, but money can also play a part. Is the regime putting restrictions in the way of the Burmese diaspora and private individuals transferring money into the Burmese banking system to help in this catastrophe?

Ms Munn: I have not heard of any problems of that nature.

Q19 Lord Anderson of Swansea: On the transfer of money?

Ms Munn: No.

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Q20 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Can I raise a couple of UN aspects? The first is the question of co-ordination of all the UN agencies and activities, the World Food Programme, UNICEF and all that, and the activities of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes. What is going on with that? The news is being reported that John Holmes is going there. Does that mean he is being given a visa and being allowed in? And in Rangoon and elsewhere, where the UN has a number of offices and different agencies, is the UN being allowed to mount any serious operations in the delta? Are they co-ordinating effectively? Are they providing an overall co-ordination function as they did in the Tsunami case for other countries, Member States of the UN, who are acting to try to get things in? Or are they completely hamstrung by the activities of the regime and their refusal to allow them to work? That is my question on the humanitarian side. Secondly, I wonder if I could ask you a question about what is going on in New York? I rather understood from an answer that the Minister in the House of Lords gave two days ago that an attempt was made to discuss this in the Security Council and that this was frustrated by Russia, China and perhaps some others. Could I just suggest that some of the discussion in the first few days does seem to be a bit wide of the mark in all this. To treat the responsibility to protect, which is the issue that has been raised, as a purely military concept is very counterproductive. It is not a purely military concept. Use of force to provide protection is the last resort and I wonder whether, given that clearly this crisis is going to go on for quite some time and it does not look as if the Burmese regime is going to respond, we cannot have a rather more subtle approach to all this in New York which does try to get people to agree collectively in the Security Council to put collective pressure on the Burmese regime and to get away from the rather, I think, unfortunate emphasis on a military angle to responsibility to protect. Responsibility to protect is a normative responsibility, not an exclusively military one, and I wonder whether there is not going to be some scope to move back into that again, rather than simply accept the first setback as being definitive.

Ms Munn: If I can answer on the humanitarian angle first, as I best understand it John Holmes is going to the region but I do not know yet whether he has a visa or not. The UN Interagency Steering Committee is meeting next week. UN OCHA are, as I understand it, on the ground but their co-ordination efforts are hampered again by lack of visas for staff. Our supplies and United States' supplies which are going in are going to the World Food Programme, and are being stored in UN warehouses. Now, we know the UN situation in relation to Burma has been difficult since Charles Petrie was expelled; it is not adequate

and not good on the ground, so they are having a problem about the co-ordination of that. The UN launched a flash appeal on Friday which is seeking to raise \$187 million, and the priorities are food, nutrition, water, sanitation, shelter and health. So far, as of yesterday, \$44 million has been raised, so that is broadly the humanitarian situation. In relation to the diplomatic discussions and the issue about responsibility to protect, the Secretary-General had an emergency meeting on Burma yesterday which was for the Permanent 5, ASEAN, India and Bangladesh, and what was said on that was that John Holmes had briefed that the flow of assistance was increasing although there were still bottlenecks; the flash appeal has increased from the initial \$187 million to \$200 million; Burma was insisting that the situation had to be treated as humanitarian with no politicisation, and essentially the discussion focused around how to communicate better with the Burmese government, what role ASEAN and other neighbours could play, how we could ensure that relief efforts were complementary and well co-ordinated, and whether we could find ways whereby the Burmese government could use boats, helicopters and engineering teams available from outside. On the broad issue of the UN Security Council and the issue about responsibility to protect, it is very much our view as a British government that we will want to see used whatever instruments of the UN are likely to be the most effective, and that we should not get hung up on one approach or another. The test has to be what will make a difference on the ground, so a discussion as to whether this falls under various categories we think is probably unhelpful at this stage. What has to happen is continued pressure to get things to move, and we could spend an awful long time discussing the niceties of this but I think you are right to emphasise that if there is too much of a push which seems military that will not be helpful in terms of the approach to the Burmese regime. Our prime focus now is on the ASEAN meeting next Monday. Now, when that was set up we were very clear with ASEAN governments that we felt this was too late and it should have happened much earlier, but this is where we are now and that has to be our focus.

Chairman: Can we move to the question of EU sanctions?

Q21 Lord Jones: Lord Chairman, Minister, for some time now the European Union has been operating sanctions on the regime. The cyclone, a great humanitarian tragedy, is very recent and we have known about it, to a degree at least, from worldwide reporting. To open up the subject of sanctions I will formally ask you the question you may know we were going to ask you. What is your assessment of the effectiveness of EU sanctions on the Burmese regime?

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Ms Munn: Our sanctions in the European Union are designed to be very targeted and to affect the regime, not the wider population. Our assessment is that they are effective in the respect that they limit travel, they limit it in relation to people in the regime themselves, they are focused on sectors of the economy which benefit the regime financially—wood, gems, those sort of issues—but we have no doubt that sanctions in and of themselves are not what is going to shift the situation in Burma. There has been a long debate, particularly between us and the ASEAN countries, as to the sanctions posed on one side and an engagement to try and get the regime to shift on the other side, and the reality is that neither has delivered what we would like to see. Sanctions are part of an overall approach; they are in and of themselves not the only thing, but they are important.

Q22 Lord Jones: And what is your perception of the regime, indeed, of the nation? Why are they so? Why is it so difficult even to help them? What is the Department's perception of the regime?

Ms Munn: This is a long, long standing situation. This country has been subject to a military regime for more than 40 years; they are very entrenched and, therefore, it is very difficult to change and move the situation. I have spoken to people who come from the region: I have obviously spoken to a lot of countries around the region; and it has to be one of the most difficult and intransigent situations there is. Nobody knows what ultimately will achieve a change. If you look at the ASEAN region it is a region where you have economies which are growing incredibly fast, people talk about the Asian century, that it is an area that is developing, China, Vietnam, and in the ASEAN region you have nine countries going forward and one that is going backwards. You have living standards rising in the countries around, they are going down in Burma, and in the long term this is not tenable. It is argued, and there has been long discussion about this, that it is stable because it has been like this for however long. I do not think in the long term you can hold that back and something sooner or later will happen, but nobody knows exactly what combination of action that will be. We firmly believe sanctions have a role to play; we know from information from other people in the region that the Burmese government do pay attention to sanctions and that they do not like them. At times sanctions do particularly have effects on them, so we believe they do have a role to play.

Q23 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Minister, can you give the Committee assurance that the financial component of the EU sanctions in no way hampers the wish of voluntary organisations of countries, individuals, to help financially support the Burmese?

Ms Munn: Our view has always been that they have to be targeted directly on the regime and not at the people, and in terms of our own provision of aid none of it goes to the Burmese regime.

Q24 Lord Anderson of Swansea: But there must be some part of our own EU which potentially could harm the flow of funds to Burma?

Ms Munn: That is not my understanding.

Ms Lassman: The point to make here is that the European Council's common position has exemptions for humanitarian aid within it, including financial, so that is covered in the Burmese region.

Q25 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: An All-Party Committee of this House produced a report on sanctions saying, one, they did not work and, two, they hit the poorest people. Surely this applies in spades to the Burmese? You say these sanctions of the EU, which are targeted, as you say, on precious stones, minerals and timber, are targeted against the people at the head of the regime because they run the companies and they benefit from them, but they employ numbers of poor Burmese, and if they bite—and I have every hope they will not, and they probably will not anyway, but if they do bite—it is poor Burmese people who are going to be put out of work as a result of these. Burma is a country with a thriving drugs trade in the north where heroin and opium are trafficked in enormous quantities, and the generals are totally into that trade so the idea that these guys are short of hard currency is absolutely nonsensical, and at the end of the day we have imposed sanctions which make us feel better and put Burmese people out of work.

