



Statement by the international partners on Caritas Bangladesh's Emergency Response Program (ERP) serving Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals

"In recent months, the spirit of generosity and solidarity which is a distinguishing mark of Bangladeshi society has been seen most vividly in its humanitarian outreach to a massive influx of refugees from Rakhine State...."

— Pope Francis, Dhaka, [November 30, 2017](#)

Five years after Pope Francis lauded the humanism of Bangladesh, his words ring even more true.

CONTEXT

Caritas Bangladesh's emergency relief program follows [50 years of service](#) and experience in responding effectively and sensitively to crises and fighting poverty through sustainable, people-centered programs.

Convened by Caritas Bangladesh (CB), delegates from 11 of its international partners, CB authorities and staff members met in Cox's Bazar from November 13 to 15, 2022 to review its emergency response program for the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs, i.e., Rohingyas) and identify its next priorities. The Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and the Additional Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (ARRRC) also joined the meeting. This statement reflects the consensus that emerged from the gathering.

COMMITMENT AND COMPETENCIES

Since 2017, the emergency program has grown to serve FDMNs across the sectors of shelter and non-food items; water, sanitation and hygiene; protection; education; disaster risk reduction; and livelihood in currently nine camps and on the Bhasan Char Island. It also serves host communities in four *Upazilas* (subdistricts).

CB ensures emergency services to the FDMNs through five multipurpose women's and girls' centers, 11 multipurpose children's and adolescents' centers, three multipurpose community centers, three learning centers, two water supply stations, a water reservoir, and six warehouses. CB has ensured the following support with the funding support of Caritas Internationalis and other partners in the last five years:

- Provided shelter-related assistance, services, and materials to 179,599 households and community-level shelter training to 40,690 individuals
- Installed 127 tube wells and 916 handwashing devices; constructed 416 latrines and 220 bathing spaces; de-sludged 5,797 toilets; excavated two reservoirs; maintained two water networks; and distributed 23,214 hygiene kits and 16,656 soaps
- Provided protection-related services, training or psychosocial support to 89,783 individuals, including 11,963 women and girls
- Provided basic education services to 223 children and 1,500 adolescents and youths
- Provided income and livelihood support, including through employment in disaster risk reduction activities, to 21,337 households
- Helped 547 households build new shelters after fires in two camps
- Provided COVID-related services and materials to 57,960 individuals in 12,075 households
- Distributed 18,829 liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders, refilled 44,049 LPG cylinders and provided solar lamps to 33,238 households

CONCERNS

Five years after the massive influx, Kutupalong of Cox's Bazar district remains home to nearly 1 million FDMNs. The residents of these camps, until today, depend entirely on international humanitarian assistance. Declining funding, therefore, poses a growing challenge. Newer global crises, including the



war in Ukraine, the climate crisis, and the cost-of-living crisis, have shifted international funders' priorities. Earlier, smaller, forgotten influxes of Rohingya people into Bangladesh did not attract any concerted response. Considering the challenges for the international community and the humanitarian system overall the Rohingya crisis and its magnitude must not be forgotten. If the current crisis, which is much larger, is forgotten, Bangladesh will face enormous challenges because local resources are insufficient.

An emerging contextual challenge is the slow pace of localization, hence funding and assistance provided must be coordinated efficiently, timely, and effectively among the government, the UN, and the National and Local agencies.

The lack of educational opportunities in the camps is a major concern for children, adolescents, and youth. Other concerns pertain to mental well-being and the vulnerability of women, children and persons with special needs. The [security situation](#) in the camps may be exacerbated by less scope of work inside the camps for the Rohingyas. Finally, because of constraints on the choices of durable materials, shelters remain vulnerable to fire, heavy rainfall, and storms and require frequent maintenance and repair at considerable expense.

CONSENSUS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following a tour of the camps, the international partners agreed that the activities run by Caritas Bangladesh are of uniformly high quality and are well managed. They remarked on the creativity, enthusiasm, professionalism, and high commitment of the camp staff to the target group and were happy to see that issues of gender, justice and equity were being attended to.

A consensus emerged between international partners and Caritas Bangladesh that, to some extent, aligns with Bangladesh's stated official positions.

Caritas Bangladesh and the international community owe a debt of gratitude to the people and government of this country for their support and humanitarian spirit. We agree with the RRRC that Bangladesh is the "innocent victim" of a crisis it did not create. As such, it merits continued international support.

This gathering recognizes and affirms that:

- The international community must secure the cooperation of Myanmar to facilitate the safe, voluntary return of those forced to flee their homelands. Until then, the right of Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals to safety, health and dignity must be protected where they are by all actors.
- International partners will lobby their governments to sustain and increase funding for the Rohingya crisis and to pressure Myanmar to cease persecuting minorities.
- While it is right that Ukraine and other global and emerging crises attract the world's attention, protracted crises like that of the Rohingya must not be forgotten or de-prioritized.
- Caritas Bangladesh should give more emphasis to better integrating and coordinating its services and to "mainstream" gender, protection, safeguarding, environmental sustainability, disaster risk reduction and accountability into and across all its sectors of activity.
- The Government of Bangladesh should maintain and coordinate its support to Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals and the organizations that serve them.
- Given the protracted nature of FDMN presence, appropriate arrangements should be made to ensure Rohingyas' access to livelihoods; education beyond grade 3; right to movement; and more durable shelter solutions.