

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Inquiry into certain aspects of the Department of Foreign Affairs Annual Report 2019-20
Public Hearing 13 April 2021

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

005 –Public Hearing – 13 April 2021

Topic: Myanmar - Aid

Senator Janet Rice

Question

Senator RICE: Are we managing to get aid out on the ground?

Ms Hambly: My understanding is, yes, we are.

Senator RICE: At a lesser level than pre the coup?

Ms Hambly: I think it's different. As I think was mentioned earlier, the conflict environment in some of the long-term conflict affected areas is also changing at the moment. It is a shifting picture, but my understanding is that some of our longstanding partners, such as the World Food Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross and some of the other UN organisations, are still able to operate at a certain level, but I can take the details on notice.

Senator RICE: Could you provide on notice some detail about where we are succeeding, where the barriers are and what other options are being considered. It has been put to me that there are opportunities to get aid in through the ethnic-controlled areas.

Answer

- Australia's assistance is supporting our humanitarian partners (UN, NGOs, Red Cross) to deliver assistance to crisis affected populations across the country, including food, health care, education, and gender-based violence services.
- For example, the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund managed by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is supporting local organisations to distribute food, basic non-food items and healthcare to displaced communities, including in Rakhine State.
- As the situation in Myanmar evolves, Australia will continue to work with partners to determine the scale of need and how best to support the delivery of life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable, including on the Thai-Myanmar border.
- Barriers to delivering assistance include: the security situation; impacts on supply chains and markets; rising food prices; disruptions to the banking system and limited availability of cash; restricted access to areas in need of humanitarian assistance; and further population displacement.