Ms Munn: The situation with the people in Burma is bad and difficult, not because of sanctions but because of the actions of the Burmese regime, and we have just spent the last 40 minutes talking about the Burmese regime and their incredible response to a humanitarian disaster. The whole running of their country, their whole approach, takes no account of the general needs of their population, and that is what is causing the problem, not sanctions, and we need to use sanctions not as the only tool to try and get change but as part of that. It is our view that these specific ones targeted in the way they are will have an effect. There is a discussion now and the EU has agreed to look more directly at financial sanctions. We know that in the wake of the demonstrations in September/October some of the actions taken by the United States were having a very direct effect on the regime: the inability of, for example, airlines to get insurance when they could not fly caused significant problems. They are part of an approach, not the whole approach.

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Q26 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Could I just confirm, perhaps, that the leader of the democratic opposition of Burma, Aung San Sun Kyi, supports the sanctions of the EU proposals and believes they are an effective means of pressure on the regime, and since I do not think any of us would wish to criticise her for lack of sensitivity towards the problems of her countrymen, that does seem to be rather important.

Ms Munn: She does, indeed, support sanctions. In fact, I think she would support sanctions beyond the view we would take. There is always a discussion to be had on that, but that is certainly correct.

Q27 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: Is it not true that I understand Sun Kyi supported a ban on people travelling to Burma, and she subsequently withdrew support for that?

Ms Munn: I am not sure of her exact views in relation to that, and dates on that. Those issues are always subject to debate. This is not a clear situation in that it is not directly causative. We know that if a regime does financially well the pressures on them to change became minimal. We also know that a population that has no contact with the West also gets very isolated and that can be problematic, and we do hear from people that they value certainly the low budget tourism where people stay with local people and the money goes into the economy there, and the local people value that contact. It is not black and white. That is the situation.

Q28 Lord Chidgey: Minister, if I could just pick up on a question related to the EU suspending preferential trade relations with Burma, and the Government's assessment of the impact that the suspension has had on trade with Burma and on poverty levels. That has already been covered, so it is particularly the preferential trade relations with Burma that I would like to have your response on, if I may?

Ms Munn: Again, because of the restrictions that the regime places upon general freedom of information it is very difficult to get the overall view, but the view of our Embassy and also the non-governmental organisations is that we have not seen any evidence that suspension of preferential trade has had a significant effect on the poverty levels of the Burmese population. The poverty, as I said, in Burma comes from the problems with basic freedom, economic rights, land confiscation—a whole range. That is what is causing that. So we have not seen any evidence of it.

Q29 Lord Chidgey: My supplementary question is related and, hopefully, relevant to the point you have just made. It concerns me that possibly one of the ways that the Government, the EU specifically, could be trying to make this policy, whether we support it

or not, more effective would be to be working with perhaps the ASEAN counterpart countries in the region, and I am particularly concerned that it is reported that the profits, the income, whatever you want to call it, is running at about \$2.7 billion going straight into the pockets of this small ruling clique in Burma. It is very difficult, therefore, to say sanctions are going to work. You have to look further; you have to look at the people and the organisations which are doing the trade which generates that income, surely? I would just like to know from you whether the Government is looking at this, with its EU counterparts and colleagues, and whether one can perhaps work more closely at the source of the income which is almost ring-fenced for the benefit of the ruling group?

Ms Munn: It is an extremely complicated situation because obviously the European Union can decide to put in place sanctions; we know that China and India engage and have agreements; I visited Thailand at the end of February after their elected government came into place in December and they assured us they were going to push the Burmese regime more on changing, and then the Prime Minister went and signed a new trade agreement and we know that is happening, so we have to calibrate our response to look at what we think we can achieve while being realistic that there is action in the region which means that the regime continues to flourish. These are complicated issues from that point of view. But we do know that there is evidence that the suspension of the preferential trade caused the Burmese government to make some concessions, such as agreement to the International Labour Law Organisation complaints mechanism on forced labour and agreement to some high level visits from UN officials, so it is not completely without effect and, as I have said before, we know that the United States financial sanctions did have some effect and the EU has decided to explore further whether it can go down that route as well.

Ms Lassman: On the financial measures, there is a study going on in the EU at the moment to try and look more deeply at financial restrictions against the regime to target the Burmese ruling elite. It is in early stages at the moment: there are some very technical issues involved in it, but it is on-going. The EU Commission is looking very closely at these issues but we do not have a date yet for the conclusion of that study. It is likely to be not in the very near future, but certainly we are looking very closely at that including, and I think this is an important point, the impact that it might have on the ordinary Burmese population as well, and we are looking very closely at the banks.

Q30 Lord Boyce: Given the opposition in Burma's rather more hardline view, before the cyclone were there any plans, apart from financial ones you have

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just talked about, to strengthen EU sanctions and, if so, what sort of sectors or people were being targeted? And this is before the cyclone, because obviously our stance has modified since then.

Ms Munn: What happened was that we increased the sanctions in the sectors following the repression of the demonstrations in October. We had not looked at there being any further development of that other than the financial ones on the basis that it was still early days in terms of assessing the impact of those, so there were not any more specific areas being looked at. It was just the financial ones.

Q31 Chairman: Moving on, has there been any change at all in the political assessment since the cyclone, and in particular the question of the recent referendum? Should the referendum have gone ahead in the circumstances, and is it at all realistic to suggest that you are going to be able to have the postponed referendum in the areas which were affected by the cyclone within a fortnight?

Ms Munn: Frankly, I think it beggars belief that they went ahead with the referendum. I was travelling in the region at the time, and while news channels were showing pictures of the awful devastation and dead bodies, the Burmese government were transmitting TV programmes of women dancing and singing that people should go and cast a vote. Words fail me really. We know the referendum has gone ahead in certain areas: we had severe doubts before the referendum that it would be free and fair: we know that opposition groups had determined to call for a “No vote” but were extremely concerned about what might happen if they went, and I understand anybody wearing a “No vote” T-shirt who went to vote was turned away and not allowed to cast a vote. I have heard this morning, although I have not had this confirmed, that they have announced the result of the referendum which, again, seems incredible. If you have not had all of the referendum, how can you announce part of it? I think the figures were a 99 per cent turnout and 92 per cent vote in favour. My elections never look like that! So, frankly, I think it is incredible. How anybody could believe that you would be able to hold a referendum in the areas that have been affected by the end of next week is unbelievable. As I say, words fail me.

Q32 Lord Boyce: Minister, there could be possibly just the faintest of hopes that the cyclone and its aftermath might have changed the attitude of the some of the generals and senior civilians, those who have not completely lost the plot and touch with reality, and there may be one or two; and if you agree with that, do you think there is an opportunity now for the United Kingdom, EU and our international partners to modify our strategy to achieve some sort of a peaceful and democratic reform in Burma?

Ms Munn: We, of course, always should look at the situation and modify our strategy. If I can go back to the situation last September/October, just to put this in context, our view was that, at that point in time, obviously it was a crisis and things were moving and a number of things change. The international community, the European Union, the UN, set down expectations of what they wanted to see happen, and the Burmese spectacularly failed to comply with all those requirements. Having said that, all the information that we get suggests that the situation had changed, that it had not gone back to completely where it was; the ASEAN countries were saying, although they were respecting the matters, that this was an internal matter for Burma, but also kept repeating that they did not think things could go back to where they were, so we were looking at a situation that we did not think was fixed politically. Inevitably a situation of this nature will also, I think, throw everything up in the air again. We can see this as an opportunity where things may change: you will understand I want to be a bit circumspect in relation to this because at the moment our focus is humanitarian, not political, but I think anybody looking at this would see that people’s views will be impacted upon by what they have seen in terms of the catastrophe and devastation and the failure to put in place an adequate relief process, so I am sure that the situation will change and we will be adjusting our approach on the basis of that, but I think at this stage it is probably good not to say too much on that.

Q33 Lord Boyce: If I may, if we are to starting to achieve some success through the ASEAN countries or otherwise, identifying individuals and who to target, in the regime I mean, who may have seen the light a bit in view of that failure, maybe this is something we should be pursuing in parallel so we do not miss an opportunity? Otherwise, if we leave it until it is all over, they will revert.

