

16 July 2011

Our reference: MIN/17314/2011

The Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

From the Secretary of State

Dear Oliver,

Thank you for your letter of 16 June on behalf of your constituent, Mr Anthony Russell, about the Government's policy on Burma for a book he is researching on peace.

Mr Russell asks about Aung San Suu Kyi's approach. We agree with Aung San Suu Kyi that progress in Burma will be best achieved through a mixture of diplomatic pressure and sanctions. Her priority is dialogue, both with the regime and other opposition and ethnic groups. In her policy pronouncements she must measure her words carefully. She has used her public openness to the idea of reviewing sanctions to encourage the authorities to engage with her and her party. It is worth noting that Aung San Suu Kyi commands widespread popular appeal in Burma. The thousands of people who greeted her on her release from house arrest are testimony to the fact that she is the only opposition figure of any stature in Burma. She has a key role to play in national reconciliation and in Burma's future and we are committed to ensure that UK, EU and UN policy support her efforts and those of the democratic opposition.

Mr Russell asks what will change the regime's behaviour. We are clear that we must continue to pursue a policy based on sanctions, pressure and carefully calibrated engagement. We know that the Burmese Government craves legitimacy and that it would like sanctions lifted. EU sanctions are therefore important in sending a political message that unless genuine progress is made on human rights and democracy, we will not regard Burma as a credible member of the international community. Furthermore, EU sanctions, combined with restrictive measures imposed by the US and Australia, are targeted against members of the Government. In April 2011, in order to encourage change, the EU suspended the ban on high level visits to Burma and suspended from the visa ban list lifelong civilian members of the Burmese Government. We agree with Aung San Suu Kyi that international sanctions should not be lifted until there is positive change on the ground.

The Government takes every opportunity to discuss Burma with regional countries and encourage them to use their leverage to press for positive change, I recently raised Burma with my Indian and Malaysian counterparts and in the past have talked to the Indonesians and Japanese. The Government also looks to the UN for active engagement including through the UN Secretary-General's Good Offices Mission and the Group of Friends to help create the conditions for dialogue and national reconciliation in Burma. We are also with EU and other like-minded working



international partners in the UN's human rights bodies to highlight in the strongest terms the continuing appalling human rights situation in Burma.

Mr Russell is correct to highlight the obstacles we face. Even at the time of the so-called Saffron Rising in 2007 when the military regime pursued a bloody crack-down on thousands of monks, it was impossible to achieve even a non-binding UN Security Resolution of condemnation because of Russian and Chinese vetoes. Neither Russia nor China see Burma as a threat to international peace and stability. It is also true to say the while Burma's ASEAN neighbours would like to see progress in Burma, their policies are generally predicated more on engagement and economic development than overt political pressure.

The Government's position on an UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) into human rights abuses in Burma is well-known. The Government supports the UN Special Rapporteur's recommendation for the UN to consider establishing a COI and we are working to build the necessary international consensus. UN human rights resolutions have catalogued systematic and appalling human rights abuses over many years. The FCO produces a command paper for Parliament which highlights Burma as a country of concern for human rights abuses. Numerous NGOs, including Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and Burma Campaign UK are also good sources of information on human rights abuses in Burma.

Finally, Mr Russell attributes a quote to Aung San Suu Kyi that may in fact be from her father, General Aung San. He said in 1946 that: "We must strive and work, all of us, until we become heroes all, so that we can ultimately dispense with any leader or leadership. For only then we can have freedom in a real and absolute sense."

I wish Mr Russell the best of luck with his research and his book.

*Yours ever,
William Hague*

WILLIAM HAGUE