

## New project safeguards Rohingya refugees; boosts local farming – UN migration agency

A major canal dredging project underway in Southern Bangladesh to protect Rohingya refugees from monsoon floods, will have the added benefit of boosting local agriculture, the United Nations migration agency said Tuesday.

The [International Organization for Migration](#), or [IOM](#), is overseeing the dredging of more than nine kilometres of abandoned canals, which will then be renovated, in the Cox's Bazar area, which is home to around 700,000 mainly-Muslim Rohingya who have fled violence in northern Myanmar.

IOM said that the project in Ukhiya sub-district would [prevent flooding](#) and allow water runoff during the annual heavy rains that come with the arrival of monsoon season.

Moreover, the UN agency has employed 50 Bangladeshi labourers locally, to carry out the work, as part of a wider IOM-supported disaster-preparedness programme.

The project will not only help safeguard lives and livelihoods when the monsoon hits by reducing the risk of flooding, it will also provide much-needed irrigation channels during the dry season.

"There was no water flow in the canal, as it hadn't been maintained for years", said the agency's Damon Elsworth. "This resulted in flooding in the surrounding communities during the monsoon as the rainwater coming down from the adjacent hills couldn't flow through."

Cox's Bazar was already prone to landslides and flooding, even before hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees began arriving at the end of last August.

IOM, the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) and the UN human rights office ([OHCHR](#)) are participating in the \$20,000 canal clearing project.

Local residents working on the project said they were happy to be employed protecting community.

"It feels good that we were consulted at every step of this dredging work. It feels like it is our property that we're working for," said Syed Kashem, 65, a local community leader overseeing the dredging work.

Cox's Bazar has already experienced the first rains of the season. IOM and other agencies are working to help local authorities respond to a wide range of potential emergency situations. Roads, pathways, bridges and drains have been built and land has been stabilized and levelled to help keep access

routes open.

Other IOM projects include bridge building, access roads, steps, drains, and slope protection work, to enable communities cope with the monsoon. The agency is also stockpiling emergency aid, such as tarpaulins, food, water and medical supplies to ensure that urgent needs of both the refugee and host communities are met.

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## [UN calls on Algeria to stop expelling thousands of sub-Saharan African migrants](#)

The United Nations human rights office (OHCHR) has called on the Algerian Government to stop collectively expelling thousands of migrants, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, saying it violates international human rights law.

Earlier this month, an OHCHR team visited several towns in neighbouring Niger where they interviewed 25 expelled migrants and other witnesses, who described how Algerian authorities had been carry out mass round-ups.

“What is particularly worrying is that most of the people we spoke to said that [they were not subjected to individualized assessments](#)” said Spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani, briefing journalists in Geneva on Tuesday, adding that “we were not informed of the reasons for their detention, nor were they allowed to pick up their belongings, passports or money before they were expelled.”

“Many had to leave behind everything they had,” she said, detailing roundups that had taken place in the towns of Oran and Boufarik, as well as the Duira neighbourhood of Algiers, in March and April this year.

“Raids are reportedly carried out on construction sites in Algiers, as well as in neighbourhoods known to be populated by the migrants. Some also reported having been stopped in the street and detained,” she added.

While some were transferred rapidly to Niger, others were held in military bases and compounds, said OHCHR, where detention conditions were reported to be “inhuman and degrading”.

“From Tamanrasset, Nigeriens are transferred by bus to Agadez in Niger, while the others are crammed into big trucks to be transferred to the Nigerien border where they are abandoned and left to walk hours in the desert heat to cross the border into Niger,” said Ms. Shamdasani.

Migrants who remain, are fearful and concerns have also been raised that what

appear to be organized expulsions could increase racism and xenophobia locally, against sub-Saharan Africans.

“The collective expulsion of migrants, without individual assessment or any due process guarantees, is deeply alarming and not in line with Algeria’s obligations under international human rights law, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which Algeria has ratified.”

“We urge Algeria to implement the recommendations made by the [Committee on Migrant Workers](#) in April, including to explicitly prohibit collective expulsions and establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure that expulsions of migrant workers are carried out in strict compliance with international standards,” she continued.

“The Committee also called on Algeria to ensure respect for the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement,” referring to the practice of forcible return to migrants’ countries of origin, Ms. Shamdasani concluded.

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## [UN chief urges governments to shield more civilians from violence in conflict](#)

With more than 128 million people worldwide requiring immediate humanitarian aid, mostly due to war and violence, the United Nations Secretary-General has urged the international community to do more to [protect civilians caught in conflict](#).

António Guterres made the appeal during a Security Council meeting on Tuesday, where he presented a report outlining three ways governments can step up action.

He noted that last year, more than 26,000 civilians were killed or injured in six countries affected by conflict: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Somalia, and Yemen.

“The most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent conflicts and to end them,” Mr. Guterres told the Council. “This is why conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding are, and will remain, the highest priorities for the whole United Nations system.”



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Secretary-General António Guterres addressing the UN Security Council open debate on 'protection of civilians in armed conflict.' Jacek Czaputowicz (right), Foreign Affairs Minister of Poland, chairs the meeting.

The Secretary-General's report first calls on governments to develop national policy frameworks to offer more protection for civilians caught up in fighting.

Countries are also asked to support efforts by the UN and others to engage with non-state armed groups to develop practical codes of conduct for them, and action plans that address civilian protection.

