

Rohingya crisis one of the fastest growing in recent years, warns UN refugee agency

15 September 2017 – The humanitarian situation in parts of Bangladesh sheltering hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees continues to deteriorate, making the crisis one of the fastest growing refugee crises of recent years, according to the United Nations.

“[The crisis is] creating enormous humanitarian needs in an area of Bangladesh already affected by earlier refugee influxes, recent floods and not equipped to cope with large numbers of new arrivals,” Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told journalists at a media briefing in Geneva today.

According to estimates, some 380,000 Rohingya refugees, fleeing violence in Myanmar, have crossed the border into Bangladesh since 25 August.

“A visit to the area this week by a UNHCR team, led by Assistant High Commissioner for Operations George Okoth-Obbo, found people suffering real hardship and some of the most difficult conditions seen in any current refugee situation,” said Mr. Mahecic.

Refugees continue to arrive daily outside of the two established camps which are already substantially overflowing, and many people have received little meaningful help to date, he added.

The UN agency has been responding to the situation and assisting those coming but its in-country stocks have been exhausted, noted the UNHCR spokesperson, adding that deliveries of more aid – flown in earlier this week – are currently underway.

Children worst affected

Challenges, however, are the greatest for children. According to the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)), there are at least 240,000 children among the refugees, including about 36,000 who are less than a year old. There were also 52,000 pregnant and lactating women.

“Conditions are ripe for the spread of disease,” Marixie Mercado, a UNICEF spokesperson highlighted at the briefing, noting that refugees have little protection from the elements and lack drinking water.

“There is nowhere near enough latrines, and extreme mosquito activity has been forecast for the coming days. It is important to note that even before the crisis, half of the children in Rakhine state [in Myanmar] had suffered from chronic malnutrition, meaning they were vulnerable to disease,” she said.

To help cope with this situation, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) is stepping up its efforts, and starting 16 September, will launch a polio and measles vaccination campaign to cover 150,000 newly arrived children aged 6 months to 15 years old, said Tarik Jasarevic, a spokesperson for the UN agency.

“In the coming days, [we will also] distribute emergency medical kits to cover 100,000 people, 2 million water purification tablets and cholera kits for 20,000 people,” he added, noting that the UN health agency is also supporting the Government of Bangladesh in providing medical teams to new spontaneous settlements.

The World Food Programme ([WFP](#)), the UN’s emergency food assistance agency, has also upped its response, delivering high-energy food bars, and together with partners, hot food and rice for cooking to tens of thousands of refugees.

‘Remarkable generosity’ of Bangladeshi communities

Mr. Mahecic also noted that Bangladeshi communities have shown “remarkable generosity,” welcoming refugees into their homes and sharing resources with them.

However, as the number of new arrivals continues, UN agencies are in urgent need of additional funds to provide protection and life-saving assistance.

Among them, UNHCR has appealed for an initial amount of \$30 million for its emergency response in the country until the end of year.

Similarly, UNICEF made an initial appeal for \$7.3 million over three months, including almost \$3 million for water and sanitation alone, but that amount was calculated on the basis of 200,000 people and that number had now doubled.

Fresh violence in Central African Republic leads to more displaced – UN agency

15 September 2017 – Expressing concern over continued violence in the Central African Republic and the resulting “massive new levels” of displacement, the United Nations refugee agency has underscored the need to ensure that relief workers are not made targets of hostilities and are given the humanitarian security they need to carry out their mission.

“Since May, fresh and fierce clashes between armed groups in the CAR have

[wrought increasing suffering, deaths and destruction of property](#),” said Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)).

“Many newly displaced people speak of having witnessed killings, robberies, lootings and kidnappings. Even after reaching safe locations, they often risk assault by armed groups, if they venture outside,” he added.

According to the UN agency, the crisis, well into its fourth year, has left one in every two Central African in need of humanitarian assistance or protection to survive and, if left to fester, the violence could negate the progress towards recovery in the country.

The violence has also driven over half a million people from CAR to seek refuge in neighbouring countries and displaced an additional 600,000 people within the country.

The level of insecurity has also prevented UNHCR and other relief organizations to fully assess the full extent of damage or displacement from the recent violence.

“Some of our planned humanitarian deliveries by air have also been delayed or blocked, due to the armed groups’ presence [and] aid agencies, including UNHCR, are increasingly among those targeted by armed groups and have, in some instances, been compelled to temporarily withdraw their personnel,” said Mr. Mahecic.

