

Religions for Peace

Humanitarian Action for Rohingya Refugee *RfP* Bangladesh | 30 January 2018

Background:

25 August 2017 marked the beginning of a series of attacks and responses between the Rohingya Muslims of the Rakhine state and the government and military forces of Myanmar. Since then, the situation in the Rakhine state has produced a refugee crisis, with over 800,000 Rohingya Muslims and Hindus having fled from the violence across the border into Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi government has responded to the realities of this refugee crisis by building new shelters, issuing identification papers, and providing humanitarian relief such as food supplies. Nonetheless, the demand for aid continues to rise, and additional intervention is needed to secure the health and safety of these Rohingya Muslim and Hindu refugees.

On 13 September 2017 Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace (RfP)* International and Rev. Nobuhiro Nemoto, Secretary General of *RfP* Asia released an urgent appeal ([HYPERLINK*](#)) for members of the *RfP* network to respect the inviolable human dignity and actively protect all vulnerable people in the Rakhine state, standing in solidarity with all those who are suffering related to the conflict in the Rakhine state, calling for cessation of violence in the region, and identifying a platform through which to offer support. *RfP* has pledged to secure additional humanitarian aid for victims of this conflict and calls on all to respect the inviolable human dignity and actively protect all vulnerable people in the Rakhine state.



RfP has utilized its global multi-religious networks to bring together the support of faith leaders from the world's major religious traditions, including Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims. These traditions all emphasize the dignity of each person and call upon individuals and communities to welcome, assist, and protect the refugees, migrants, and displaced persons among us. Operating through a multireligious platform, from the highest seats of policy-making to grassroots action-based involvement, those of faith have profound

influence on those in need and occupy a unique position for providing aid. Through the work of *RfP* Bangladesh Christians, Hindus, and Muslims have all united under the shared principles of dignity and compassion, and have invested in inter-religious efforts that provide life-saving aid to the survivors of the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Multireligious Action:

Mosquito nets were one of the most needed items at that time for the vulnerable people. During the wet season that annually returns to this region of Bangladesh, mosquitos plague the area due to an excess of standing water. Carrying diseases such as malaria and dengue, these mosquitoes are a massive risk to health, most of all to children in poor housing situations or temporary shelters that accumulate water. According to the World Health Organization, mosquitoes are one of the deadliest insects in the world. Their ability to carry and spread disease to humans causes millions of deaths every year. In 2015 malaria alone caused 438,000 deaths. While millions of people are harmed by this tragedy every year, those most affected are the poor and displaced individuals living in underdeveloped housing and challenged by environmental conditions. The grave state of the refugee camps in Bangladesh have drawn attention to the impending health concerns imposed by the heavy presence of disease-carrying mosquitoes.



Members of *RfP* regional and national bodies world-wide have acted quickly in raising funds to bring humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees who fled from their homeland in Myanmar to Bangladesh. On behalf of *RfP* International and *RfP* Asia, *RfP* Bangladesh representatives delivered 1,300 mosquito nets to the refugees in Baluhhali Camp-2 on 12 October 2017.

Twenty representatives of *RfP* Bangladesh made their second trip on 20 January 2018. Among those who were representing *RfP* Bangladesh to provide on-the-ground assistance were Principal Barua, Secretary General of *RfP* Bangladesh, and Rev. Masamichi Kamiya, Senior Advisor, *RfP* Asia. The *RfP* delegation traveled with three 4-ton trucks to deliver 12 tons of rice. An army representative responsible for coordinating relief activities from all over the world suggested to *RfP* that the vulnerable refugees living in Jamtali and Balukhali No. 2 were most in need of the food supply. Upon arriving at Balukhali No. 2 Camp, *RfP* volunteers were met by temporary refugees who volunteered to assist in transporting bags of rice one by one to refugees.





Without sufficient monetary means to acquire food and basic supplies, regular support is necessary. Only those with ID registration letters can receive supplementary items. After the delivery of aid from *RfP* to some of the residents in the refugee camp the volunteers witnessed several Rohingya living outside of the camp, without proper shelter, who had fled from Myanmar but did not have proper ID registration letters.

The connections that multi-religious volunteers from *RfP* Bangladesh made with the Rohingya refugees at Balukhali No. 2 began fostering trust between the religious and cultural communities. This trust, cultivated through the in-person, action-oriented approach adopted by *RfP*, has nurtured the fundamental relationships with Rohingya refugees, opening the door to new possibilities for providing ongoing aid, especially to women and children.

This trust and collaboration will be essential as *RfP* continues to provide aid to Rohingya refugees. Although the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar agreed that all the refugees in Bangladesh would return to their homeland in Myanmar within two years, agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR have expressed concern about the feasibility of this agreement. They assert that unless full safety and security of the returnees at the State of Rakhine in Myanmar are guaranteed, the repatriation must suspend.

Noting these concerns, the *RfP* family is committed to continued engagement to support, with love and compassion, Rohingya refugees, while working toward an environment where they can live with full realization of their dignity.



Needed Next Steps:

In the initial phase of this humanitarian effort, *RfP* Bangladesh has been able to effectively distribute the life-saving mosquito nets and critical food supply by utilizing the support of *RfP* and its network of religious leaders. It is the hope of *RfP* Bangladesh that many more households in the refugee camps can be provided with the vital mosquito nets and additional food supplies.

While the project of distributing mosquito nets and food supplies will undoubtedly save thousands of lives when the plague of mosquitoes arrives and as food scarcity increases, consideration must also be given to the long-term needs of refugees. With additional support provided by *RfP*, and countless acts of generosity from individuals around the world, projects will continue to be undertaken to provide critical aid to the Rohingya Muslims and Hindus from the Rakhine state.

In March *RfP* International Honorary President Bishop Gunnar J. Stålsett and *RfP* International Deputy Secretary General Reverend Kyoichi Sugino will travel to Myanmar as leaders of a High-Level Delegation for a series of meetings with governmental and religious leaders to discuss the implementation of the recommendations handed down from the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan.