

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

003 – 13 September 2021

Topic: Conveying concerns about treatment of diaspora communities

Mr Julian Hill MP

Question

Mr HILL: I just want to make another couple of points. In the earlier discussion, before my last set of questions, or maybe in your opening statement, I think you mentioned that you conveyed concerns regarding some of these issues—diaspora issues and so on—to two countries. You mentioned Cambodia and China. Which other countries has the department or the government also conveyed similar concerns to regarding issues and interference in diaspora communities? I presume the two were not an exhaustive list.

Ms Corcoran: I'm here representing the countries that I cover, so I can only speak for Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos. I can say that we have conveyed those concerns to those countries. We haven't heard about Thailand and Laos in this hearing, but I have been listening to the evidence. I can't answer for other parts of the department. We can take that on notice.

Mr HILL: So there have been concerns, in some instances, for Thailand and Laos?

Ms Corcoran: What I was meaning to say was that when we have human rights concerns we raise them directly with the government. But in respect of interference in diaspora communities here, no, in my tenure at least, I haven't had any experience of having to raise that with those communities.

Mr HILL: In your sphere of influence, it has only been in relation to Cambodia and Vietnam, in relation to diaspora communities?

Ms Corcoran: That's the case, yes. Exactly.

Mr HILL: Let's drop the stone in the puddle and radiate out. Who looks after Myanmar?

Ms Corcoran: That's looked after by the Myanmar task force, which is headed up by a separate assistant secretary.

Mr HILL: Mr Hawkins, does that sit within your area of responsibility?

Mr Hawkins: No, it doesn't.

Mr HILL: It has been put to me separately that concerns have been raised with the Burmese Myanmarese authorities in relation to diaspora communities. Can anyone confirm that?

Ms Corcoran: That sits within the division that I work within, but I would have to take that on notice.

Answer:

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade raised concerns with Myanmar's Ambassador to Australia on 28 June after media reported that a letter had been sent from the Myanmar Embassy in Canberra to Myanmar government officials studying in Australia. The letter called for the rejection of the civil disobedience movement.