Ms Munn: What we have to understand about the regime is they are a regime who have kept themselves insulated from the outside world extremely well; they moved their capital from Rangoon to Naypyidaw, which has further insulated them from contact with the outside world. I think probably it is people not at the top level where this will make a difference, because those at the top level are in Naypyidaw, Naypyidaw was not hit by the cyclone—vindication for the regime in their move there, you might say; but people at the lower levels are faced with the reality of what is happening much more directly, and I think that is where we may begin to see a change of views. In addition, we know that the military obviously are all recruited from the local population and they will have relatives, family, friends, who are involved, and that, too, may bring about a change of views. We are not at all complacent about this, and obviously our

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people on the ground are keeping closely in touch, but we just need to be absolutely clear that at the moment our focus is very much humanitarian.

Q34 Lord Anderson of Swansea: I have a supplementary on that. Clearly our sources of information are limited and probably the best sources are those of neighbouring countries. Is there any hard evidence against the view that there is a monolith? Evidence that there are cracks at the senior level, or differences? Different tendencies?

Ms Munn: It is quite difficult to answer that, really, because this is a regime which has managed to stay in control, and there are differing views. Some people think that the next generation may be less hardline: some people think they might be more hardline. Our view very much, as Lord Boyce said, is that the fact that this has happened will have quite a significant --

Q35 Lord Anderson of Swansea: That is a hope rather than an expectation. Are there individuals who are known to be more liberal at senior levels?

Ms Munn: I am not aware of any specific individuals to whom that would apply at this point.

Q36 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: You referred to the difficulty of communicating and the fact they are all very isolated. Could you just tell the Committee how much effort the BBC, the World Service and language services are putting into this and has any consideration been given to increasing the flow of information so that ordinary Burmese people get a proper understanding of the failure of their government to respond properly to this crisis?

Ms Munn: The BBC World Service and Burmese Service broadcast twice a day to Burma. We have looked with the Service at whether there can be an increased output from that and yes, we have consistently worked with the BBC on the information that they are putting across. It is very important; people in Burma do listen to it; and that is certainly part of our consideration.

Q37 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: The UN Gambari process that was started after the demonstrations in September seems to have really got nowhere, and is being treated by the regime as simply a temporising device, a way of spinning out time until everyone's attention is diverted somewhere else. Do we have any hopes of that process at all? Also, the Security Council having adopted the Presidential Statement about a week before the referendum, which has been totally ignored and, indeed, treated with contempt by the regime, presumably there will be a requirement after the referendum for the Security Council to say something about the consequences of there not having been a free and fair process, and the flawed nature of the constitutional process there?

Ms Munn: I am absolutely sure they would wish to say something. As you rightly say, there was a further Presidential Statement at the beginning of May which helpfully confirmed the strong statement that was made on 11 October last year, and it is helpful in that it demonstrates that the world collectively has said that there is a problem here, and in reinforcing the situation and working with the ASEAN countries, who were obviously party to making a strong statement back in October, that is very helpful. In terms of the Gambari process what has happened is that, in the early days, there was a bit of give on certain things, but we have to be realistic that in terms of what was set out of the expectations in that 11 October statement nothing has changed. It is important for the UN process to continue; we will obviously need to look at that in the light of what happens from the cyclone, but it does have the benefit of having the support of the United Nations and, I think, the world, and we have certainly not given up on the Gambari process.

Q38 Lord Crickhowell: We have understandably concentrated on discussing with the neighbours how to help with this terrible disaster, and I understand perfectly well your caution in making too many political points when that is the central objective. It is also a problem that countries like China are not keen to be seen to interfere in the political affairs of other countries. Coming back to the longer term, however, how do you see the EU engaging with the neighbouring countries, the ASEAN, China and India and so on, in trying to drive forward the political reforms and democratic reforms, because we have to return to that issue at some point? Do you see a role here, and how do you see Europe engaging with the neighbours on these issues?

Ms Munn: I absolutely think there is a role. There is an annual EU/ASEAN Summit, which obviously has as its focus these kind of discussions, and I think what we have to bear in mind in relation to this is that ASEAN is a developing organisation; they have put in place a new charter which they did at their meeting last November, and they are keen to become a more active regional group. You could say before they were, as it says, an association of nations but now with the charter they are seeking to move on. ASEAN themselves are frustrated that the issue of Burma has dominated the agenda, and they make the point to us and to the European Union collectively that there is a lot more to our relationships than Burma, and we have discussions on trade agreements and a whole wide range of issues so that continuing engagement between the European Union and ASEAN is important. Alongside that, however, I know from direct discussions that I regularly have with the ambassadors from ASEAN whom I meet as a group periodically that they become frustrated

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because they want to talk about the other issues, and obviously I say to them very directly that I know and understand that, but that the world will judge them on their response to this situation in Burma, so we are very frank with them about that and they understand that, so I think that is the on-going relationship and those are the levers.

Q39 Lord Selkirk of Douglas: Lord Chairman, can I first express an interest as President of the International Rescue Corps, which did apply to send a team to Burma but, in fact, they now have a team in Hong Kong which is hopefully moving on very shortly to the earthquake zone in China. Can I, on their behalf, express through you to the Department of International Development gratitude for their close working relationship with the Department and for their assistance, and if I may say so I do not think that just applies to the International Rescue Corps but to other charities like the International Red Cross. I cannot speak for them, obviously, but I think there is a general feeling of gratitude for the assistance they receive. Can I put through you a question to them that, from their perspective, the speed of response is often absolutely critical in achieving maximum success, and that after their missions have been accomplished debriefings can be enormously valuable in ascertaining the best possible

advanced planning in the most up-to-date way, and make I just make the point that they will, of course, give maximum assistance if the opportunity arises. They could send a small team to Burma now, as we speak, if required, but, of course, it is very much appreciated what you have said this morning.

Ms Munn: Thank you very much. That is a really helpful contribution and it is very good to hear directly from somebody involved with one of the organisations which is standing ready to help. That was very much my message directly to the Burmese Ambassador yesterday, that we have people who are ready to help, and the British people have raised £6 million because they are concerned about the Burmese people, not because they want to see regime change.

Q40 Chairman: Minister, could I thank you, in what is obviously a very busy time for you and your colleagues, for having come and given a full picture and responded so fully to questions of the members of the Committee? We do feel it is important and we are very grateful that we can have a Minister come and give such wise advice, and we wish you very well in what is obviously going to be a very difficult few weeks as far as your own responsibilities are concerned. Thank you very much indeed.

Ms Munn: Thank you very much indeed.

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy: Burma

REPORT

1. The Committee asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ms Meg Munn MP, to give evidence on the most recent developments in relations between the European Union and Burma. We thank the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for her time.
2. In the Report we make available, for the information of the House, the oral evidence given to Sub-Committee C (Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy) by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, accompanied by Ms Louise Lassman, Desk Officer for Burma, International Organisations Department, and Ms Ruzina Hasan, Desk Officer for Burma, South East Asia Pacific Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on 15 May 2008.
3. Key topics in the evidence are:

The May 2008 Cyclone

- The human and physical damage caused by the cyclone in May 2008 (Q 2)
- The problems of access for foreign aid workers following the cyclone (QQ 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 16, 20)
- The role of the countries of ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) (QQ 5, 8–12, 16, 17, 20)
- UK aid, including from UK charities (QQ 6–8, 11, 16, 20, 23, 39)
- The EU's role (QQ 7, 12, 14, 15, 24)
- The US role (QQ 7, 12, 20)
- The role of China (Q 8)
- The attitude of the Burmese to the presence of foreign soldiers (Q 10)
- The use of helicopters and flat-bottomed boats (QQ 10–13)
- The UN role and that of the UN Agencies (QQ 12, 20)
- The Responsibility to Protect (Q 20)
- The transfer of money by private individuals into the Burmese banking system (QQ 18, 19)

The Political Situation and Sanctions

- The effectiveness of sanctions (QQ 21–30)
- The political situation in Burma and prospects for the future (Q 22)
- The EU's suspension of preferential trade relations (QQ 28, 29)

