

16 December 2015

### **Burma: Political Prisoners**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received many emails in recent weeks about political prisoners in Burma. I am responding as the Minister responsible for our relations with Burma.

While we have welcomed the release of over 2,000 political prisoners since the political reforms began in 2011, we are concerned that numbers have increased from around 30 in January 2014 to an estimated minimum of 112 behind bars at the end of October 2015. Further, there are over 486 more detained under repressive laws and awaiting trial.

The arrest of activists for engaging in peaceful protests and social media posts – for example Patrick Khum Jaa Lee and Chaw Sandy Tun - raise particular concerns about the situation for freedom of expression. We continue to be very clear in all our communications with the Burmese government that we still have many very serious concerns about political prisoners in the country. Most recently I discussed this issue directly with U Aung Min, Minister for the President's Office, when I visited Burma in July. Officials from our Embassy in Rangoon also continue to raise our concerns with the government of Burma as a matter of urgency and meet regularly with members of civil society on this issue.

We also raise our concerns publicly in our Annual Report on Human Rights and in multilateral fora such as the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council, where the UK has co-sponsored Resolutions calling for the unconditional release of all political prisoners.

With regard to reforms, we have urged both the government and the Parliament to repeal all existing laws which are not in line with democratic standards to ensure democratic activists are able to voice their opinions freely and without fear of arrest. Repealing these repressive laws will be vital for Burma as it continues on its path to greater democracy. We also continue to call for a comprehensive and transparent mechanism to remain in place to review existing cases and to support the reintegration of former political prisoners.

The historic elections in Burma on 8 November represent a significant opportunity to consolidate the reform process begun in 2011 and to make real progress on Rakhine. The Prime Minister called Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on 10 November to offer our continued support for the people of Burma. Whatever the shape of the new

government which will form in March 2016, human rights will remain at the heart of the UK's policy in Burma.

We will remain a vocal advocate for change and will continue to press for action to resolve issues of concern. If you require any further information, please consult [www.gov.uk/world/burma](http://www.gov.uk/world/burma), follow us on [www.facebook.com/fcoburma](https://www.facebook.com/fcoburma) or Twitter: [@UKinBurma](https://twitter.com/UKinBurma).

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hugo Swire'.

**THE RT HON HUGO SWIRE MP**  
**Minister of State**