

August 2018

**ROHINGYA REFUGEES:
ONE YEAR LATER,
THE CRISIS CONTINUES**



**Development
and Peace**
CARITAS CANADA

Forced to flee with no return in sight

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority residing mainly in Rakhine state in the north of Burma (also called Myanmar), a country where more than 90% of the 52 million inhabitants are Buddhists. Persecuted and marginalized in their own country for decades, Rohingya are considered stateless and have neither Burmese nationality nor freedom of movement in the country.

On August 25, 2017, violence erupted between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Burmese army in Rakhine state. Between August and October 2017, more than 600,000 Rohingya fled Burma in fear of being subjected to brutal actions by the Burmese army that the United Nations qualified as ethnic cleansing.

This massive influx of refugees resulted in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The urgency with which the Rohingya had to flee and the magnitude of displacements increased the vulnerability of thousands of children, women, and men who, still today, lack basic necessities and have limited access to essential services.

One year later, the situation in Burma remains worrisome and conditions enabling a safe and dignified return for Rohingya refugees are still far from being met. Many have expressed concern about their future and their reluctance to return home as long as issues relating to citizenship, legal rights, access to services and justice, and restitution of their land have not been addressed.

Meeting their long-term needs is clearly a priority, now more than ever.

*A major crisis**

6,700

Rohingya killed in Burma

213,000

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh before August 2017

919,000

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh today, 60% of whom are children

Throughout history, the Rohingya have been the victims of numerous episodes of violence, notably in 1992 and in 2016, forcing 213,000 people to flee to Bangladesh.

Rajida Begum, 30, a Rohingya refugee in Kutupalong Camp, holds her 14-day-old baby, born in a rice field when Begum was fleeing the Burmese army. "I hid for five days in the forest, then we tried to reach the border on foot. I was so scared."

Begum gave birth on the fifth day under a plastic tarp in the middle of a rice field: "When I saw that she was in good health, I was so happy. I thanked God."

* (Source : UNHCR ; MSF)

The response of Development and Peace – Caritas Canada

Development and Peace and its partner Caritas Bangladesh have been active since the beginning of the crisis in August 2017, providing food to nearly 25,000 of the most vulnerable refugees.

Thanks to the generosity of Canadians and funding from Global Affairs Canada, Development and Peace has expanded its response over the past year to include the construction of temporary shelters, distribution of basic necessities and hygiene and dignity kits, as well as building drinking water stations, latrines, and shower areas. These initiatives have reached nearly 100,000 refugees in camps located in Cox’s Bazar District, in southeastern Bangladesh.



A LONGSTANDING PARTNERSHIP

For more than 10 years, Development and Peace and Caritas Bangladesh have joined forces in response to various natural disasters in Bangladesh, which are increasing due to climate change. These include destructive cyclones and flash floods.

Caritas Bangladesh has been working with Rohingya refugees since 1993, and the program currently being put in place in partnership with Development and Peace reflects its commitment to restore dignity to people who just want to live in peace in their own country.

From the onset of the crisis, Development and Peace quickly established a humanitarian response to help meet the basic needs of Rohingya refugees:



Food
25,000 people



Protection
10,000 people



Temporary shelters
905 families



Water, hygiene, and sanitation
24,200 people



Basic necessities
7,500 people



“Dear brothers and sisters, just let the world see what the egoism of the world does with the image of God [...]. Let’s keep doing good for them, helping them. Let’s keep mobilizing ourselves so their rights are recognized. Let’s keep our hearts open. Let’s not look away. The presence of God today is also called Rohingya. Each of us shall give their own answer.”

– Pope Francis, during his visit to Bangladesh on December 1, 2017.

Rohingya: the world’s largest stateless population

A Muslim minority living for the most part in Rakhine state (also called Arakan), in northwestern Burma, the Rohingya have been born and raised in Rakhine for a number of generations. They were granted full citizenship rights in 1947 when the country was still under British rule but were stripped of these rights and rendered stateless in 1982 after the Burma Citizenship Law came into effect. Considered as foreigners in their own land, the Rohingya are deprived of their most basic rights and are victims of a wide range of discriminatory measures, including restriction of their freedom of movement, confiscation of their land, and forced labour.

Conditions that would allow Rohingya refugees to permanently return to Burma must include recognition of their political and civic rights in Rakhine State and must resolve the central problem of their statelessness once and for all.

Kutupalong–Balukhali camp, the world’s largest refugee camp

In the space of a few months, Kutupalong-Balukhali Refugee Camp, which houses nearly 626,000 Rohingya refugees, has become the largest and most densely populated refugee camp in the world. It far exceeds Dadaab Camp in Kenya, formerly the largest camp with 250,000 refugees.

In Kutupalong Camp, Rohingya refugees live in cramped shelters built with plastic tarps and bamboo stalks. The camp, which looks like a large city, has about the same population as Vancouver.

A camp that extends as far as the eye can see

Kutupalong is still growing, leading some Rohingya to leave overcrowded areas

(or those at risk of becoming so) and freeing up space for new refugees to settle. Such a high concentration of vulnerable people in an area at the mercy of unpredictable weather poses considerable humanitarian challenges, including drinking water shortages, malnutrition, squalor, insecurity, and overcrowding.