- The Burmese referendum on the future constitution (Q 31)
- The possibility of political change in the wake of the cyclone (QQ 32–35)
- The role of the BBC's World Service and language services (Q 36)
- The UN's Gambari process (Q 37)
- EU engagement with Burma's neighbours (Q 38)

APPENDIX 1: SUB-COMMITTEE C (FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY)

The Members of the Sub-Committee which conducted this Inquiry were:

Lord Anderson of Swansea
Lord Boyce
Lord Chidgey
Lord Crickhowell
Lord Hamilton of Epsom
Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Lord Jones
Lord Roper (Chairman)
Lord Selkirk of Douglas
Lord Swinfen
Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean
Lord Truscott

Declaration of Interests

Lord Selkirk of Douglas
President of the International Rescue Corps

A full list of Members' interests can be found in the Register of Lords' Interests:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldreg.htm>

APPENDIX 2: RECENT REPORTS

Recent Reports from the EU Select Committee

Evidence from the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany on the German Presidency (10th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 56)

The Commission's Annual Policy Strategy for 2008 (23rd Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 123)

Further Enlargement of the EU: Follow-up Report (24th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 125)

Evidence from the Minister for Europe on the June European Union Council and the 2007 Inter-Governmental Conference (28th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 142)

Evidence from the Ambassador of Portugal on the Priorities of the Portuguese Presidency (29th Report, session 2006–07, HL Paper 143)

The EU Reform Treaty: work in progress (35th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 180)

Annual Report 2007 (36th Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 181)

The Treaty of Lisbon: an impact assessment (10th Report, Session 2007–08, HL Paper 62)

Priorities of the European Union: evidence from the Minister for Europe and the Ambassador of Slovenia (11th Report, Session 2007–08, HL Paper 73)

Session 2007–2008 Reports prepared by Sub-Committee C

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy: the EU and Africa (4th Report, HL Paper 32)

Current Developments in European Defence Policy (8th Report, HL Paper 59)

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy (12th Report, HL Paper 75)

The European Union and Russia (14th Report, HL Paper 98)

Session 2006–2007 Reports prepared by Sub-Committee C

Current Developments in European Defence Policy (1st Report, HL Paper 17)

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy (16th Report, HL Paper 76)

The EU and the Middle East Peace Process (26th Report, HL Paper 132)

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy: Kosovo (32nd Report, HL Paper 154)

Current Developments in European Defence Policy (34th Report, HL Paper 161)

Current Developments in European Foreign Policy (38th Report, HL Paper 183)

Minutes of Evidence

Taken before the Select Committee on the European Union (Sub-Committee C)

THURSDAY 15 MAY 2008

Present	Anderson of Swansea, L. Boyce, L. Chidgey, L. Crickhowell, L. Hamilton of Epsom, L.	Hannay of Chiswick, L. Jones, L. Roper, L. Selkirk of Douglas, L.
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Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: MS MEG MUNN, a Member of the House of Commons, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; MS LOUISE LASSMAN, Desk Officer for Burma, International Organisations Department, and MS RUZINA HASAN, Desk Officer for Burma, South East Asia Pacific Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: Minister, thank you very much indeed for coming to some us this morning. We are the Sub-Committee of the European Union Committee which deals with foreign affairs and development policy, and we have been concerned for some time about Burma; we have been in correspondence over the question of the effectiveness of EU sanctions; and we are obviously also concerned about the EU's political impact. We had hoped to see you in any case and it is perhaps useful that your visit has occurred at this time, and we are very glad that you have brought with you Louise Lassman and Ruzina Hasan, both of whom have responsibilities for Burma in the Foreign Office. Do you have an introductory statement?

Ms Munn: At the outset, may I say that I am sure the Committee will understand that we are in an extremely fast-moving situation, although I will obviously give the Committee as best I can the updated information on what is happening on the ground. I am also sure that the Committee will understand, in terms of the officials I have present, that we were not clear who was going to be able to come at the time because obviously officials are extremely busy, and that some of the more senior officials who normally would perhaps have supported a minister in this situation have a great deal on their minds.

Q2 Chairman: Thank you very much. Could you let us know what is the current estimated extent of the human and physical damage to Burma caused by the cyclone?

Ms Munn: Our understanding at the moment, and this is the situation report from yesterday afternoon, is that our best estimate is about 200,000 dead or missing. We believe there are about one and a half million people in need of immediate assistance, of

whom about a quarter of a million to 270,000 are desperately in need. The Committee will also be aware that we are expecting heavy rain in the next five days from a further cyclone, and therefore the problems of getting aid into the country are exacerbated by the natural circumstances, as well as, of course, by the Burmese regime.

Q3 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Minister, good morning. Clearly the situation is desperate: access is vital for the international community, both countries and NGOs. Is it true that foreign aid workers have been ordered to leave the delta by today?

Ms Munn: That is our understanding, that a number of foreign workers have been asked to leave the area.

Q4 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Are they complying?

Ms Munn: I do not have any information in relation to that. Our general understanding is there is a process which the generals in charge are setting out: we understand that in terms of some of the people on the ground there is more flexibility being given, because they are obviously seeing what is happening, but it is far from what we would expect of the government in this situation.

Q5 Lord Anderson of Swansea: The BBC this morning carried a story that six neighbouring countries have now been given access by the Burmese generals. Is that true?

Ms Munn: I have not had confirmation of that. We certainly believe that the countries in the region are enormously important. They are all part of ASEAN, the Association of South East Asian Nations, and therefore they have strong relationships with Burma. I called in the Ambassadors from ASEAN yesterday and we had a very full and frank discussion about that. They are concerned to do whatever will work in

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terms of getting some help and support, so we are hopeful that will be the case.

Q6 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Is there a possible opening for us here? If privileged access were given to the neighbours could we use that as a conduit for our own aid, because obviously we do not worry how the aid is labelled so long as it reaches the people who desperately need it?

Ms Munn: We have certainly said that from the outset. We are very happy to get aid in through whatever means. We are very clear that it should go to organisations such as World Food Programme, Save the Children, et cetera, and, indeed, I am told that the first aid that went in yesterday, which was Department of International Development aid, the plane arrived there and was passed on to the World Food Programme.

Q7 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Finally, on the access point, clearly there is scepticism about the effectiveness of air drops. Now, the French and Bernard Kouchner have put forward the idea of a sea corridor. Is that part of EU policy? Is that something we would favour?

Ms Munn: We are looking at all ways in which we could get help in. We do have a ship in the region, as do the United States and the French, and therefore we would certainly look at that route. What we have to remember is that, without the co-operation of the Burmese authorities, any successful aid distribution is going to be extremely difficult.

Q8 Lord Chidgey: I would like, if I may, to ask some more detailed questions on the same subject as Lord Anderson was asking about. The question of the neighbouring states has been commented on this morning in the BBC news. Does the Foreign Office have any more information on this? One assumes that the neighbouring states have particular relations with Burma, a mutual dependency in some frame or other and one would expect that China would figure very strongly in this. I would like to know whether your office or the Government has made any particular protest to the Chinese counterparts about what they intend to do in regard to the situation. There is also the question of the 23 flights that I think your colleagues mentioned this morning. 23 flights have now been able to get into Burma, but the point was made that 23 flights a day were needed to address the situation. Is it not, frankly, quite traumatic that the adequacy of the international air force is so limited because of the situation, and really it is not something one can brush aside, and I would like to know a little more about what the Government's position is on trying to increase the flow of flights and aid through to the appropriate people? You mentioned Save the Children. They have, I understand, a great many

local staff which is why they are able to be in Burma, because they mainly use local staff in these situations, and I would like to know how that particular facility is being used to best effect, bearing in mind their special situation. I do not know of any other international aid organisations which have that presence on the ground but you may be able to enlighten me.