“Despite the challenges, we continue to help those displaced in areas like the Haute-Kotto provincial capital of Bria, which was at the centre of much of the displacement in the east,” he added, noting that the UN agency’s response is struggling due to lack of resources.

Earlier this year, UNCHR [issued an appeal for \\$209 million](#) for its operations within the country as well as to assist refugees from the Central African Republic in neighbouring countries. However, only 9 per cent of the appeal has been funded thus far.

[UN chief condemns deadly terrorist attack in southern Iraq](#)

15 September 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today condemned the terrorist attacks in southern Iraq and called for the perpetrators to be quickly brought to justice.

In a statement from his spokesperson, the Secretary-General expressed “his [sincere condolences](#) to the families of the victims and to the Government and

people of Iraq.”

Terrorists attacked the Thi-Qar province on 14 September, reportedly killing or wounding dozens of people.

In the statement, Mr. Guterres reiterated UN support to the Government and people of Iraq in fighting terrorism and violent extremism.

[UN dedicates annual Peace Day to safety, respect for refugees and migrants](#)

15 September 2017 – The United Nations in New York today marked the International Day of Peace with the annual ringing of the peace bell and calls for combatants worldwide to lay down their arms and observe a day of ceasefire and non-violence.

This year’s ceremony was dedicated to the more than 65 million people forced to flee their homes to escape conflict and persecution.

“When more and more doors and minds are being closed to refugees, [let us show solidarity](#),” [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said at the ceremony, which focuses attention this year on the spirit of Together, a global initiative led by the UN to promote respect, safety and dignity for [refugees and migrants](#).

“Let us highlight the shared benefits of migration to economies and to nations. When others receive the support they need and deserve, we are all more secure and better off,” he added.

The Secretary-General, joined by UN Messenger of Peace Jane Goodall, as well as Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the President of the General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák, thanked those participating for their efforts in working towards world peace.

“Those of us fortunate enough to enjoy peace and prosperity should do everything we can to allow others to enjoy it as well,” Mr. Guterres said.

Young people made up much of the audience, alongside the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, and young musicians who opened the ceremony.

Participants at the Peace Bell Ceremony in Observance of International Peace Day. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

Later in the day, Mr. Guterres addressed youth at a student observance, urging them to focus on what binds them as a human family, and not on what is different.

“To avoid war, we need to be able to build bridges, to combat discrimination, to struggle for justice and human rights for all, to make people respect each other, to make people see their identities respected but at the same time feel that they belong to the larger community where they are integrated, he [said](#).

The UN is marking the Day before the annual 21 September date due to next week’s high-level General Assembly debate in New York.

The Day was established in 1981 by the UN General Assembly. Two decades later in 2001, the Assembly unanimously voted to designate the Day as a period of non-violence and ceasefire. The UN invites all nations and people to honour a cessation of hostilities during the Day, and to otherwise commemorate the Day through education and public awareness on issues related to peace.

[**INTERVIEW: UN should be flagbearer when it comes to gender parity, stresses top official**](#)

15 September 2017 – This week [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres launched a new strategy to achieve gender parity across the United Nations – something he described as “an urgent need, a moral duty, an operational necessity – and a personal priority.”

The System-wide [Strategy on Gender Parity](#) provides a roadmap to reach parity at the senior levels of leadership by 2021, and across the board by 2028. In particular, it covers targets and accountability; special measures; an enabling environment; senior appointments; and mission settings.

A key focus of the strategy is increasing the recruitment and advancement of women, in particular in the middle to senior management levels, where the gaps are the greatest and a glass-ceiling persists.

Leading this key element of the Secretary-General’s effort to create a modern Organization and workforce is his [Senior Adviser on Policy, Ana Maria Menéndez](#), a national of Spain who brings to the position more than 30 years of experience in diplomatic service involving bilateral, regional and global issues.

“This is not only about numbers, though numbers are very important,” Ms. Menendez said in an interview with *UN News*. “But it also has to do with being able to attract and retain and motivate women. It also has to do with special, temporary measures when situations need to be corrected because of this parity gap.”

The Special Adviser, who was appointed in June, also discussed why it is important for the UN to set an example in the area of gender parity, the vital role of Member States in advancing this goal, as well as other steps being taken in this area.

VIDEO: Secretary-General’s Senior Adviser on Policy, Ana Maria Menéndez, discusses the new strategy launched to achieve gender parity within the United Nations, and what needs to be done to achieve this goal.

