

View from the House- Insertion 22 August 2013

I was delighted to be asked by Mr Speaker Rt Hon John Bercow MP to visit Burma with a cross-party delegation of MPs. Together with 2 officers of the House our visit during the Parliamentary recess was over 6 days with over 24 meetings with parliamentarians, NGOs, groups and organisations.

The leader of the opposition, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, had asked Mr Speaker when she addressed parliament last year for help to support their fledgling parliamentary democracy. Mr Speaker was determined to provide a lasting legacy.

Having raised Daw Suu's plight at my first PMQs just after I was elected, it was amazing to meet her as an MP and to see her sit in Parliament. The sight of the Army sitting in parliament was unnerving. We met with the President and Speakers of both Houses, Chairs of the Committees and of course Daw Suu at Naypyidaw (Parliament). In Yangon(Rangoon) we met with faith leaders and community activists. Many activists are still detained or bailed with adjourned hearings which prevent them from getting on with their lives.

There are many issues to be resolved not least the ethnic tensions. The Burmese people must find a way to live together with all their differences. We have experienced negotiators in conflict resolution who could help. The Constitution of Burma also needs to be changed to allow Daw Suu to take part in the Presidential elections.

We visited brilliant projects delivered through UK Aid and other countries' aid programmes which have transformed the lives of people who have so little. Malaria is being treated early because it can be tested with a result in 15 minutes by local volunteer health workers. In a schools programme which keeps the children in school they proudly carry their UNICEF backpacks.

Aid does work because it supports people in their own country. Sometimes we can give people the gift of life just by our aid programme. As Mr Speaker said in his speech at Yangon University quoting Martin Luther King, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

At home, I am opposed to the process known as fracking which can cause contamination of ground water and earth tremors. There should be more investment in green technologies which deserve the same tax breaks as the Government is giving to fracking companies.

To all those young people getting exam results, education is a journey not a destination.

Valerie Vaz MP

18 August 2013

