

Humanitarian policy statement: Christian Aid's response to the Rohingya pledging conference

November 2017



Authors:

Jane Backhurst, Senior Advisor for Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy for Christian Aid.

Cover image: Nearly 600,000 Rohingya people have crossed the border into Bangladesh since late August. They are mostly in camps around the city of Cox's Bazar. Credit: Christian Aid/ Rozana Majumdar.

Acknowledgements:

This paper was produced with the support of Rajan Khosla, Ray Hasan, Madara Hettiarachchi, Ramani Leathard and Shakeb Nabi.

Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice.

We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

christianaid.org.uk

Contact us

Christian Aid
35 Lower Marsh
Waterloo
London
SE1 7RL
T: +44 (0) 20 7620 4444
E: info@christian-aid.org
W: christianaid.org.uk

Pledging conference: 'a good start'

Christian Aid welcomes the 35 pledges made at the UN-backed donor pledging conference for the Rohingya crisis, held on 23 October 2017.

These pledges include the additional £12 million pledged by the UK, and €30 million pledged by the EU, to meet the \$328 million gap in funding requirements identified previously by the UN. However, these need to be honoured as funds are critically low.

Now, a fully-funded long-range and comprehensive plan is needed to provide adequate support to vulnerable families: a plan that aligns with the aspirations for a more effective humanitarian response to crises such as these, as outlined at last year's World Humanitarian Summit.

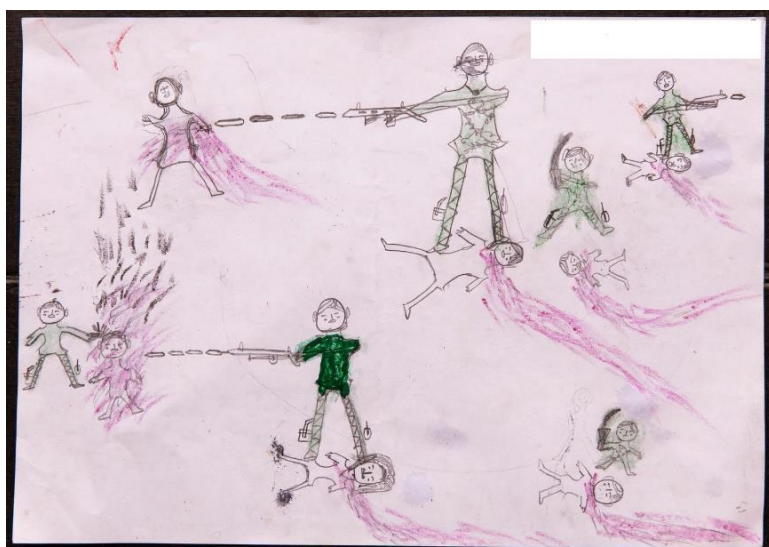
The conference is therefore a good start, if donors act responsibly to rapidly fulfil their funding commitments. However, a range of factors will dictate whether those affected will be able to seek safety and assistance in Myanmar and Bangladesh, adequately recover, and build their lives again safely.

Each week, 12,000 children now flee Rakhine state, Myanmar, to Bangladesh. Over 800,000 Rohingya people have sought safety in Bangladesh, nearly 600,000 of these since the escalation in violence in northern Rakhine state on 25 August 2017.

Children arriving in camps have told Christian Aid staff and partners what they have witnessed: the killing and maiming of other children, their parents and other adults, and attacks on their homes, schools and hospitals. Children depict in their drawings grave violations of the rights of the child (see *below*), and war crimes involving the responsibility of the parties to the conflict under international humanitarian law.

Most people left their homes in Rakhine with just the clothes on their backs, with no money to buy food or equipment with which to cook or build proper shelter. Persistent heavy rains have flooded many camps, making temporary tents useless. More aid will be needed over the coming year.

'A long-range and comprehensive plan is needed: a plan that aligns with the aspirations for a more effective humanitarian response to crises such as these, as outlined at last year's World Humanitarian Summit.'



Left: Balukhali refugee camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh: a picture drawn by Abdul, a young person who fled his home in Myanmar. © UNICEF/UN0126672/Brown.

