

Joint Statement On Cox's Bazar Fire In Bangladesh



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Joint statement on the fires in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

We stand in solidarity with the 10,000 Rohingya refugee families affected by the massive fires in Kutapalong Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The humanitarian community and the Government of Bangladesh have worked together tirelessly to support those affected by the blaze on March 22, 2021.

The fire wreaked havoc in the densely packed refugee camps and quickly raged across four camps in the world's largest refugee settlement – home to more than 1 million people. From the onset, Rohingya volunteers rushed to the scene as first responders and continue to work around the clock to help in close collaboration with the fire service, members of the humanitarian community and local residents who all contributed to contain the blaze and save lives. Despite these efforts, early reports from the camps indicate at least 11 people were tragically killed. With shelters burnt to ashes and nowhere to live, women, girls, people with disabilities, and older people also face greater threats to their personal safety.

We are especially horrified by accounts shared with us by Rohingya refugees, who told us they were trapped and unable to reach safety due to the fencing that now encloses the camps and, in some instances, had to cut an opening through the barbed wire fence to survive. The fencing hampered the ability of refugees to escape and caused significant delays to fire services. Fleeing in these circumstances is even more difficult, if not impossible, for refugees with disabilities. The delays contributed to greater damage to the homes, learning centers and health facilities, upon which the refugees rely, particularly in one camp where everything was destroyed.

The collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, the army, police and fire brigades and their efforts to put out the flames and work with humanitarian actors to bring aid to affected refugees is greatly appreciated. However, more must be done to ensure this catastrophe is not repeated in the future. Whilst by far the largest, yesterday's blaze was not the only significant fire to break out in recent months. Therefore, urgent action to address refugee safety and emergency humanitarian access is required to prevent loss of life and mitigate exposure to extreme risk in the future.

In the aftermath of Monday's events, we propose the following measures to be considered in close coordination with the UN, donor agencies, the Government of Bangladesh and refugee community leaders. By working together, the Government and the humanitarian community reaffirm our commitment to the safety and wellbeing of refugees and host communities in Cox's Bazar.

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