626,000

Rohingya refugees in Kutupalong-Balukhali Camp

278,000

Rohingya refugees in other neighbouring camps

15,000

Rohingya refugees in host communities

(Source: *ISCG Situation Report* – June 21, 2018)



Food and basic necessities

Shortly after the start of food distributions, basic necessities were also given, including cooking utensils, mosquito nets, solar lamps, umbrellas, and stoves with the gas cylinders needed to ignite them.

Gathering firewood exposes refugees, especially children and women, to grave dangers. Fear of abduction, harassment, and sexual violence drastically limits the movement of women and girls. To ensure they do not have to expose themselves to these risks, Development and Peace will distribute cooking stoves and gas cylinders that can last up to 6 months to 5,000 families over the coming year.



“In our programs, we strive to protect the dignity of each human being, to promote true equality between women and men, and to encourage each person to feel responsible for others according to their family or social ties. Our mantra and the basis for our actions remain cooperation, coordination, and mutual support,” explains Francis Atul Sarker, Director of Caritas Bangladesh



32,500

people have received food and basic necessities.

“The stoves that we received from Caritas Bangladesh are very helpful and are just as important as the food aid. Without our stove, we’d have trouble cooking. There are no more trees around. It can take up to three hours of walking to gather wood, and we’re not allowed to cut branches from the trees.”

—Fatema Khatun, 40, is a mother of eight children and arrived at Kutupalong Camp four months ago.



Development and Peace and Caritas Bangladesh are active in five areas of Kutupalong Camp.

Weather-resistant shelters

At the height of the monsoon, heavy rains cause flooding and landslides, while strong winds damage or destroy the more fragile shelters, leaving thousands of families vulnerable and helpless. The risk of landslides has been aggravated by the cutting down and uprooting of trees by refugees.

At the request of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and with the financial support of Global Affairs Canada, Development and Peace and its partner Caritas Bangladesh built 905 shelters in Kutupalong Camp, including 760 weather-resistant reinforced shelters and 145 semi-permanent shelters that have concrete supports.

“Thousands of families live in shelters on hills devoid of any trees or rocks to retain the sandy soil, which turns into mud when it continues to rain and when the groundwater rapidly rises. Refugees in more risky areas simply have to be

moved to safer locations,” explains Sajal Chandra Debnath, Geographic Information Systems Manager at Caritas Bangladesh.



905

A total of 905 reinforced emergency shelters and semi-permanent shelters have been built.

Water, hygiene, and sanitation

The lack of access to water and the absence of a sanitation system, combined with overcrowding in the camps, are risk factors for the propagation of waterborne diseases such as cholera. This situation is even more difficult for women and girls since they are generally responsible for tasks involving water.

In its response, Development and Peace has prioritized the building of gender-segregated water stations, latrines, and showers to offer safe locations for women and girls. Hygiene and dignity kits have been distributed to 10,000 people (soap, brushes, toothpaste, etc.) and refugees and members of the local community have been recruited to offer 2,000 education sessions on good hygiene practices for preventing disease transmission. These sessions are serving to educate refugees on the use and maintenance of latrines and shower facilities, to conduct handwashing demonstrations, and to distribute information and education. When people are encouraged to change their hygiene habits, in particular to wash their hands with soap, the health benefits are many and varied. Our intervention has made sanitation facilities more accessible for 24,200 refugees.



- 7** safe shower spaces for women and girls
- 12** drinking water stations
- 46** sanitary facilities
- 2,000** education sessions
- 10,000** hygiene and dignity kits distributed

THE IMPACT OF THE MONSOON

The monsoon is characterized by torrential rains, the accumulation of dozens of centimetres of water per day, and violent winds which can reach up to 112 km/h. According to the United Nations, more than 200,000 refugees are at risk due to climate conditions.

Rohingya refugees are threatened by floods and landslides. Latrines are at risk of overflowing and could contaminate drinking water supplies and lead to the spread of diseases such as cholera or diphtheria. The Rohingya, who are already vulnerable, could spiral into a more precarious situation, and children would be the first ones affected by these diseases.



Protecting the most vulnerable people

The Rohingya refugee population includes extremely vulnerable people, among them unaccompanied children, single women who lost their husbands, the elderly, and families who have suffered direct and indirect trauma.

The exploitation of adolescent girls and women takes the form of forced marriages, trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, and narcotics trafficking, while boys face an increased risk of forced labour and human trafficking. Children are therefore at serious risk of psychosocial distress, neglect, and mistreatment.

Protection of refugees is a major concern and has been highlighted as an integral part of the response by Development and Peace. Caritas Bangladesh with support from the Caritas family has set up safe spaces where women and children are protected from violence, exploitation, and trafficking, and are provided with referrals for psychological assistance, as required.

In addition, the Caritas network is organizing education sessions at the community level and conducting an education campaign on protection against human trafficking, trauma, gender-based violence, abuse and aggression. It assesses risks, prevents situations of abuse and gender-based violence, and communicates with other stakeholders to obtain resources and appropriate support for those affected.



