

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 May 2021

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

010 – Public Hearing – 13 May 2021

Topic: Engagement with Myanmar

Mr Julian Hill MP

Question

Mr HILL: Just a question to DFAT—I just wanted to go back—you said that the government had made a decision to engage at the officials' level and not to engage with the democratically elected government, or legitimate government, as Senator Fawcett put it, or the shadow cabinet, as you put it—whatever we want to call it. Is that a conscious decision that the government has made to not engage?

CHAIR: I don't think that's quite what DFAT said.

Mr HILL: Feel free to correct me if I misunderstood.

Ms Worthaisong: My recollection is that the decision was taken to engage carefully, as I put it earlier, at the officials level and, where possible, outside Myanmar.

CHAIR: But when you say 'officials level', you mean Australian officials

Ms Worthaisong: Absolutely. Sorry, I should have made that clear.

CHAIR: In terms of who you're engaging with in Myanmar, are you engaging with people who are styled as the legitimate minister for foreign affairs for instance?

Mrs Worthaisong: Yes.

Mr HILL: I'm trying to understand: there's been a conscious decision at this time made by the Australian government—as in ministers—to not engage with those people directly but to leave it to officials. Am I right in understanding that?

Ms Worthaisong: I can't remember the exact words of the submission, so I'm happy to take that on notice to make sure I get it exactly right in response to your question.

Answer

The Australian Government has engaged at officials' level with the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and the National Unity Government. Several meetings have been held to date, including with NUG-appointed ministers and other NUG representatives.