Providing relief to conflict-affected communities

Christian Aid is working with partners delivering food, water, sanitation, shelter, blankets and essential household items, and providing psycho-social support to thousands of families in Jamtoli camp, in Bangladesh.

We are also taking steps to protect children and their families from further harm, and to ensure that communities are at the centre of decision-making that affects them. We have installed breast-feeding corners, a safe drinking water facility and a medical facility at relief distribution sites.

Christian Aid, with support of Irish Aid, is working with Lutheran World Federation, Rakhine Women Network and Mittiyar Resource Foundation in Central Rakhine, and is providing shelter, livelihood support, WASH, and Hygiene and Dignity Kits to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and conflict-affected communities. Our partners are conducting awareness on gender-based violence with the local communities.

We are grateful for the generous funds and prayers from our supporters, and to those who answered our collective NGO pleas in September.

'Christian Aid calls for unimpeded and timely humanitarian access to all those in most need, without discrimination, including those displaced inside Rakhine state.'

The need for a comprehensive plan

Christian Aid calls for a comprehensive and long-range plan to provide a protective banner around those who have fled the violence:

- 1.** Christian Aid calls on all parties to the conflict to end violence, for the full respect of international humanitarian and human rights law, including special efforts to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure against attack.
- 2.** As a humanitarian agency, Christian Aid calls for unimpeded and timely humanitarian access to all those in most need, without discrimination, including those displaced inside Rakhine state. While there have been improvements in humanitarian access, we have observed that this still needs to be improved to enable alignment with the condition, under the Geneva Conventions, for all humanitarian organisations to be impartial; that is, that all aid reaches those most in distress.
- 3.** We call on the Government of Myanmar to allow the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Rohingya people ensuring their protection. We urge the Government of Bangladesh to facilitate this return when it is voluntary and safe, and to facilitate the safe passage of Rohingya people seeking sanctuary and asylum.
- 4.** We call for UN Member States to work towards a fair deal for internally displaced persons by 2018 that is funded, ambitious, inclusive and respects international law. The Rohingya crisis is one example of the increasingly complex and often protracted nature of displacement globally. IDPs should enjoy the same human rights as other people, whether or not they are regarded as being citizens of

Myanmar or “stateless”. All civilians are afforded protection under international humanitarian law. Christian Aid and a growing number of faith-based and other organisations believe that the 2018 UN refugee and migration summit must arrive at agreements that include greater protection for refugees and migrants, and also spur greater protection for the 40.3 million IDPs out of the 60 million people displaced globally.

We call on the UK government and all donors, including the EU Member States, to:

- 1.** Honour the promises made, and meet the circa \$100 million gap between humanitarian needs and funding requirements identified by the UN. As noted at the end of the pledging conference, new funding commitments will be needed. However, pledges are not being converted into concrete funds, and other commitments have been left hanging. The UN states that \$434 million is required to assist 1.2 million people, but this figure is likely to be higher once humanitarian access has been strengthened. \$344 million has been either committed since 25 August or pledged at the donor conference. This crisis would also benefit from the UK and other Grand Bargain donor signatories taking forward commitments for multi-year and flexible funding instruments.
- 2.** Urge for a timely, independent and full investigation of the crimes against civilians attracting responsibility under international criminal law and other violations of international humanitarian law. The independent international fact-finding mission must be given full, safe and unhindered access without further delay.
- 3.** Provide direct funding to local impartial humanitarian organisations in Myanmar and Bangladesh in line with the World Humanitarian Summit commitment to strengthen and not replace local capacities.

‘Christian Aid and a growing number of faith-based and other organisations believe that the 2018 UN refugee and migration summit must arrive at agreements that include greater protection for refugees and migrants.’

Christian Aid is running a crisis appeal to help all communities displaced by violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine State, and Rohingya Muslims who have crossed the border into Bangladesh as refugees.

We have been working through local partners in Myanmar and Bangladesh for some time. We are working with authorities in both countries to secure permission to work with affected groups.

Using appeal funds, we hope to scale up our emergency response. For more information visit: www.caid.org.uk/rohingya.

For further details about the contents of this paper, please email Jane Backhurst: jbackhurst@christian-aid.org