16%
of Rohingya refugees are single mothers.

Up to 80% of newcomers are women and children. There are a number of groups of traffickers active in the area, and child trafficking, particularly of teenage girls, is a major concern.

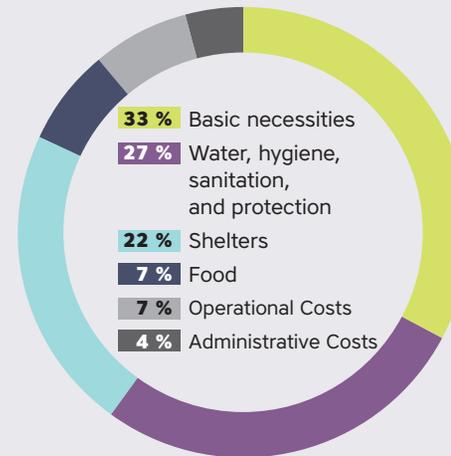
(Source : UNICEF)



2017-2018: FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

The generosity of the public toward Development and Peace testifies to the immense trust of our donors. To maintain this bond of trust, we are particularly attentive to the sound management of funds entrusted to us and want to be completely transparent regarding the use of donations received.

HOW FUNDS ARE ALLOCATED



SOURCES OF FUNDING*

Global Affairs Canada**
\$750,000

Donations from the public
\$786,414

Our Emergency Fund
\$50,000

Total
\$1,586,414

In the coming year, Development and Peace will continue to improve the living conditions of Rohingya refugees in camps in Bangladesh by increasing access to water and sanitation services, safe shelters, and basic necessities.

We will also focus on the special needs of women and girls, who are severely affected by the crisis, by promoting access to education, training, and psychosocial support. In addition, we will strengthen our work with host communities to re-establish their livelihoods, mitigate social tensions, restore the environment, and revive the local economy.

Lastly, we will continue to demand unhindered humanitarian access to Rakhine state in Burma to provide humanitarian assistance to the 450,000 Rohingya who have limited access to basic services and live in extremely precarious conditions.

* As of August 20, 2018.

** Funding comes from the Canadian government's Myanmar Crisis Relief Fund, which consists of matched contributions made by Canadians between August 25th and October 31st, 2017.

A plea for peace and reconciliation

Current conditions in Burma do not allow for a safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugees. As part of its programming, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada is calling on the Government of Canada to:

- Support initiatives focused on social cohesion and self-sufficiency of refugees in Bangladesh and of their host communities.
- Ensure that the Burmese government allows continuous and unhindered humanitarian and media access in Rakhine state in Burma.
- Support citizen organizations in Burma promoting peace, democracy, and respect for human rights.
- Advocate for an end to impunity and the opening of an impartial international investigation on allegations of crimes against humanity as regards the Rohingya.
- Contribute to an inclusive peace and reconciliation process addressing the root causes of the forced displacement of Rohingya with the goal of finding a lasting solution to the crisis.

Spread the word

Help us keep the fate of Rohingya refugees as a global priority. Share our messages, videos, and images on social media by using **#rohingyarefugees**



Your generosity saves lives!



"My country is as dear to me as yours is to you. If Bangladesh and Burma resolve the issue of our return to our country through meetings and discussions, we'll return. But we don't want to go back there as long as we haven't obtained justice for the torment we've suffered."

– Muhammed Hussein,
Rohingya community leader.

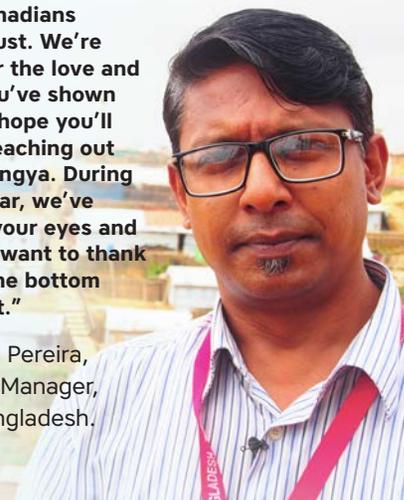
We would like to thank each and every Canadian who, across the country, have shown compassion and tremendous generosity toward the Rohingya people. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your trust in Development and Peace – Caritas Canada. We also thank our institutional partners, in particular Global Affairs Canada, for their support and commitment.

Our partners in Bangladesh are working tirelessly on a daily basis to enable people who have lost almost everything to live with dignity.

Nearly 100,000 Rohingya refugees have been reached through our action in refugee camps in Bangladesh. With your support, we could help more than 200,000 refugees and strengthen our initiatives among host populations.

"I thank Canadians for their trust. We're grateful for the love and support you've shown us and we hope you'll continue reaching out to the Rohingya. During this last year, we've served as your eyes and ears, and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart."

– Ferdinand Pereira,
Protection Manager,
Caritas Bangladesh.



Development and Peace – Caritas Canada is still accepting donations to continue to meet the needs of Rohingya refugees.

For more information on how to donate, go to devp.org/rohingyas or dial 1 888 234-8533.



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