UN News: The Secretary-General has, this week, released his strategy to achieve gender parity in the UN. Can you tell us a bit about this goal? Why is it important? Where the UN currently is? And how this strategy will make an impact?

Ana Maria Menéndez: As you know very well, the Secretary-General has established gender parity as a priority, ever since taking office in January. This is a very important issue for him, and to prove that he really means it, this week we are presenting the gender parity strategy. The gender parity strategy is very important, not only because it is a right, but it’s also going to have – I am sure – an impact on the effectiveness and credibility of the United Nations. I can say that, for example, at the beginning of this year, for 2017, the situation in the system was that there were 50 per cent women at Professional levels that can be considered the beginning of one’s career – that is to say P1, P2. But when you went into senior positions, there were only 29 per cent women. So you see that the higher the grade, the larger the parity gap.

the higher the grade, the larger the parity gap Ana Maria Menéndez

Obviously, another problem is that if you go into the middle levels, you notice that for women it is very difficult to be promoted from the level of P3 to D1, D2, ASG, USG levels. So we have this situation, and it is really necessary to work on it so that the situation is reversed and corrected. The Secretary-General has appointed to the Senior Management Group, 17 women and 15 men. That’s getting very much closer to parity, but [there is] still, of course, a long way to go.

I must say also that the gender parity strategy is very specific. There are plenty of recommendations with a lot of concrete and specific measures that are going to be put into place. This is important because parity has been a long-standing goal of the Organization but we never reached it. Perhaps because we were not able to take these specific measures in a structured and coherent way – such as we have now in the gender parity strategy.

And this is not only about numbers, although numbers are very important. But it also has to do with being able to attract and retain and motivate women. It also has to do with special, temporary measures when situations need to be corrected because of this parity gap. It also has to do with creating an enabling environment because there is a cultural aspect to it. And we also need a cultural shift. So as I said, I think this time we have targets that are bold but are realistic – that parity at the senior level should be reached in 2021. In most of the [UN] system, [parity] should be reached by 2026, and there will be a few outliers that will go until 2028. That is the ultimate target.



Secretary-General António Guterres (centre) meets with the Group of Friends for Gender Parity in March 2017 at UN Headquarters. UN Photo/Mark Garten

UN News: Does the UN have a particular role to play in achieving gender parity?

Ana Maria Menéndez: Indeed, it has a role to play because, as you know very well, the UN, among other things, is a standard-setting Organization. So it is very important that we lead by example, that we enact the principles that we stand for, and that we serve the peoples of the world. So this is very important. Of course, I have to say that many Member States have implemented measures and they are closer to parity, and many CEOs are also working to close the parity gap at the level of corporations and private institutions. So we need to learn from them. And if we reach parity, I think that will be a good example for everybody. So I think it is mutually reinforcing, but certainly the United Nations should be the flagbearer of this.

UN News: What is the specific role of the Member States in supporting this strategy?

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Ana Maria Menéndez: Member States can really support us in a lot of ways, and we are already in dialogue with them, because we really need their help and they can contribute and they are eager to do it. I must say that there is a lot of enthusiasm for this strategy. I can perhaps give you a few examples of how they can work with us. For example, they can put forward names for senior managers, names of women. They can also contribute with campaigns, both to disseminate strategies and to try to recruit more personnel, more women in those areas that lag a little bit behind – for instance, the peace operations, especially in the field.

They can also provide some donor support. It is not that we are asking for a lot of money, but it will help if we can have some financial support for some measures, especially at the beginning, that need to be [used for] modernizing

our system – human resources system – for tracking and monitoring. In general terms, be supportive. We have a Group of Friends for Gender Parity, which has 126 Member States, which is almost a record. We have also the Gender Champions network. So they can contribute a lot in a very substantive way.

UN News: The focus on parity has been described by the Secretary-General as a first step towards empowerment and equality by the UN. Can you tell us a bit more about any other efforts being undertaken to strengthen the UN's work on gender equality?

Ana María Menéndez: I think gender parity is of course part of a larger picture, which is gender equality. And [the] Secretary-General is of course very committed to the mainstreaming of gender equality across the system. The creation of UN Women is of course fundamental and essential to this. But by no means is it only UN Women who should be doing this work. It is really all of us; all entities have to contribute to this. I will also mention that there is of course Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 5. I think that mainstreaming this goal and working on this goal is very important, and gender equality is something that is cross-cutting and it's going to be present in all of the different strands of reforms that the Secretary-General is undertaking.