

Topic: FADT References Committee - Democracy and Human Rights in Myanmar - Spoken QoN - Public Hearing
13Feb26

Senator Jessica Collins

Question

Senator COLLINS: But I will be following very closely whether the central bank and the private banks that are now facilitating forced remittances for the Tatmadaw that are fuelling this war will be followed up on through the sanctions framework—and also, as we've heard about today, supply chains of materials coming into Australia that are building everyday goods for Australians, particularly through the teak trade.

I want to follow on from the funding gap that Senator Shoebridge just raised. We have heard many, many concerns of people, particularly on the Thai-Burma border. A hundred thousand people are still there four decades later. They are terrified about this 18-month funding gap from the Australian government. **So, if you can, provide on notice whether the Australian government is actually going to be plugging that gap or whether that gap still exists.** In terms of the fear about funding for these refugee camps, are you aware if the United Nations is trying to encourage people to repatriate and whether the Australian government is looking to increase its humanitarian resettlement from those refugee camps to Australia?

Ms Smith: To clarify, are you talking about refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border and/or the camps in Cox's Bazar? I may have missed the outset of your question, sorry.

Senator COLLINS: Yes, you can reflect on both. I'd like to have a response to both of them please.

Ms Smith: **Certainly. Obviously, we'll take the points on notice that you have raised.** With respect to the plight of the Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar, we've committed over \$1.26 billion in humanitarian assistance since 2017 to the people of Myanmar, the displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh and their host communities. This includes—

Senator COLLINS: Are you aware if the UN is still encouraging people to repatriate?

Ms Smith: I'd need to take that on notice. The position that we very clearly put most recently at the high-level conference in September, which is our consistent position with respect to Rohingyas return to Myanmar, is that of course we would support that in conditions where it could be voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable. Those conditions do not currently exist, and, until that occurs, we will continue to support displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh. I appreciate the details with respect to the funding that we are providing most recently into additional support for Rohingyas in Bangladesh are something that perhaps we can give on notice rather than something, in the interest of time, the committee wishes to hear about at the moment. But that is certainly something that we are focused on, and the additional \$370 million three-year package, which is commencing this year, really does take into account that ongoing dreadful situation in the camps in Cox's Bazar.

Senator COLLINS: But that's for Rohingya, not for the Thai-Burma border, which has been there for 40 years. If we can **get notice of that funding gap**, that would be great.

Ms Smith: Of course.

Answer

There is no gap in Australian development assistance. Since 2017, Australia has committed \$1.26 billion in humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar, displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh and their host communities. This assistance also covers displaced communities on both sides of the Thai-Myanmar border.

Funding reductions by other donors have created funding shortfalls across Myanmar and in refugee camps in Bangladesh and Thailand. The Australian Government has responded to these developments by ensuring more of Australia's development assistance goes to Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The Australian Government now dedicate 75 cents of every Australian development dollar to the Indo-Pacific region. We have also used the flexibility that exists

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in existing programs to pivot and reprioritise, ensuring we respond to the most acute needs, including in Cox's Bazar and on the Thai-Myanmar border. We will continue to provide this assistance, including through a new three-year program of \$370 million focused on delivering humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar, displaced Rohingya living in Bangladesh and their host communities.

Australia is not aware of the United Nations encouraging displaced people in Cox's Bazar or on the Thai-Myanmar border to repatriate to Myanmar. Australia's position is that the people of Myanmar have a right to return to their country when conditions allow for their safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable repatriation. These conditions are key principles of voluntary repatriation supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other UN agencies. These conditions are not currently in place.

Questions on Australia's immigration policy and humanitarian program should be directed to the Department of Home Affairs.