

UN agencies helping Rohingya refugee camps brace for potentially devastating rains in southern Bangladesh

Against the backdrop of the fast approaching wet season in Bangladesh, United Nations relief agencies are working flat out to strengthen vital infrastructure and boost resilience among hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees living in rudimentary shelters as well as for local communities hosting them.

Assessments by the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) and partners indicate that at least 100,000 refugees and vulnerable families in the local community in Cox's Bazar – one of the world's biggest refugee settlements – face life-threatening risks from landslides and floods, and thousands more are at risk of disease and being cut off from assistance.

“With emergency situations inevitable when the rains hit, it is crucial we work together now to limit disaster as much as possible before it occurs,” Manuel Marques Pereira, the IOM Emergency Coordinator in Cox's Bazar, said in a news release Tuesday

“We need to be able to respond swiftly and effectively during crisis events.”

Preparation efforts include providing search and rescue training; setting up emergency medical centres; establishing bases for work crews and light machinery; and upgrading shelters to mitigate disasters. Work is also ongoing to improve roads and drainage, stabilize slopes (to prevent landslides and erosion) and setting up early warning systems.

In addition, IOM has created disaster risk reduction safety committees to warn refugees of what to expect and how to prepare for the wind and rain that are expected to bring deadly floods and landslides.

“It is vitally important to support members of the refugee and local communities with training and information in advance, so they are ready to respond and protect themselves and others when the worst conditions arrive,” added Mr. Marques Pereira.

But given the scale of the challenges, including the sheer size of the refugee population, limited suitable land, and harsh environmental conditions, it will be impossible to move everyone at risk, and therefore rapid emergency response action will be critical to save lives.

To improve response, an emergency drill is being conducted on Thursday (1 March) to develop rapid and coordinated operations, which is being attended by IOM, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),

humanitarian partners and Government agencies.

Since late August 2017, some 700,000 members of Myanmar's minority Muslim Rohingya community have been driven from their homes due to brutal and widespread violence in Myanmar's Rakhine province, joining some 200,000 Rohingya refugees displaced earlier.

Together with local host communities, the number of persons in need of humanitarian assistance in the region is estimated to number over a million.

[In Geneva, UN chief urges new push to free world from nuclear weapons](#)

Warning that nuclear weapons pose catastrophic risks to human life and the environment, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Monday called on the international community to make a reinvigorated push to rid the world of such weapons.

"Countries persist in the mistaken idea that nuclear weapons make the world safer," said the Secretary-General, addressing the UN Conference on Disarmament, in Geneva, Switzerland, on Monday.

"At the global level, we must work together towards forging a new momentum on eliminating nuclear weapons," he urged.

Outlining a new initiative to give greater impetus and direction to the global disarmament agenda, Mr. Guterres said the world must respond to the dangers of the over-accumulation and proliferation of weapons, and reinforce the need to integrate disarmament into the UN efforts on preventive diplomacy and peacemaking.

Side-by-side, a focus is needed on the impact of conventional weapons on civilians as well as on the link between disarmament and the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), in particular the resources lost to excessive military spending – resources that could have been used to spur development activities.

"My initiative will strive to offer a new perspective on traditional priorities; and a clear vision for the future; and also, practical and implementable actions," he said, noting that while the challenges are enormous, "history shows that it has been possible to reach agreement on disarmament and arms control even at the most difficult moments."

The UN chief also welcomed the completion of reductions by the United States and Russia under the [New START Treaty](#) (the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty),

and urged that the “courageous initiatives” taken by the Republic of Korea during the recent Pyeongchang 2018 Olympic Games be translated into lasting improvements, based on the central objective of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and sustainable peace in the region.

“We must work together towards our common goal: a world free of nuclear weapons,” underscored the Secretary-General.

Speaking alongside Mr. Guterres, the President of the General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák, stressed that Conference on Disarmament – which was established in 1979 but whose last decision was in 1996 – remains as critical as ever as the demand for disarmament has only risen, not fallen.

“The Conference on Disarmament has been deadlocked since the agreement on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, more than two decades ago,” he said.

“We have to address this reality [...] the Conference is the world’s foremost multilateralism forum on disarmament. It should be producing global frameworks and policies. It should be driving discussions and decisions, around the world. It should have the loudest voice of all,” he stressed.

The [Conference on Disarmament](#), established as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, is not formally a UN body but reports annually, or more frequently as appropriate, to the UN General Assembly.

Currently, the consensus-based body focuses primarily on the following issues: cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters, prevention of an arms race in outer space and effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Amid ongoing political tensions, situation in Burundi ‘not suitable’ for credible elections – UN official

Urgent efforts are needed to keep the “hard-won” gains in Burundi from eroding, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council on Monday, noting that while the security situation is calm, there is still the potential for volatility as political tensions persist.

The overall political situation, along with the Government’s decision to revise the Constitution, has hampered economic development, said Michel

Kafando, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi.

At the same time, though Burundi has made some progress, human rights violations are still being reported and the humanitarian situation remains a worry.

The environment is “not suitable” for the conduct of credible elections, planned for 2020, he added.

Presenting the Secretary-General’s latest report on the situation in the country, Mr. Kafando highlighted the efforts made at the inter-Burundian dialogue and said the region had decided to continue those talks, with strong commitments from the African Union and other regional partners.

