

# UN scales up response as number of Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar nears 500,000

22 September 2017 – With the number of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar arriving in south-east Bangladesh edging towards half a million, United Nations agencies are [stepping up delivery of life-saving aid](#) to two official refugee camps, where the health concerns are quickly growing.

At the request of Bangladeshi authorities, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) is speeding up the distribution of plastic sheeting to get as many people as possible under at least minimal protection from monsoon rains and winds.

“On Saturday, we plan to begin distribution of kitchen sets, sleeping mats, solar lamps and other essential relief items to an initial 3,500 families who have been selected by community leaders,” UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic told a [press briefing](#) in Geneva.

Refugee volunteers and contractors are helping newly arriving refugees moving into emergency shelter, but it is vital that UNHCR site planners have the opportunity to lay out the new Kutupalong extension in an orderly way to adequately provide for sanitation and to make sure structures are erected on higher ground not prone to flooding.

In total, more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees are now believed to be in Bangladesh; 420,000 of them have arrived in the past three and a half weeks.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi will be in Bangladesh this weekend to get a first-hand look at the scale of the crisis as well as UNHCR’s response, and meet with refugees.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) said that camps are bursting at the seams and there is a huge risk of disease.

“WHO is very concerned about the health situation on the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, given the very crowded settlements, most of them spontaneous,” said Fadela Chaib, the agency’s spokesperson in Geneva.

“It has been challenging to roll out the emergency response, not least because of the difficult terrain and the very heavy rains, and the fact that the population in question is dispersed, mobile and often injured,” she added.

Ms. Chaib said the greatest risk is related to water and sanitation, with poor conditions increasing the risk of vector- and water-borne diseases. Cholera, which is endemic in Bangladesh, cannot be ruled out. WHO has provided some 20,000 people with water purification tablets.

“Immunization rates among children is very low,” she said, explaining that when children are malnourished and exposed to the elements, the risk of childhood diseases such as measles are very high.

WHO, together with other agencies, recently launched an immunization campaign against polio and measles. Owing to the poor weather conditions and the continuous influx of people, the campaign has been extended.

Around 40 WHO staff have been dispatched to Bangladesh, and the agency will deploy a team of epidemiologists over the weekend to support risk assessment for infectious diseases.

For its part, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) has now reached at least 385,000 people with food aid as of today. Together with its partners, WFP feeds more than 5,000 people daily in the area.

“The situation is dire and WFP is on the frontlines trying to reach people as quickly as possible,” spokesperson Bettina Luescher told reporters in Geneva.

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## [Funding shortfall jeopardizes humanitarian response in Yemen, UN aid chief warns](#)

22 September 2017 – Efforts to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, currently the world’s largest, are being hampered by insufficient funding and other challenges, the top United Nations relief official warned today.

“Despite the extraordinary scale of the suffering linked to the brutal conflict, including the threat of famine and the world’s worst cholera outbreak, Yemen [does not receive the international attention it deserves](#),” Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock told a high-level event held in the margins of the General Assembly.

Mr. Lowcock, who is also UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, noted that nearly 21 million people are in need of emergency aid or protection, most of them children, and that this year’s humanitarian response plan for Yemen is just 45 per cent funded, which means short-changing famine prevention efforts, and discontinuing programmes.

The World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) did reach 7 million people last month, helping to avert potential famine – but this came at the cost of cutting rations for about half of recipients to 60 per cent of the normal level.

“Yemen is an absolute catastrophe,” WFP Executive Director David Beasley said at a separate event today. “Of the less than 30 million people that live

there, 20 million literally don't know what's going to happen from day to day; 17 million of them are on the brink of famine."

He noted that WFP has received about half of the funds its needs, adding that the Gulf States, in particular, need to "step up and fill in the gap."

Mr. Lowcock called on donors to provide full funding for the Humanitarian Response Plan, noting that the Yemen Humanitarian Fund is one of the quickest and most effective ways to support the most urgent priorities.

Although only negotiations and a political settlement can put an end to this appalling, man-made crisis, all parties to the fighting in Yemen must be repeatedly reminded to comply with international humanitarian law, taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure, he said.

The coordinated effort by partners in all sectors is making an enormous difference, he added, but much more remains to be done.

Among the other challenges faced, Mr. Lowcock cited the delay or blockage of humanitarian assistance or the movements of humanitarian staff – including for the cholera response by de facto authorities in Sana'a; commercial imports restrictions; the closure of Sana'a airport to commercial traffic; and salary arrears for health workers, teachers and water and sanitation staff that are accelerating the collapse of essential services.

"Overcoming each of these obstacles is within the reach of the international community," said Mr. Lowcock.

In an interview with UN News, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen Jamie McGoldrick said he met with Member States this week in New York and asked them to provide more funding.

Mr. McGoldrick also met with those involved in the conflict and reminded them of their obligations to abide by international humanitarian law.

"Enough is enough," he said. "The suffering should not be the DNA of the people in that country."

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## [At UN, Central African Republic President outlines country's peace, reconciliation process](#)

22 September 2017 – The President of the Central African Republic (CAR), Faustin Archange Touadéra, reaffirmed today at the United Nations General Assembly his determination and that of his Government to make the peace

efforts succeed, but stressed that the country suffers from limited capacity as it continues to cope with a raft of post-conflict challenges.

