

View from the House

On the morning of 14 January 2013 there were reports from the predominantly Christian Kachin State in Burma of the deaths of 3 civilians shot dead by the Burmese Army. Among the dead were a 15 year old boy and a Pastor (76).

I applied to Mr Speaker, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP to ask for an Urgent Question. Aid had been stopped from getting through. He kindly granted my request. On the 18 January 2013 the lower house of the Burmese Parliament called for a ceasefire and negotiations in the Kachin State.

The Burmese people are undergoing a transformation in their country with the election of Aung Sang Sui Kyi as a member of Parliament. The EU and the UN must continue to play a role in supporting Burma as they move towards full democracy and protecting minority groups.

It was disappointing for everyone involved in the bid by the New Art Gallery to host the Turner Prize in 2015. Making it to the last four was an excellent achievement, one that was praised by the Judges for having a wide range of stakeholders engaged in the bid.

Reports that the bid cost over £400,000 were incorrect. That was the amount required to host it if Walsall was successful. The bid cost virtually nothing. There was a sum returned to the Gallery in a rate rebate. And with Sunday openings showing an increase in visitor numbers, the Gallery must expand its collection and stage other eye catching exhibitions.

As a member of the Health Select Committee, we published two more reports over the New Year, the accountability hearing with the Care Quality Commission and a report into the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). One of its key findings is that there needs to be a proper assessment of the benefits and the impact of the Cancer Drugs Fund.

I took part in the debate on Atos and the work capability assessment. This debate was requested by backbench MPs. Many of us have constituents who have let us know about their terrible experiences of how they have been treated and the interview process during these assessments. One said that he was told that as he made it to the interview he was fit for work.

There is no commonsense, humanity or dignity for people undergoing these assessments. I hope the Minister will ask Atos to look again at the way these assessments are carried out.

Valerie Vaz MP
18 January 2013