Mr. Guterres said 17 groups have already signed action plans with the UN on ending child recruitment, adding that "we need more of these initiatives."

Finally, he urged countries to ensure accountability for serious violations to end what he called "the climate of impunity."

Steps include conducting credible national investigations and giving full support to the work of the [International Criminal Court](#), which prosecutes individuals charged with atrocities such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Secretary-General's speech highlighted numerous ways lives have been upended by war, such as being subjected to rape and other human rights violations, or enduring the horrors of bombing and shelling in densely populated areas.





UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), addresses the Security Council meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), echoed another concern expressed by the UN chief: attacks against medical facilities and personnel.

He said that in the two years since the Council [adopted a resolution on this subject](#), the ICRC has recorded more than 1,200 incidents in 16 countries, with health workers killed, hospitals bombed or looted, and medical supplies destroyed or prevented from crossing front lines.

“The gap between words and actions is rather dramatic,” he charged. “And it is imperative that all states, not only parties to conflicts, uphold international commitments and make the protection of healthcare a national priority.”



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Hanaa Edwar, Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, addresses the Security Council meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Civilians in Iraq have endured more than three decades of war, insecurity and violence, veteran human rights defender, Hanaa Edwar, reminded ambassadors.

She urged the Council to give more support to recovery efforts there, such as those underway in the city of Mosul, the last stronghold of the extremist group, ISIL, or Daesh.

Ms. Edwar said all Iraqi civilians must have access to accountability, which she stressed "should not be limited to some people and some types of violations."

She reported that families of Daesh fighters have been badly treated in camps. Meanwhile, women who had been forced to marry extremists, as well as their children, have been stigmatized.

"The successful elections following the liberation of areas under the control of Daesh offer us a chance to move forward to building inclusive peace and justice," she said. "In this effort, the rights of all women to full participation should be respected."

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**Armed gangs force 'growing number' to**

# flee north and south, in Central America

The number of people fleeing violence and persecution from States in Central America, including Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, has risen by nearly 60 per cent in the space of just a year, the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)) has warned.

According to UNHCR, many vulnerable women and children are among the more than 290,000 people who sought refuge in the continent's north, during the course of 2017.

By comparison, that is a 58 per cent increase from the previous year, and sixteen times more people on the run from the same region during 2011.



UNHCR Costa Rica

Refugees in Costa Rica receive training to enter the job market with the help of UNHCR.

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"We hear repeatedly from people requesting refugee protection, including from a growing number of children, that they are fleeing forced recruitment into armed criminal gangs – and death threats," said UNHCR spokesperson Aikaterini Kitidi, briefing reporters in Geneva.

"As people journey across borders and onwards, they face numerous dangers, including violence at the hands of criminal groups, often leaving women in



particular, vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.”

Despite the risks of travelling north to Belize, Mexico and the U.S. Ms Kitidi said that people felt they had no choice.

If they stayed in their home countries they faced “high levels of homicide” and violence, particularly targeting women and marginalized communities, she added.

Increasing numbers are also seeking refugee protection to the south; in Costa Rica and Panama. Applications for asylum from the region are increasing worldwide too, with 350,000 applications made globally between 2011-15, of which nearly 130,500 were filed in 2017 alone.

UNHCR helps asylum seekers and refugees by working with governments and civil society to provide access to shelter, jobs and welfare.

Of the \$36 million needed to fund the agency’s work, only around \$4 million has been received so far this year.

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## [Human rights under attack, ‘no longer a priority; a pariah’ – UN rights chief](#)

The world is sliding back on human rights and its principles are under attack in all corners of the globe, the top United Nations rights official warned on Tuesday, urging people everywhere to show “fierce and passionate commitment” in defending them.

In a hard-hitting [speech](#) marking the 25th anniversary of the [World Conference on Human Rights](#) that underscored the “universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated” nature of human rights, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said that a quarter century on, the world seemed instead to be “headed in another direction.”

At the 1993 Conference, 171 States adopted the [Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action](#), to strengthen human rights around the world. It was widely viewed as the blueprint for rights in the post-Cold-War era.

The conference also set in motion the establishment of the UN human rights office, or [OHCHR](#), which Mr. Zeid now heads.

[Addressing](#) the conference on Tuesday, he said there was a drift “backwards, to an era when racists and xenophobes deliberately enflamed hatred and discrimination among the public, while carefully cloaking themselves in the



guise of democracy and the rule of law.”

He cautioned that particularly in Europe, ethno-populist parties are on the rise in many countries, fuelling hatred and division. Once in power, these parties were deliberately spreading “distorted and false views” of migrants and human rights activists.

“Almost everywhere, across Europe the hatred they direct at migrants has infiltrated the mainstream parties and skewed the political landscape towards greater violence and suffering,” said Mr. Zeid.

### **Today is not a time for ‘soporific complacency’**

Noting the threats against human rights around the world, which were no longer treated as “a priority” but instead as “a pariah,” he called on everyone to stand up for what the Vienna Declaration really represents.

[“We need to use this anniversary](#) to begin to mobilize a much broader community to defend human rights with our fierce, and passionate commitment,” said Mr. Zeid stressing the need to make clear “the vital, life-saving importance of human rights for the daily lives and global future of our fellow human beings.”

“There is no time to lose. Let this be a turning point, so that the Vienna Declaration can stand proud – not as a decaying museum piece, but as the flag-bearer for a resurgent movement to build peace and progress,” he said.