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Response to Rohingya in Burma (EDM 884) – February 2017

Thank you for contacting me about a UN inquiry into human rights abuses against the Rohingya in Burma and EDM 884.

Parliamentary Private Secretaries do not, by convention, sign any Early Day Motions, as doing so is likely to breach the Ministerial Code's rules on collective responsibility. However, I am deeply concerned by the human rights and humanitarian situation in Rakhine. A range of human rights organisations report of human rights violations by the security forces. Humanitarian access is also restricted which is particularly impacting those already affected by malnutrition.

The UN Special Rapporteur, Yanghee Lee, recently visited the region and has publicly criticised the crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority and urged the military to respect the law and human rights.

I am encouraged that Ministers share our concerns about this crisis and continue to engage with the Burmese Government on this. Most recently, the Foreign Secretary visited Burma in January and discussed the need for a restrained security approach with the Home Affairs Minister, as well as the importance of resuming humanitarian access and of ending discrimination against the Rohingya. He also raised these issues with the State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi.

I know that the Government has considered the viability of a UN Commission of Inquiry into this issue. However I understand that establishing an inquiry would require broad international support; unfortunately this simply does not exist in the current international environment and for that reason I will not be signing this EDM, although I share your concerns about the plight of the Rohingya.

As you may be aware, the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which is led by Kofi Annan, was put in place last year and is due to produce a report in August. Ministers have had a number of conversations with Kofi Annan about the work that is ongoing and it is my hope that it will bring about real improvements to the welfare of all in Rakhine State.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP