

# Bangladesh: Head of UN refugee agency calls on Asia-Pacific leaders to show 'solidarity' with Rohingya refugees

The Head of the UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)), Filippo Grandi, on Tuesday [urged](#) government representatives and business leaders from the Asia-Pacific region to offer more support and protection for over 700,000 Rohingya refugees who have fled violence and discrimination in Myanmar's Rakhine State over the past year.

"I urge you to consider what support your Governments could pledge in solidarity with Bangladesh until solutions are found for refugees," he said, addressing ministers of 26 countries in Bali, Indonesia, at the Seventh Ministerial Conference of the Bali Process. "We need also to work towards comprehensive solutions for the people of Rakhine State, so that they are not forced to move in the first place," he added.

The [Bali Process](#) is a forum made up of 48 Governments and four international organizations – including UNHCR, the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)) – which was set up to enable dialogue and discussion on issues relating to people-smuggling, human trafficking and related cross-border crime.



UNHCR/Caroline Gluck

In March 2016, the [Bali Declaration](#) was adopted, highlighting the need for a comprehensive collective approach to resolve statelessness, invest in inclusive development, and expand safe pathways so that refugees and migrants would have legal alternatives to putting their lives at risk while on the move.

Since late August 2017, widespread and systematic violence against Myanmar's mainly Muslim minority Rohingya has forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes in Rakhine state for Bangladesh. Prior to that, well over 200,000 Rohingya refugees were sheltering in vast, makeshift camps in Bangladesh as a

result of earlier displacements.

In his address on Tuesday, Mr. Grandi urged Governments to move “from consultation to action on the commitments they made” in the Declaration, asking them to consider how they could share Bangladesh’s refugee burden.

“Could your Government support, for example, construction of hospitals in Bangladesh,” he asked, “that will treat refugees but also improve the health care of local people? Can we conceive of development, trade, and migration-related measures to help the people and Government of Bangladesh shoulder the responsibility of hosting some 900,000 refugees, such as expanding guest worker quotas for Bangladeshis that would increase remittances, or reducing tariffs on garment exports from Bangladesh?”



UNICEF/Robert LeMoyne

The UNHCR chief also stressed that the “real solution” lies in Myanmar itself, and he appealed for regional support to address the root causes of displacement in Rakhine: for example, investing in infrastructure that connects communities instead of dividing them, and providing expertise on resolving statelessness and intercommunal conflict.

The High Commissioner also addressed business leaders of major corporations who attended the Conference as part of the Bali Process Government and Business Forum, a public-private partnership to expand legal labour migration and combat human trafficking.

“People forced to move can fall prey to modern slavery, adding the insult of exploitation to the injury of exile,” he said, adding that “there are now, more than ever, opportunities for refugees in this region to contribute to their host communities.”

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**‘Immense’ needs of migrants making**

## perilous journey between Yemen and Horn of Africa prompts \$45 million UN migration agency appeal

As conflicts and natural disasters have sharply deteriorated living conditions in the Horn of Africa and Yemen, more and more people have been crossing the Gulf of Aden in both directions, leading the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) to appeal for \$45 million to provide critical aid to 81,000 people over three years.

The agency's Regional Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), launched on Monday, is meant to cover movements in both directions between Yemen and Horn of Africa nations, Djibouti, Somalia and Ethiopia.

"The humanitarian needs in the region remain immense, which leave migrants and host communities in a vulnerable situation," said Jeffrey Labovitz, IOM Regional Director for the region, including East Africa.

In 2018 alone, IOM anticipates 100,000 arrivals into Yemen – despite the ongoing conflict there – and approximately 200,000 returns from Yemen and Saudi Arabia to the Horn of Africa countries. Of these, the UN migration agency and its partners, including the UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)), will target the most at-risk.

They number around 81,000, including vulnerable women; unaccompanied children and the elderly; members of ethnic and religious minorities; and victims of violence, as well as persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and victims of human trafficking.