Ms Munn: In relation to other countries, yes, the Foreign Secretary spoke to his counterpart earlier this week, on Tuesday, and raised the issue very strongly with him and pressed China to press the issue with Burma. We know that the Thai Prime Minister yesterday—I am struggling because of the difference in the hours and the time—the Prime Minister from Thailand went to see the Burmese regime yesterday. Lord Malloch Brown and Shahid Malik, the Minister from the International Development Department, are in Thailand and are due to see today, this afternoon in Thai terms, the Prime Minister, so they will get more information on that. In terms of the 23 flights, we understand the plan is that that number of flights, if not more, should continue. That has opened up the situation but we know it is inadequate. The issue, of course, is not just getting the aid in: it is crucially this issue about having the people on the ground to distribute it. Now, the Burmese Permanent Representative at the UN has said that ASEAN will complete an assessment of the situation within 48 hours and that 160 ASEAN regional relief workers will be allowed to enter the area thereafter, so there will be considerably more than have been in there going in hopefully very shortly. We know it is not adequate, and I said this very clearly to the Ambassadors yesterday.

Ms Hasan: Save the Children is certainly on the ground; World Vision is also on the ground; Merlin, which is a medical relief organisation, is also on the ground. The pattern has been that those organisations which have had presence prior to the cyclone are finding it easier to work now and NGOs who have not had that presence are finding it much more difficult to get visas, but we are pushing for access and for the visas to be issued.

Q9 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Could I just go back to this ASEAN point? I can see why ASEAN are extremely important diplomatic players, and it is very good that they are being mobilised to bring pressure to bear on the Burmese government to be more co-operative, but do they have any capability for dealing with a crisis of this scale? Do they have helicopters? Do they have distribution networks? 160 sounds, frankly, pretty meaningless in an area this size, so what is our information about the capacity of ASEAN to do the job if they are the only people who are allowed to do so? And perhaps I could just add that I know Lord Jay, who is the Chairman of

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Merlin, says that their people there are doing very well because, as you say, they are on the ground and they have not been interfered with in any way, and they have both expatriate and Burmese staff working there in quite large numbers.

Ms Munn: In terms of ASEAN, it varies. Different countries have different ranges of support. I am just trying to remember which specific countries were saying this but Singapore, for example, has offered quite a significant amount of aid and I think Thailand were in the same position, so support does vary. The other thing that the ASEAN Ambassadors said to me yesterday is that, where they previously had experience of help and support, particularly Thailand, Indonesia, obviously with the Tsunami and Philippines with other general disasters, they were happy to press the Burmese saying that these people coming in are humanitarian workers and this is not a political situation, and this was a point I stressed—the Burmese Ambassador was also present—that we are not looking to exploit this politically in any way. This is about getting humanitarian support in and preventing people dying. So that is where we are. I do not know whether we have any more specific information on the capacity of the ASEAN countries.

Ms Hasan: All I can add is that Thailand is emerging as a hub obviously for the region and therefore has a crucial role to play and in terms of equipment we look to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia. How we are seeing it is that the West needs to be working strongly with ASEAN for a massive scale-up, and it is about working together and ensuring that we put pressure on them, because they have a greater influence on the regime than we do.

Q10 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: To follow up on Lord Hannay's point, if it comes to the effective distribution of aid you need helicopters, because the areas you are dealing with are absolutely vast, firstly, and, secondly, roads and so on do not work any more. Normally, where this has been effectively done, the military have been involved because they have the helicopters and the organisation to distribute. What is the attitude of the Burmese to having foreign soldiers on their soil?

Ms Munn: Well, we know that the Burmese are very reluctant to have any foreign workers generally coming in, and I am sure that is a particular problem. The United States have offered significant numbers of helicopters: we have a helicopter with the ship that is in the region. We need to keep pressing them, again, to be very clear that this is humanitarian support, and this is where I think the other ASEAN countries, who have experienced military assistance in a humanitarian way, are important and that is why the meeting of the ASEAN foreign ministers next

Monday will be very important in them putting that information across.

Q11 Lord Crickhowell: I am really pursuing the same point. You talk about getting aid in and you talk, understandably, about the importance of having people on the ground otherwise you do not know quite what happens to it, but the fact is you cannot get aid into the delta area where most of these people are lying dead in the water or in appalling conditions without the combination of a large number of helicopters and probably flat-bottomed boats as well. In the Tsunami disaster the Americans had a large aircraft carrier just offshore and a continual flow of helicopters day and night going in. I do not see there is any possibility of getting aid into where it is needed, even with people on the ground and so on, unless there is the provision of adequate physical equipment. Now, presumably the Chinese, who might have been able to help, are now fully engaged and using most of their helicopters on their own appalling disaster. How far are we really pressing the ASEAN governments or the Burmese government for some co-operative effort that will enable these facilities, because without these facilities we are, frankly, merely playing at the game?

Ms Munn: We are entirely focused on that very matter. There is a huge amount of effort going on to press the ASEAN governments to move on that, and we have been speaking directly to foreign ministers and to other ministers in governments. Obviously our posts overseas are doing exactly that. I know a number of flat-bottomed boats have arrived, that was information I had yesterday and, again, I am not sure of the number but we know that is what is needed. We know there is a huge problem and that proper assessment has not been done, but we do have estimates, as I said at the outset. We are in no doubt about the scale of the need here. The primary push has to be to get that access otherwise, as you rightly say, nothing will happen and people are dying—and they are dying today.

Q12 Lord Crickhowell: But if they will not let the Americans in, and that may be their biggest point of resistance, there are very large numbers of civilian and other helicopters that could be made available around the world so are we discussing with the ASEAN governments how those might be made available to those other countries on loan or some other basis, so they can bring the helicopters in if there are countries who are being banned from crossing the frontier with helicopters?

Ms Munn: Well, the United States are getting in in terms of planes and providing aid, so it is not quite as clear-cut as your question might suggest. Our whole approach is precisely to press diplomatically to try and get the movement which would then allow the

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support to come in, and at the same time to mobilise the support so that it is there as soon as it is needed. Now, in the UN there are discussions going on around that, and there has been a meeting yesterday on these very issues to look at what needs to happen chaired by the Secretary General and there is going to be a further meeting precisely to look at further donations, because while we are all very frustrated at the failure to get in to deal with the immediate situation, we know from experiences with the Tsunami and the like that the help and support that is needed is going to go on for a long time, so there is a requirement to look at that as well, and so bringing donors together is something that will happen as well in the near future.

Q13 Lord Anderson of Swansea: On the question of helicopters, the Russians and the Ukrainians are countries which are thought, for example, in Darfur to have spare capacity. Are the Russians and the Ukrainians engaged at all, and are you aware of any conditions which the regime is imposing even on their neighbours in terms of access?

Ms Munn: The regime itself is imposing conditions on everybody at the moment, and is giving a little in certain areas. I do not know specifically in relation to those two countries about helicopter provision.

Ms Hasan: I am not aware of any information on the situation with Russia and the Ukraine. I think our immediate lobbying has been with those countries who are direct neighbours of Burma whom we feel have the most leverage, but we can check on that.

Q14 Lord Crickhowell: Now, this is a European Committee so can I bring you to Europe? How is the EU responding to the disaster, and is the response adequate? I read I think that there was a meeting two days ago on the 13th. What has been the outcome of that meeting and what is your latest information about the European participation in all this?

Ms Munn: I have the Council's conclusions with me and, as you say, the Council met; Douglas Alexander represented the Government; and obviously it set out its deep concern and its strong support. There have been financial donations, both from the European Commission and from the ECHO. In addition to that, Louis Michel, the Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, is travelling to Burma and my latest information—and my officials will correct me if I am wrong—is that he has a visa and is going to press on this issue.

Q15 Lord Crickhowell: And the scale of the aid that Europe has voted so far?

Ms Munn: I said on the floor of the House yesterday that ECHO has given 2 million euros. I believe the Commission has given more than that, something like 5 million euros.

Ms Lassman: That is the figure I had.

Q16 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: The French Foreign Minister thinks we should go in any way, whether we are asked or not. Is there a Plan B of Europe's so that when the Burmese remain completely obdurate and will not have anything to do with us, we go in anyway?

Ms Munn: We obviously have to keep the situation under review and people are working round the clock on this, but when we say we have to go in any way, the question is what do we mean by that? I think the Prime Minister was quite right yesterday at Prime Minister's Question Time that we would be wrong to suggest to the British public that there is any easy way round this. What are we talking about? It is extremely difficult to get into the region even with unfettered access; we know that there are problems. Without the co-operation of the Burmese regime, the Burmese military, it would be extraordinarily difficult to see how we would achieve that. So I think we are not ruling anything out and we are keeping the situation under review, but our best assessment at the moment is to seek the co-operation of the Burmese regime and to do that through the neighbouring countries, and that was very much confirmed by Ambassadors yesterday from the ASEAN countries who I was left in no doubt are personally as concerned as we are, and are seeking the best way forward. I do not think anybody is happy about this situation at all. We find ourselves in an unprecedented situation where we have a humanitarian catastrophe and a regime not accepting outside help, but there are no easy answers.

Q17 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: There are relatively simple answers in that the surrounding ASEAN countries could certainly establish air supremacy—the Burmese are not famous for the effectiveness of their Air Force—and then you could move freely in the country anywhere you wanted.

Ms Munn: I do not believe that is easy to accomplish.

Chairman: I gather Lord Boyce is rather sceptical about that too!

Q18 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Clearly it is people on the ground—goods, tents, boats—which are most important, but money can also play a part. Is the regime putting restrictions in the way of the Burmese diaspora and private individuals transferring money into the Burmese banking system to help in this catastrophe?

Ms Munn: I have not heard of any problems of that nature.

Q19 Lord Anderson of Swansea: On the transfer of money?

Ms Munn: No.

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Q20 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Can I raise a couple of UN aspects? The first is the question of co-ordination of all the UN agencies and activities, the World Food Programme, UNICEF and all that, and the activities of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes. What is going on with that? The news is being reported that John Holmes is going there. Does that mean he is being given a visa and being allowed in? And in Rangoon and elsewhere, where the UN has a number of offices and different agencies, is the UN being allowed to mount any serious operations in the delta? Are they co-ordinating effectively? Are they providing an overall co-ordination function as they did in the Tsunami case for other countries, Member States of the UN, who are acting to try to get things in? Or are they completely hamstrung by the activities of the regime and their refusal to allow them to work? That is my question on the humanitarian side. Secondly, I wonder if I could ask you a question about what is going on in New York? I rather understood from an answer that the Minister in the House of Lords gave two days ago that an attempt was made to discuss this in the Security Council and that this was frustrated by Russia, China and perhaps some others. Could I just suggest that some of the discussion in the first few days does seem to be a bit wide of the mark in all this. To treat the responsibility to protect, which is the issue that has been raised, as a purely military concept is very counterproductive. It is not a purely military concept. Use of force to provide protection is the last resort and I wonder whether, given that clearly this crisis is going to go on for quite some time and it does not look as if the Burmese regime is going to respond, we cannot have a rather more subtle approach to all this in New York which does try to get people to agree collectively in the Security Council to put collective pressure on the Burmese regime and to get away from the rather, I think, unfortunate emphasis on a military angle to responsibility to protect. Responsibility to protect is a normative responsibility, not an exclusively military one, and I wonder whether there is not going to be some scope to move back into that again, rather than simply accept the first setback as being definitive.

Ms Munn: If I can answer on the humanitarian angle first, as I best understand it John Holmes is going to the region but I do not know yet whether he has a visa or not. The UN Interagency Steering Committee is meeting next week. UN OCHA are, as I understand it, on the ground but their co-ordination efforts are hampered again by lack of visas for staff. Our supplies and United States' supplies which are going in are going to the World Food Programme, and are being stored in UN warehouses. Now, we know the UN situation in relation to Burma has been difficult since Charles Petrie was expelled; it is not adequate

and not good on the ground, so they are having a problem about the co-ordination of that. The UN launched a flash appeal on Friday which is seeking to raise \$187 million, and the priorities are food, nutrition, water, sanitation, shelter and health. So far, as of yesterday, \$44 million has been raised, so that is broadly the humanitarian situation. In relation to the diplomatic discussions and the issue about responsibility to protect, the Secretary-General had an emergency meeting on Burma yesterday which was for the Permanent 5, ASEAN, India and Bangladesh, and what was said on that was that John Holmes had briefed that the flow of assistance was increasing although there were still bottlenecks; the flash appeal has increased from the initial \$187 million to \$200 million; Burma was insisting that the situation had to be treated as humanitarian with no politicisation, and essentially the discussion focused around how to communicate better with the Burmese government, what role ASEAN and other neighbours could play, how we could ensure that relief efforts were complementary and well co-ordinated, and whether we could find ways whereby the Burmese government could use boats, helicopters and engineering teams available from outside. On the broad issue of the UN Security Council and the issue about responsibility to protect, it is very much our view as a British government that we will want to see used whatever instruments of the UN are likely to be the most effective, and that we should not get hung up on one approach or another. The test has to be what will make a difference on the ground, so a discussion as to whether this falls under various categories we think is probably unhelpful at this stage. What has to happen is continued pressure to get things to move, and we could spend an awful long time discussing the niceties of this but I think you are right to emphasise that if there is too much of a push which seems military that will not be helpful in terms of the approach to the Burmese regime. Our prime focus now is on the ASEAN meeting next Monday. Now, when that was set up we were very clear with ASEAN governments that we felt this was too late and it should have happened much earlier, but this is where we are now and that has to be our focus.

Chairman: Can we move to the question of EU sanctions?

Q21 Lord Jones: Lord Chairman, Minister, for some time now the European Union has been operating sanctions on the regime. The cyclone, a great humanitarian tragedy, is very recent and we have known about it, to a degree at least, from worldwide reporting. To open up the subject of sanctions I will formally ask you the question you may know we were going to ask you. What is your assessment of the effectiveness of EU sanctions on the Burmese regime?

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Ms Munn: Our sanctions in the European Union are designed to be very targeted and to affect the regime, not the wider population. Our assessment is that they are effective in the respect that they limit travel, they limit it in relation to people in the regime themselves, they are focused on sectors of the economy which benefit the regime financially—wood, gems, those sort of issues—but we have no doubt that sanctions in and of themselves are not what is going to shift the situation in Burma. There has been a long debate, particularly between us and the ASEAN countries, as to the sanctions posed on one side and an engagement to try and get the regime to shift on the other side, and the reality is that neither has delivered what we would like to see. Sanctions are part of an overall approach; they are in and of themselves not the only thing, but they are important.

Q22 Lord Jones: And what is your perception of the regime, indeed, of the nation? Why are they so? Why is it so difficult even to help them? What is the Department's perception of the regime?

Ms Munn: This is a long, long standing situation. This country has been subject to a military regime for more than 40 years; they are very entrenched and, therefore, it is very difficult to change and move the situation. I have spoken to people who come from the region: I have obviously spoken to a lot of countries around the region; and it has to be one of the most difficult and intransigent situations there is. Nobody knows what ultimately will achieve a change. If you look at the ASEAN region it is a region where you have economies which are growing incredibly fast, people talk about the Asian century, that it is an area that is developing, China, Vietnam, and in the ASEAN region you have nine countries going forward and one that is going backwards. You have living standards rising in the countries around, they are going down in Burma, and in the long term this is not tenable. It is argued, and there has been long discussion about this, that it is stable because it has been like this for however long. I do not think in the long term you can hold that back and something sooner or later will happen, but nobody knows exactly what combination of action that will be. We firmly believe sanctions have a role to play; we know from information from other people in the region that the Burmese government do pay attention to sanctions and that they do not like them. At times sanctions do particularly have effects on them, so we believe they do have a role to play.

Q23 Lord Anderson of Swansea: Minister, can you give the Committee assurance that the financial component of the EU sanctions in no way hampers the wish of voluntary organisations of countries, individuals, to help financially support the Burmese?

