

News story: UK and Canada call for international support for Rohingya crisis

On the margins of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland hosted a roundtable on one of the most pressing global issues, the Rohingya crisis.

The event provided an opportunity for Commonwealth countries to stand in solidarity with Bangladesh which is hosting more than 671,000 Rohingya refugees who have fled Burma since August 2017. In addition to the two hosts, Foreign Ministers from Australia, New Zealand and Bangladesh were also in attendance.

Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson said:

The plight of the Rohingya will not be forgotten. As a Commonwealth community we need to ensure there is a strong response to the urgent request for humanitarian assistance in Bangladesh. Lives depend on it.

The UK is proud to be one of the largest bilateral donors to the crisis, with £59 million committed so far, but alongside our financial contribution it is right that we use events such as the Commonwealth Summit to ensure that attention does not fade away from the almost 1 million refugees living in Bangladesh.

We want these people to be able to return home. But as UNHCR have said, the conditions in Rakhine are not conducive to safe returns. The Burmese authorities need to demonstrate that they are serious about the safety and security of the Rohingya. A credible independent investigation into reported atrocities is an important step in this process.

Foreign Minister, Chrystia Freeland added:

We stand with our partners in the Commonwealth to remind the international community of the urgent need to assist the Rohingya in both Myanmar and Bangladesh. We commend Bangladesh and host communities for opening their arms to hundreds of thousands Rohingya seeking refuge, and for the delivery of life-saving assistance. Bangladesh deserves our gratitude and continued support.

Canada will continue to provide gender-responsive humanitarian

assistance to vulnerable populations in Myanmar and Bangladesh, building on the \$45.9 million provided since the beginning of 2017 and maintaining its role as a lead donor to the humanitarian response. We will also take a number of immediate actions in response to the final report of Canada's Special Envoy to Myanmar, the Honourable Bob Rae.

The international community, including key Commonwealth Nations, must rally and reaffirm their support to ensure that the basic needs of those affected by this crisis are met. We also need to work together to hold perpetrators of violence to account, and actively coordinate our efforts to further promote diversity, inclusiveness, justice and equity for all, and support all efforts towards building lasting peace and reconciliation in Myanmar.

The group discussed the role of the UN in resolving the crisis including much needed access for UNHCR to Rakhine state in advance of any returns process and the upcoming UN Security Council Visit to the region. There was a general agreement that any returns must be safe, voluntary, sustainable, and dignified, and monitored by the UNHCR on both sides of the border. Attendees also discussed accountability options and the need for a credible independent investigation into mounting reports of atrocities.

Further information