“Dialogue remains indispensable, as the process sought to bring Burundians closer together with a view to building a strong nation,” he added.

Also at the Security Council meeting, Jürg Lauber (Switzerland), the Chair of the Burundi Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, said that the Configuration would align its work with subregional, regional and international efforts, focusing on the East African Community’s mediation initiative, a path to peaceful elections, socioeconomic dialogue with the Government and partners, as well as humanitarian and national reconciliation initiatives.

Noting that he would visit Burundi in the coming weeks, Mr. Lauber pledged to focus on five key issues: mediation efforts of the East African Community; the path leading to the conduct of free, fair and democratic elections in 2020; socioeconomic dialogue with the Government and its international partners; the humanitarian situation; and efforts towards national reconciliation.

He also informed the 15-member Security Council that the Peacebuilding Fund had approved three new projects for Burundi worth \$6.5 million and outlined several conclusions based on the Configuration’s recent work, which underscored the importance of the regionally-led dialogue, the 2020 elections, humanitarian efforts, improving socioeconomic development, the swift signing of Memoranda of Understanding – both between the Government and the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), and between the Government and the African Union – and the deployment of observers to provide a more accurate picture of human rights and civil society developments in Burundi.

[UN launches 24-hour hotline for staff](#)

to report sexual harassment

The United Nations is launching a 24-hour helpline to enable staff to call out sexual harassment in the workplace, Secretary-General António Guterres said on Monday.

“The [helpline](#) is a 24-hour resource for UN Secretariat personnel to speak confidentially with an impartial and trained individual who can provide information on protection, support and reporting mechanisms,” said Mr. Guterres in his email sent to staff members.

Going live tomorrow, the ‘Speak up’ helpline is part of the UN’s [five-point plan](#) to address such behavior within its ranks and will complement existing reporting mechanisms.

The goal is to attend to the needs of personnel, and to empower them to make informed decisions on action, if they choose, he said.

The Investigations Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services will, with immediate effect, take responsibility for investigating all complaints of sexual harassment, and implement a streamlined, fast-tracked procedure to receive, process and address complaints.

A specialized team focusing on the investigation of sexual harassment is being created, and additional investigators are under recruitment, with particular attention given to increasing the number of female investigators, Mr. Guterres said.

“I reiterate my commitment to zero tolerance of sexual harassment, and underline that harassment of any type is antithetical to the principles for which we stand as an Organization,” he said.

As members of a standard-setting institution, he said, the UN must be committed to fostering an inclusive environment in which every person is valued and respected. A harmonious, safe and civil workplace is a key to delivering on its mandates for the people it serves.

In Cameroon, UN deputy aid chief urges assistance as insecurity deepens in Lake Chad basin

Amid growing insecurity in Lake Chad, a senior United Nations relief official

on Monday said the international community and the Government of Cameroon must step up support for humanitarian action in the country, which is most affected by regionwide violence sparked by Boko Haram.

“The Lake Chad crisis and violence in the sub-region are far from over said Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Ursula Mueller as she wrapped up a four-day visit to Cameroon.

“The international community cannot spare any effort,” she added. “Violent attacks by armed groups, mostly affiliated to Boko Haram, have increased over the past year and I have seen its direct impact and growing humanitarian needs in the Far North of Cameroon.”

In Cameroon, Ms. Mueller met with the minister of External Relations and the governor of the Far North.

Visiting the Zamai internally displaced people (IDP) site and Minawao refugee camp, she saw first-hand the impact of the deteriorating security situation in the Lake Chad basin.

In the region, Cameroon is most affected by the Boko Haram conflict, which started in Nigeria’s northeast nine years ago.

More than 60 suicide attacks were conducted in the Far North in 2017 – a 50 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

Ms. Mueller recounted the story of a family in the Zamai IDP camp, in which the mother, Sara, and her baby had been kidnapped by and escaped from Boko Haram, saying that she had no idea of her husband’s whereabouts nor whether he was even still alive.

“We need to be able to provide food, water and other life-saving assistance, as well as protection, to women and men like Sara and her ten-month-old baby,” explained Ms. Mueller. “The response to increased forced recruitment and violent attacks should also be increased solidarity with those affected by crises.”

She underscored that this area needs greater attention, including from donors.

“Security and access are major challenges but the lack of funding remains, by far, the main impediment to humanitarian aid reaching those most in need,” flagged Ms. Mueller.

Currently, the Humanitarian Response Plan proposed by the UN and its partners have only received five per cent of the \$305 million required.

In Cameroon, 3.3 million people need urgent humanitarian assistance. In the Far North, one-out-of-three people, or 1.5 million people, are now food insecure at crisis and emergency levels.

Between an increased influx of refugees from the Central African Republic and

socio-political tensions in the northwest and southwest regions, the Deputy Relief Coordinator's visit also provided an opportunity to discuss other crises facing the country.

She emphasized that UN's deep concern about the situation in Cameroon, including in the south- and north-west.

"We are again calling on all parties to avoid further escalation of violence and to protect civilian populations," said Ms. Mueller.

"Further fact-finding missions will be taking place as early as next week and we are putting into place assistance to the internally displaced persons, who are estimated in the tens of thousands," she concluded.