

Humanitarian community calls for compassion for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, after fire ravages through camps leaving thousands destitute**23 March 2021, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh**

The humanitarian community is deeply concerned about the safety and wellbeing of tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh left destitute by the massive fire that raged through four camps on 22 March.

Fire services and civil defense, emergency and response teams and aid agencies rushed to the areas affected by the fire and helped move refugees to safer locations. Tragically, reports from the camps indicate that at least 11 people are said to have lost their lives in the fire and more than 500 others have been injured. Around 400 people are unaccounted for.

Government authorities and aid agencies worked throughout the night to help those impacted and assess damages in the camps. Refugees who fled the fires are taking shelter in various locations. Many are staying with relatives or in learning and transit centers which are accommodating the most vulnerable people. The Government of Bangladesh and aid agencies are providing water, hot meals and high energy biscuits as well as emergency healthcare to those affected.

The fire consumed shelters and personal belongings of refugees as well as essential facilities such as hospitals, primary health facilities, learning centers, and women friendly spaces in the camps. Teams on the ground say the scale and intensity of the fire is unlike anything seen before in the camps.

Some 24 hours into the response, preliminary assessments by aid agencies have found that some 10,000 Rohingya refugee families (approximately 45,000 persons) were displaced and a similar number of shelters have been damaged or destroyed in the camps as a result of the fire. Assessments are still ongoing.

As the humanitarian response continues, health care and mental health support is being provided to those who have been injured or experienced stress as well as first line responders. Moving forward, the priority will be to reunite families and children who were separated during the fire and the subsequent movements to safe places, as well as to identify and support persons with specific needs, such as older persons, pregnant women and persons with disabilities. Aid agencies are also monitoring the safety conditions of refugees to mitigate risks, as they remain vulnerable to incidents of theft, harassment, and exploitation. Another priority for authorities and humanitarian actors will be to replace the key documentation that Rohingya refugees lost in the fire.

Rescue efforts proved to be challenging as a result of the presence of perimeter fencing. In some instances, refugees themselves cut through the fence to escape the fire. Limited mobile connectivity in the camps also hampered the ability of refugees to call for immediate assistance and contact their families. It also continues to limit the coordination of the aid response.

Refugee volunteers are playing an invaluable role in the response. They are the first responders, helping people to safety, supporting fire response efforts and continue to work to support aid efforts on the ground.

The humanitarian community is urging the public to respect privacy of those Rohingya refugee families who have either lost family members or have been impacted by fires. We are calling for a show of compassion and solidarity towards the Rohingya refugee population during this very difficult time.

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