In addition to the weak State response to the violence of armed groups, Mr. Touadéra regretted that even the staff of the UN Multi-Dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission, known by its's French acronym, UNMISCA, is not sufficient to cope to the challenges of protecting civilian populations.

"The increase in security threats due to violence imposed by armed groups required that steps be taken to curb the risks of widespread crisis," he told UN Member delegations attending the Assembly's annual general debate.

With this in mind, he called on the international community to increase the military strength of MINUSCA, particularly in view of the immensity of the territory it must cover. Mr. Touadéra also urged that the operation's mandate, which is coming to an end very soon, be revised to assist the Government in regaining control over areas with natural resources.

He went on to welcome the unprecedented mobilization of international solidarity in for CAR towards the implementation of the Rehabilitation and Peacebuilding Programme (RCPCA), after the November 2016 Brussels Donor Conference. "To follow up on the implementation of this plan, we have concluded an Agreement serving as a new framework for mutual engagement between the Central African Republic and the international community," said Mr. Touadera.

He outlined his hope that steps would be taken in 2017 to establish dialogue with the armed groups, noting that other major efforts would focus on implementing the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. He would also seek greater dialogue with regional actors in hopes they would provide political support for the road map for peace and national reconciliation.

[\*Full statement \(in French\) available here\*](#)

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## **'No room for complacency' when survival of future generations is at stake, Bhutan tells UN Assembly**

22 September 2017 – Addressing global leaders at the 72nd annual general debate at the United Nations, the Prime Minister of Bhutan underscored that the impacts of climate change – illustrated by devastating hurricanes and floods, and record-setting temperatures year after year – are very real.

"After centuries of neglect, fighting climate change is complex and

expensive,” said Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, underlining the need for all countries to fulfil their respective commitments.

“I am optimistic that we will be able to prevent the worst effects of climate change. But for that we must work together.”

Underscoring the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), he highlighted that poverty eradication is a critical component of all 17 Goals, and that while the endeavour is a complex challenge, it is possible with concerted effort.

The Prime Minister also spoke on the challenges posed by terrorism, as well as threats to international peace and security, and urged all countries to contribute to making the world a safer place.

Also in his address, the Prime Minister noted the reform initiatives by [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres and urged all UN Member States to support those measures. He also highlighted the ‘gross national happiness’ approach to development adopted by Bhutan as well as efforts to strengthen democracy in the nation.

[Full statement available here](#)

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## **Torture during interrogations not just wrong but also counterproductive – UN rights chief**

22 September 2017 – The torture and ill-treatment of persons suspected of crimes is not only “deeply wrong” but, from an interrogator’s perspective, also counterproductive, the United Nations human rights chief said today at an event held in New York.

“Abundant scientific and historical evidence demonstrates that the information yielded by people who are being subjected to violence is unreliable,” High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein [said](#) at the event, entitled “Torture during Interrogations – Illegal, Immoral, and Ineffective.”

The torture of detainees, who are captive and cannot defend themselves, also creates enormous rage among their larger communities, he added. “By feeding the desire for vengeance, torture produces more hatred and more violence.”

Today’s event, organized by the High Commissioner’s Office ([OHCHR](#)) and held on the sidelines of the annual high-level segment of the General Assembly, sought to inform discussions among Member States about the development of

standards and guidelines on investigative interviewing by police and other law enforcement agencies, with the aim of assisting States to meet their fundamental legal obligations to prevent torture and ill-treatment.

Among the participants in the event were the lead investigative interviewer in the Anders Behring Breivik case in Norway, and a former NCIS Deputy Assistant Director for Counterterrorism from the United States.

“Officials required to enforce the law should not undermine the rule of law.”

The High Commissioner noted that people who are in police custody for a very broad range of reasons are frequently subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment. This is particularly true, he said, in the first hours and days after their arrest, when – although they should benefit from the presumption of innocence – suspects may have no access to legal assistance or independent medical examination, and have not been brought before a judge.

“Alarming, in the past, some States have resorted to using psychologists to design brutal interrogation methods such as waterboarding, forcing detainees into small containers, forcing them to hold painful positions for hours or slamming them into flexible walls,” he stated.

“Furthermore, conditions for detainees are often so squalid and inadequate that they may amount to torture or other forms of ill-treatment under the terms of the Convention against Torture. This is true even in numerous developed countries.”

The High Commissioner cited the example of an allegation in which a pre-trial detainee in one of the richest countries in the world had died after prison guards cut off his water supply for seven days, to punish him for a violent outburst – leading to his death from dehydration.

“These abuses should matter, very deeply, to every member of the community,” he said. “Not only do they violate the rights of the individuals concerned, they also corrode what should be the protective and principled function of every police force.

“Officials required to enforce the law should not undermine the rule of law,” he continued. “If police break the law in pursuit of law enforcement, the message is one of capricious and abusive power. The institution which should protect the people becomes unmoored from principle; unresponsive to the law, it is a loose cannon.

“This destruction of public trust is profoundly damaging. When added to the perception that police abuses and humiliation of specific communities is tolerated – based on economic, geographic, ethnic, religious or other distinctions – it will certainly exacerbate tensions and may lead to serious violence.

OHCHR is planning to co-create a Manual on Investigative Interviewing, with

the UN's Police Division, for use by UN police officers. The Convention against Torture Initiative and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights are also preparing guidance on investigative interviewing that does not rely on threats and brutality.