Ms Munn: Our view has always been that they have to be targeted directly on the regime and not at the people, and in terms of our own provision of aid none of it goes to the Burmese regime.

Q24 Lord Anderson of Swansea: But there must be some part of our own EU which potentially could harm the flow of funds to Burma?

Ms Munn: That is not my understanding.

Ms Lassman: The point to make here is that the European Council's common position has exemptions for humanitarian aid within it, including financial, so that is covered in the Burmese region.

Q25 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: An All-Party Committee of this House produced a report on sanctions saying, one, they did not work and, two, they hit the poorest people. Surely this applies in spades to the Burmese? You say these sanctions of the EU, which are targeted, as you say, on precious stones, minerals and timber, are targeted against the people at the head of the regime because they run the companies and they benefit from them, but they employ numbers of poor Burmese, and if they bite—and I have every hope they will not, and they probably will not anyway, but if they do bite—it is poor Burmese people who are going to be put out of work as a result of these. Burma is a country with a thriving drugs trade in the north where heroin and opium are trafficked in enormous quantities, and the generals are totally into that trade so the idea that these guys are short of hard currency is absolutely nonsensical, and at the end of the day we have imposed sanctions which make us feel better and put Burmese people out of work.

Ms Munn: The situation with the people in Burma is bad and difficult, not because of sanctions but because of the actions of the Burmese regime, and we have just spent the last 40 minutes talking about the Burmese regime and their incredible response to a humanitarian disaster. The whole running of their country, their whole approach, takes no account of the general needs of their population, and that is what is causing the problem, not sanctions, and we need to use sanctions not as the only tool to try and get change but as part of that. It is our view that these specific ones targeted in the way they are will have an effect. There is a discussion now and the EU has agreed to look more directly at financial sanctions. We know that in the wake of the demonstrations in September/October some of the actions taken by the United States were having a very direct effect on the regime: the inability of, for example, airlines to get insurance when they could not fly caused significant problems. They are part of an approach, not the whole approach.

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Q26 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Could I just confirm, perhaps, that the leader of the democratic opposition of Burma, Aung San Sun Kyi, supports the sanctions of the EU proposals and believes they are an effective means of pressure on the regime, and since I do not think any of us would wish to criticise her for lack of sensitivity towards the problems of her countrymen, that does seem to be rather important.

Ms Munn: She does, indeed, support sanctions. In fact, I think she would support sanctions beyond the view we would take. There is always a discussion to be had on that, but that is certainly correct.

Q27 Lord Hamilton of Epsom: Is it not true that I understand Sun Kyi supported a ban on people travelling to Burma, and she subsequently withdrew support for that?

Ms Munn: I am not sure of her exact views in relation to that, and dates on that. Those issues are always subject to debate. This is not a clear situation in that it is not directly causative. We know that if a regime does financially well the pressures on them to change became minimal. We also know that a population that has no contact with the West also gets very isolated and that can be problematic, and we do hear from people that they value certainly the low budget tourism where people stay with local people and the money goes into the economy there, and the local people value that contact. It is not black and white. That is the situation.

Q28 Lord Chidgey: Minister, if I could just pick up on a question related to the EU suspending preferential trade relations with Burma, and the Government's assessment of the impact that the suspension has had on trade with Burma and on poverty levels. That has already been covered, so it is particularly the preferential trade relations with Burma that I would like to have your response on, if I may?

Ms Munn: Again, because of the restrictions that the regime places upon general freedom of information it is very difficult to get the overall view, but the view of our Embassy and also the non-governmental organisations is that we have not seen any evidence that suspension of preferential trade has had a significant effect on the poverty levels of the Burmese population. The poverty, as I said, in Burma comes from the problems with basic freedom, economic rights, land confiscation—a whole range. That is what is causing that. So we have not seen any evidence of it.

Q29 Lord Chidgey: My supplementary question is related and, hopefully, relevant to the point you have just made. It concerns me that possibly one of the ways that the Government, the EU specifically, could be trying to make this policy, whether we support it

or not, more effective would be to be working with perhaps the ASEAN counterpart countries in the region, and I am particularly concerned that it is reported that the profits, the income, whatever you want to call it, is running at about \$2.7 billion going straight into the pockets of this small ruling clique in Burma. It is very difficult, therefore, to say sanctions are going to work. You have to look further; you have to look at the people and the organisations which are doing the trade which generates that income, surely? I would just like to know from you whether the Government is looking at this, with its EU counterparts and colleagues, and whether one can perhaps work more closely at the source of the income which is almost ring-fenced for the benefit of the ruling group?

Ms Munn: It is an extremely complicated situation because obviously the European Union can decide to put in place sanctions; we know that China and India engage and have agreements; I visited Thailand at the end of February after their elected government came into place in December and they assured us they were going to push the Burmese regime more on changing, and then the Prime Minister went and signed a new trade agreement and we know that is happening, so we have to calibrate our response to look at what we think we can achieve while being realistic that there is action in the region which means that the regime continues to flourish. These are complicated issues from that point of view. But we do know that there is evidence that the suspension of the preferential trade caused the Burmese government to make some concessions, such as agreement to the International Labour Law Organisation complaints mechanism on forced labour and agreement to some high level visits from UN officials, so it is not completely without effect and, as I have said before, we know that the United States financial sanctions did have some effect and the EU has decided to explore further whether it can go down that route as well.

Ms Lassman: On the financial measures, there is a study going on in the EU at the moment to try and look more deeply at financial restrictions against the regime to target the Burmese ruling elite. It is in early stages at the moment: there are some very technical issues involved in it, but it is on-going. The EU Commission is looking very closely at these issues but we do not have a date yet for the conclusion of that study. It is likely to be not in the very near future, but certainly we are looking very closely at that including, and I think this is an important point, the impact that it might have on the ordinary Burmese population as well, and we are looking very closely at the banks.

Q30 Lord Boyce: Given the opposition in Burma's rather more hardline view, before the cyclone were there any plans, apart from financial ones you have

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just talked about, to strengthen EU sanctions and, if so, what sort of sectors or people were being targeted? And this is before the cyclone, because obviously our stance has modified since then.

Ms Munn: What happened was that we increased the sanctions in the sectors following the repression of the demonstrations in October. We had not looked at there being any further development of that other than the financial ones on the basis that it was still early days in terms of assessing the impact of those, so there were not any more specific areas being looked at. It was just the financial ones.

Q31 Chairman: Moving on, has there been any change at all in the political assessment since the cyclone, and in particular the question of the recent referendum? Should the referendum have gone ahead in the circumstances, and is it at all realistic to suggest that you are going to be able to have the postponed referendum in the areas which were affected by the cyclone within a fortnight?

Ms Munn: Frankly, I think it beggars belief that they went ahead with the referendum. I was travelling in the region at the time, and while news channels were showing pictures of the awful devastation and dead bodies, the Burmese government were transmitting TV programmes of women dancing and singing that people should go and cast a vote. Words fail me really. We know the referendum has gone ahead in certain areas: we had severe doubts before the referendum that it would be free and fair: we know that opposition groups had determined to call for a “No vote” but were extremely concerned about what might happen if they went, and I understand anybody wearing a “No vote” T-shirt who went to vote was turned away and not allowed to cast a vote. I have heard this morning, although I have not had this confirmed, that they have announced the result of the referendum which, again, seems incredible. If you have not had all of the referendum, how can you announce part of it? I think the figures were a 99 per cent turnout and 92 per cent vote in favour. My elections never look like that! So, frankly, I think it is incredible. How anybody could believe that you would be able to hold a referendum in the areas that have been affected by the end of next week is unbelievable. As I say, words fail me.

Q32 Lord Boyce: Minister, there could be possibly just the faintest of hopes that the cyclone and its aftermath might have changed the attitude of the some of the generals and senior civilians, those who have not completely lost the plot and touch with reality, and there may be one or two; and if you agree with that, do you think there is an opportunity now for the United Kingdom, EU and our international partners to modify our strategy to achieve some sort of a peaceful and democratic reform in Burma?

