

FOREWORD

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One year ago, a startled international community watched a dramatic humanitarian crisis unfold on the north-eastern edge of the Bay of Bengal. In a matter of weeks, hundreds of thousands of desperate and terrorized people – 60 per cent of them children – poured across the border from Myanmar into Bangladesh, bringing with them accounts of the unspeakable violence and brutality that had forced them to flee.

Twelve months on, memories of those experiences remain raw among the roughly one million Rohingya refugees – including many from previous cross-border influxes – who live in cramped and primitive shelters inside the congested and often insanitary camps of Cox's Bazar.

The unstinting support of local Bangladeshi communities, and a multi-national aid effort led by the Government, has averted the more dire fears for the Rohingyas' safety and well-being.

Disease outbreaks have been largely kept at bay and famine has been averted. Safe water, sanitation, nutrition and other basic services have been installed, even if large gaps remain. For about one third of children up to the age of 14, a network of learning centres and child-friendly spaces offer a chance to begin healing, and a respite from their harsh surroundings.

A semblance of normality has descended on the camps and the neighbouring communities, but it's a normality that cannot last indefinitely. The refugees live on a knife-edge, gripped by uncertainty about their future, and still traumatized by their experiences in Myanmar. Their homes – many built on precarious hillsides – risk being washed away by the monsoon rain, or destroyed by a cyclone. A cholera or measles epidemic remains a real possibility.


With no end in sight to their bleak exile, despair and hopelessness are growing among the refugees, alongside a fatalism about what the future has in store. Older children and adolescents who are deprived of opportunities to learn or make a living, are at real risk of becoming a "lost generation", ready prey to traffickers and those who would exploit them for political or other ends.

This Child Alert calls for a concerted effort to build a new foundation for the rights and opportunities of Rohingya children over the longer term. By taking resolute action together, we – the international community as well as the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar – can give

Rohingya children's lives a stability and sense of hope that is currently absent. At the same time, we can strengthen the solidarity between Rohingya children and those living in host communities (whose situation is often not much better than that of the refugees).

Central to our call is the promise of a quality, multi-lingual education, built around the acquisition of essential life-skills, and competencies in literacy, language and numeracy.

Of course, a lasting solution to the plight of the Rohingya requires tackling the root causes of the Rohingya crisis inside Myanmar itself. The refugees cannot and will not agree to return home until the discrimination and violence that they have experienced for decades are ended, until their basic



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rights – to citizenship, free movement, health, education, and jobs – have been established, and their property restored.

But it is not only in Myanmar that difficult choices are needed. As our Call to Action makes clear, Bangladesh and the international community have critical responsibilities to address. This is a crisis that will require a complex, multilayered approach underpinned by long-term financial resources and infrastructural development, and bold political will.

Given the untenable situation in which the refugees find themselves, and its implications for both countries, this is a challenge that must be addressed, and rapidly. The Rohingya – and their children especially – demand and deserve nothing less.