Irregular migration by those mostly looking for work from the Horn of Africa to Gulf countries has been steadily increasing over the past few years, with approximately 100,000 people entering Yemen in 2017 alone. Often, migrants and refugees cross the Gulf of Aden from Djibouti or Somalia, arriving in Yemen with the support of smugglers.

The countries on this route are beset with humanitarian challenges. In Yemen, where conflict has been raging since March 2015, more than 20 million people need humanitarian assistance, while Somalia and Ethiopia are also in the grip of complex emergencies because of conflict and recurrent natural disasters such as flooding and drought.

The three-year migration plan includes key humanitarian activities such as return registrations, psychosocial counselling for abuse and violence survivors, transportation assistance, and support for economic reintegration into their communities.

It also details longer-term actions, working hand in hand with governments to build national and local capacities on migration management; rescue-at-sea

and coastguard interventions; and sustainable socioeconomic infrastructure to support communities of origin, transit and destination.

In a statement, IOM said the objectives of the plan are in line with the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) of the 2030 Agenda, ensuring that humanitarian and development efforts feed into each other.

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## Indonesia: Psychological impact on earthquake survivors turns villages into “ghost towns”

Following the magnitude 7 earthquake which rocked the Indonesian island of Lombok at the weekend, more than 130 aftershocks have been felt with some villages being turned into “ghost towns”, journalists at the UN in Geneva heard on Tuesday.

Mathew Cochrane, Spokesperson for the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Associations (IFRC) , briefed reporters saying that “about 80 per cent of buildings had been damaged or destroyed,” in the north of the island, which is home to around 200,000 people, adding to the destruction caused by an earlier quake on 29 July.

“Thousands of people were displaced and the main needs right now are emergency shelter and basic relief,” he said, elaborating that because the IFRC is still unable to access some remote villages, “we are far from having a complete picture of the damage.”

The earthquake not only cut power and communication lines in the area, but physical access as well.

Turning to the psychological toll of the earthquake, he said that teams spoke of coming across “ghost towns and villages” that had been abandoned.

Thousands of people were displaced and the main needs right now are emergency shelter and basic relief – Red Cross Spokesperson Mathew Cochrane

“People have left homes. They are fearful of staying inside, or perhaps fearful of another major earthquake and a possible tsunami,” Mr. Cochrane said. He flagged that “there had been more than 130 aftershocks over the past 24 hours,” adding his suspicion that the figure had risen.

Mr. Cochrane explained that after an earthquake, “a sense of terror,” was

often experienced, as people struggled with differentiating between “what’s an aftershock and what’s actually the beginning of the next major one.”

“One of the needs going forward, in addition to emergency shelter and basic relief, will be to address these emotional scars and the concerns of communities, particularly remote communities,” he stated.

He underscored that colleagues from the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) had been active from the outset.

“About 110 staff and volunteers from the Lombok branch were activated really within the first minutes after the earthquake and they had been involved in search and rescue operations, transporting people to hospitals, and providing first aid, including for many tourists”, he continued.

Pointing out that some teams had also provided advanced medical care and distributed relief supplies, he explained that many suffered personal family loss and would also need support, in addition to additional capacity.

According to Mr. Cochrane, discussions were underway on what international assistance might be needed.

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## [Rights experts call for greater protection of indigenous people during migration](#)

Governments are being urged to ensure that the rights of indigenous peoples are recognized, whether they are living on their traditional lands or forced to move elsewhere.

The [appeal](#) has been made by a group of independent experts, appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, who are calling on States to act now to protect these communities during migration.

Globally, there are approximately 370 million indigenous people, meaning those who are descendants of the original inhabitants of a geographical region or country, according to UN estimates.

“In many parts of the world, indigenous peoples have become migrants because they are fleeing economic deprivation, forced displacement, environmental disasters including climate change impacts, social and political unrest, and militarization,” the experts said in a press release issued on Tuesday.

“While States have the sovereign prerogative to manage their borders, they must also recognize international human rights standards and ensure that

migrants are not subjected to violence, discrimination, or other treatment that would violate their rights”, they said.

“In addition, states must recognize indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination; lands, territories and resources; to a nationality, as well as rights of family, education, health, culture and language.”

The statement was released ahead of the [International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples](#), observed annually on 9 August, with this year’s theme highlighting migration and movement.

The human rights experts said there is a “dearth” of data on indigenous people who are migrants and this “invisibility” means that those who are detained at international borders, or prosecuted or deported from a country, are often denied due process.

The members of the UN [Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), called on national authorities to immediately reunite children, parents and caregivers who may have been separated during border detentions or deportations.

“In addition, States must ensure that indigenous peoples migrating from their territories, including from rural to urban areas within their countries, are guaranteed rights to their identity and adequate living standards, as well as necessary and culturally appropriate social services,” they added.

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## [Venezuela asylum numbers already higher than last year: UNHCR](#)

Some 117,000 Venezuelans have claimed asylum already this year – more than for the whole of 2017 – the UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)) said on Tuesday, after welcoming a decision by the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court to reverse the closure of the country’s border with its northern neighbour.

“UNHCR welcomes last night’s decision of the Court to overturn a decision by a Federal Judge in Roraima border state, to suspend admission of Venezuelans to the country and close the border,” said the agency’s spokesperson William Spindler.

In Geneva, Mr. Spindler added that hundreds of Venezuelans cross into Brazil’s northern Roraima state near the small border city of Pacaraima every day, in search of safety.

The route was blocked temporarily on Monday, when the frontier was closed in line with the initial decision by a federal judge in Roraima. Hours later it



was overturned by Brazil's higher federal court.

More than 200 Venezuelans were unable to finalize their immigration registration during the brief closure on Monday, but they were not deported or pushed back over the border, according to the UN agency.

Today, Brazil is home to more than 32,700 Venezuelan asylum seekers; another 25,000 are legally permitted to stay in the country, as they have work or residency permits, or similar.

"The total number of Venezuelan asylum seekers this year – this is asylum claims everywhere – is 117,000 ... and this figure surpasses the total number of claims made last year," Spindler told journalists in Geneva.

The development comes amid reports of widespread food and medicine shortages, skyrocketing inflation, political unrest and violence in Venezuela.



UNHCR/Reynesson Damasceno

Venezuelans wait outside the Federal Police office in the Brazilian border city of Pacaraima. In August 2018, Brazilian Federal courts temporarily halted, then resumed, admission of Venezuelans seeking asylum or special permits to stay in the country.

Just last month, the UN human rights office ([OHCHR](#)) published [a report](#) highlighting the Venezuelan Government's continuing failure to hold perpetrators of "serious human rights violations" accountable, including "killings, the use of excessive force against demonstrators, arbitrary detentions, ill-treatment and torture".

Noting "tensions" at the frontier between Roraima residents and the newcomers, the UNHCR spokesperson said that the agency would continue to support efforts to meet the needs of those arriving in Brazil.

Until now, the authorities have traditionally welcomed anyone in need of

protection and provided them access to basic rights and services, Spindler said, adding that movement between borders in Latin America is often very fluid.

“There were some tensions between the local people and Venezuelans,” he said. “We understand that there has been a large influx in Roraima and that’s why we are helping the authorities to cope with the situation.”

To date, UNHCR has helped more than 800 Venezuelans relocate to other areas in Brazil in order to alleviate the strain on the state, which has seen the greatest influx of people seeking shelter.

The UN agency says that most of those abandoning Venezuela for Brazil – and neighbouring Colombia – need urgent assistance with documentation, shelter, food and health care, which it seeks to provide by working with the authorities and partner organizations.

Among those helped by UNHCR are [a growing number of indigenous people](#) left vulnerable by food shortages.

They include the family of 33-year-old Warao community leader, Eligio Tejerina, whose youngest child died after falling sick with pneumonia.

“Since they were out of medicine, she could not receive proper treatment,” the 33-year-old Warao community leader said.

His surviving five children were already weakened and distressed by hunger. No longer able to find food in the local market, their only option was to leave, Tejerina explained.

“We decided to come to Brazil because our children were starving,” he said. “They used to cry from hunger. They were having only one meal a day, at night. Just a little portion.”