



June 2020

Supporters of the Burma Campaign UK

Dear Supporters,

Thank you for your email to the Secretary of State for International Development highlighting the continued vulnerability of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) across Myanmar, especially now in light of COVID-19. I am responding as Minister for Asia.

I share your view that urgent action is needed to support refugees and IDPs in Myanmar. Supporting displaced and conflict affected people and refugees is at the heart of DFID Myanmar's country programme.

DFID is the second largest bilateral donor in Myanmar, and one of the largest in Rakhine, where we continue to support all communities affected by crises. This includes the 600,000 Rohingya who remain in Rakhine. Our programming prioritises the needs of IDPs across all communities, and promotes inclusion, social cohesion and equity as part of our conflict sensitive development approach.

Since 2012, the UK has provided £137 million in humanitarian assistance to support the most vulnerable in Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Northern Shan State and the Southeast/Thai border. Through this we have reached nearly 400,000 people.

We are monitoring the spread of COVID-19 cases in Myanmar closely and have adapted our programmes in response. Our primary focus is on the needs of the most vulnerable, especially IDPs and those living in conflict affected areas. We are also working to help Myanmar mitigate the secondary impacts of the epidemic, which could push people back into poverty and increase conflicts and tensions across the country. I have announced that DFID is reallocating £31 million from within its aid programming in Myanmar to help limit the spread and impact of COVID-19. The reprioritised funding includes support for:

- vital medical supplies and health services through the Access to Health Fund

- the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund to support livelihoods and nutrition including through improved access to clean water and sanitation, and social protection initiatives
- lifesaving assistance to internally displaced people and others affected by conflict, including food, medical services and health information

We are particularly concerned about IDPs and supporting the health sector and ethnic health authorities to prepare for and respond to COVID-19. To help prepare the humanitarian response, we are asking our partners to stockpile sufficient food and medicines to ensure needs can be met in the case of future lockdowns and quarantines; rapidly expanding water, sanitation and health facilities in camps and surrounding villages; advocating for access to health services, and supporting social distancing measures, including through our aid delivery. We are also working alongside the Government to scale up social protection measures to half a million of the most vulnerable households to receive cash transfers and nutrition support. We note the recent announcement of the establishment of a coordination mechanism with the Ethnic Armed Organisations on COVID-19 which could help to support the response in ethnic areas. We will watch implementation carefully.

Our humanitarian assistance in Rakhine reaches around 133,000 thousand people with WASH, food, protection and health services. The situation in Rakhine is made more difficult and dangerous by the conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army, which has impacted on humanitarian access. In addition, the internet blackout constrains the flow of information making the response more difficult. The UK was extremely concerned by the death of a WHO staff member on 20 April following a security incident. We have repeatedly called for a ceasefire and the lifting of the internet ban in Rakhine and southern Chin, including through a statement co-signed by 17 other Ambassadors. I am clear that the Tatmadaw's recent ceasefire announcement does not go far enough and must include a cessation of hostilities in Rakhine and Chin states.

Across other conflict affected areas, UK aid is supporting at least 60,000 people in Kachin and Northern Shan with water, sanitation and hygiene, cash, food, protection, health services and livelihoods support. In the Southeast, we are spending around £7 million which includes £4 million support for The Border Consortium (TBC) in nine refugee camps on the Thailand/Myanmar border and a further £1 million on the Myanmar side. We are about to start new work on the border through the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) and local partners to support migrants through the COVID-19 crisis.

Our Ambassador and DFID Head of Office have been actively engaging with key Myanmar ministers to discuss the issue of conflict in Rakhine and Chin, access constraints, protection for aid workers, the internet ban and the potential impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable. DFID will continue to work with the UN, (I)NGOs and civil society partners to try to ensure humanitarian support is provided to those who are vulnerable and most at risk, including IDPs across Myanmar.

I hope this letter addresses your concerns and highlights the work DFID is doing to support the most vulnerable in Myanmar, as well as the commitment we are making to work with international partners as well as the Government of Myanmar to make progress. Many thanks for your continued engagement.

Nigel Adams MP
Minister of State for Asia