Ms Munn: We, of course, always should look at the situation and modify our strategy. If I can go back to the situation last September/October, just to put this in context, our view was that, at that point in time, obviously it was a crisis and things were moving and a number of things change. The international community, the European Union, the UN, set down expectations of what they wanted to see happen, and the Burmese spectacularly failed to comply with all those requirements. Having said that, all the information that we get suggests that the situation had changed, that it had not gone back to completely where it was; the ASEAN countries were saying, although they were respecting the matters, that this was an internal matter for Burma, but also kept repeating that they did not think things could go back to where they were, so we were looking at a situation that we did not think was fixed politically. Inevitably a situation of this nature will also, I think, throw everything up in the air again. We can see this as an opportunity where things may change: you will understand I want to be a bit circumspect in relation to this because at the moment our focus is humanitarian, not political, but I think anybody looking at this would see that people’s views will be impacted upon by what they have seen in terms of the catastrophe and devastation and the failure to put in place an adequate relief process, so I am sure that the situation will change and we will be adjusting our approach on the basis of that, but I think at this stage it is probably good not to say too much on that.

Q33 Lord Boyce: If I may, if we are to starting to achieve some success through the ASEAN countries or otherwise, identifying individuals and who to target, in the regime I mean, who may have seen the light a bit in view of that failure, maybe this is something we should be pursuing in parallel so we do not miss an opportunity? Otherwise, if we leave it until it is all over, they will revert.

Ms Munn: What we have to understand about the regime is they are a regime who have kept themselves insulated from the outside world extremely well; they moved their capital from Rangoon to Naypyidaw, which has further insulated them from contact with the outside world. I think probably it is people not at the top level where this will make a difference, because those at the top level are in Naypyidaw, Naypyidaw was not hit by the cyclone—vindication for the regime in their move there, you might say; but people at the lower levels are faced with the reality of what is happening much more directly, and I think that is where we may begin to see a change of views. In addition, we know that the military obviously are all recruited from the local population and they will have relatives, family, friends, who are involved, and that, too, may bring about a change of views. We are not at all complacent about this, and obviously our

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people on the ground are keeping closely in touch, but we just need to be absolutely clear that at the moment our focus is very much humanitarian.

Q34 Lord Anderson of Swansea: I have a supplementary on that. Clearly our sources of information are limited and probably the best sources are those of neighbouring countries. Is there any hard evidence against the view that there is a monolith? Evidence that there are cracks at the senior level, or differences? Different tendencies?

Ms Munn: It is quite difficult to answer that, really, because this is a regime which has managed to stay in control, and there are differing views. Some people think that the next generation may be less hardline: some people think they might be more hardline. Our view very much, as Lord Boyce said, is that the fact that this has happened will have quite a significant --

Q35 Lord Anderson of Swansea: That is a hope rather than an expectation. Are there individuals who are known to be more liberal at senior levels?

Ms Munn: I am not aware of any specific individuals to whom that would apply at this point.

Q36 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: You referred to the difficulty of communicating and the fact they are all very isolated. Could you just tell the Committee how much effort the BBC, the World Service and language services are putting into this and has any consideration been given to increasing the flow of information so that ordinary Burmese people get a proper understanding of the failure of their government to respond properly to this crisis?

Ms Munn: The BBC World Service and Burmese Service broadcast twice a day to Burma. We have looked with the Service at whether there can be an increased output from that and yes, we have consistently worked with the BBC on the information that they are putting across. It is very important; people in Burma do listen to it; and that is certainly part of our consideration.

Q37 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: The UN Gambari process that was started after the demonstrations in September seems to have really got nowhere, and is being treated by the regime as simply a temporising device, a way of spinning out time until everyone's attention is diverted somewhere else. Do we have any hopes of that process at all? Also, the Security Council having adopted the Presidential Statement about a week before the referendum, which has been totally ignored and, indeed, treated with contempt by the regime, presumably there will be a requirement after the referendum for the Security Council to say something about the consequences of there not having been a free and fair process, and the flawed nature of the constitutional process there?

Ms Munn: I am absolutely sure they would wish to say something. As you rightly say, there was a further Presidential Statement at the beginning of May which helpfully confirmed the strong statement that was made on 11 October last year, and it is helpful in that it demonstrates that the world collectively has said that there is a problem here, and in reinforcing the situation and working with the ASEAN countries, who were obviously party to making a strong statement back in October, that is very helpful. In terms of the Gambari process what has happened is that, in the early days, there was a bit of give on certain things, but we have to be realistic that in terms of what was set out of the expectations in that 11 October statement nothing has changed. It is important for the UN process to continue; we will obviously need to look at that in the light of what happens from the cyclone, but it does have the benefit of having the support of the United Nations and, I think, the world, and we have certainly not given up on the Gambari process.

Q38 Lord Crickhowell: We have understandably concentrated on discussing with the neighbours how to help with this terrible disaster, and I understand perfectly well your caution in making too many political points when that is the central objective. It is also a problem that countries like China are not keen to be seen to interfere in the political affairs of other countries. Coming back to the longer term, however, how do you see the EU engaging with the neighbouring countries, the ASEAN, China and India and so on, in trying to drive forward the political reforms and democratic reforms, because we have to return to that issue at some point? Do you see a role here, and how do you see Europe engaging with the neighbours on these issues?

Ms Munn: I absolutely think there is a role. There is an annual EU/ASEAN Summit, which obviously has as its focus these kind of discussions, and I think what we have to bear in mind in relation to this is that ASEAN is a developing organisation; they have put in place a new charter which they did at their meeting last November, and they are keen to become a more active regional group. You could say before they were, as it says, an association of nations but now with the charter they are seeking to move on. ASEAN themselves are frustrated that the issue of Burma has dominated the agenda, and they make the point to us and to the European Union collectively that there is a lot more to our relationships than Burma, and we have discussions on trade agreements and a whole wide range of issues so that continuing engagement between the European Union and ASEAN is important. Alongside that, however, I know from direct discussions that I regularly have with the ambassadors from ASEAN whom I meet as a group periodically that they become frustrated

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because they want to talk about the other issues, and obviously I say to them very directly that I know and understand that, but that the world will judge them on their response to this situation in Burma, so we are very frank with them about that and they understand that, so I think that is the on-going relationship and those are the levers.

Q39 Lord Selkirk of Douglas: Lord Chairman, can I first express an interest as President of the International Rescue Corps, which did apply to send a team to Burma but, in fact, they now have a team in Hong Kong which is hopefully moving on very shortly to the earthquake zone in China. Can I, on their behalf, express through you to the Department of International Development gratitude for their close working relationship with the Department and for their assistance, and if I may say so I do not think that just applies to the International Rescue Corps but to other charities like the International Red Cross. I cannot speak for them, obviously, but I think there is a general feeling of gratitude for the assistance they receive. Can I put through you a question to them that, from their perspective, the speed of response is often absolutely critical in achieving maximum success, and that after their missions have been accomplished debriefings can be enormously valuable in ascertaining the best possible

advanced planning in the most up-to-date way, and make I just make the point that they will, of course, give maximum assistance if the opportunity arises. They could send a small team to Burma now, as we speak, if required, but, of course, it is very much appreciated what you have said this morning.

Ms Munn: Thank you very much. That is a really helpful contribution and it is very good to hear directly from somebody involved with one of the organisations which is standing ready to help. That was very much my message directly to the Burmese Ambassador yesterday, that we have people who are ready to help, and the British people have raised £6 million because they are concerned about the Burmese people, not because they want to see regime change.

Q40 Chairman: Minister, could I thank you, in what is obviously a very busy time for you and your colleagues, for having come and given a full picture and responded so fully to questions of the members of the Committee? We do feel it is important and we are very grateful that we can have a Minister come and give such wise advice, and we wish you very well in what is obviously going to be a very difficult few weeks as far as your own responsibilities are concerned. Thank you very much indeed.

Ms Munn: Thank you very much indeed.
