



ROHINGYA IN CRISIS – PLEASE SUPPORT TODAY

Putting people at the centre of humanitarian response

In the past few weeks more than 500,000 Rohingya refugees have fled Bangladesh. As a stateless Muslim minority group in Myanmar, they have faced discrimination, violence and extreme poverty for decades. Most have walked for days and tell harrowing stories of violence only to arrive sick and exhausted at makeshift camps.

In humanitarian disasters, people affected by the crisis have an urgent need for information. Getting the right information can mean the difference between life and death. Affected communities need information about how to reconnect with family members or what aid services may be available for them. Otherwise, rumours, and misinformation can exacerbate the crisis and can lead people to make poor decisions or make them vulnerable to violence, extortion, trafficking or rape.

The lack of information, misinformation, and outright propaganda have driven the conflict, raising tensions on all sides, stoking rumours, emboldening extremist elements, and masking atrocities. There is no accessible Rohingya language media, leaving the Rohingya population of up to 1.5 million reliant on information only available in languages other than their own. Trust levels in Rakhine and Burmese language outlets are, unsurprisingly, extremely low. Insensitive and inflammatory reporting by some Bangladeshi news organisations, describing refugees fleeing violence as intruders or worse, feeds prejudice and dehumanizes refugees.

Further exacerbating this situation, access to northern Rakhine is highly restricted, including for humanitarian actors and journalists, making it extremely difficult for outside sources – such as international media – to provide useful or practical information for affected communities on the ground. Within this vacuum Rohingya communities are forced to rely on word-of-mouth. These trust networks extend beyond face-to-face communication, however, and although connectivity is limited, information (and misinformation) is effectively spread through mobile and social media.

THE INFORMATION CRISIS

Although the crisis facing Rohingya communities in Rakhine – and now regionally, in Bangladesh and elsewhere – is by no means new, the dramatic escalation in recent weeks has led to unprecedented levels of humanitarian need. The Bangladesh National Human Rights Council is among an increasing number of organisations and individuals

Support the production of a daily show for 6 months to provide life-saving information to mothers on how to take care of their new born children in the camps (1000 children were born in the last 2 weeks).

Support training for refugee correspondents on how to work with humanitarian organizations on the ground to deliver information to the refugees in languages that they understand.

Support the creation of an Information Hub in the camps so that people can understand what information they need to act on and can keep themselves and their families safe.

labelling the crisis as “tantamount to genocide”. Internews has conducted two assessments, one inside Myanmar and one at the border with Bangladesh. We found that:

- The people stranded on the border do not have enough food or medicine. Many of them are still trying to cross the mountains, dense bush and rice fields to reach Bangladesh. Several of them were shot while trying to cross the border or were wounded by landmines.
- The majority of the people stranded at the borders are women and children, with no information available in their language about: health and hygiene; pre- and post-natal care (1,000 children have reportedly been born in the no man’s land in the last 2 weeks); mine awareness; and how and where to access services.
- During the last week, there has been an increase of cyber-war / hate speech activities in Myanmar connected with the position of Turkey in the Rohingya situation.
- The limited amount of Rohingya language information circulating is heavily politicized and potentially influenced by extremist elements. This highlights the need for more reliable, balanced, accurate and verifiable sources of information both inside Myanmar and at the border. On the Bangladesh side, the local population is increasingly frustrated with the influx of refugees, which without positive interventions, may lead to tensions in the long-term.

INTERNEWS WILL LAUNCH THE ROHINGYA HUMANITARIAN INFORMATION SERVICE (RHIS).

Our RHIS will provide timely and widely accessible information, clear and uniform messaging to the influx population on humanitarian assistance and strengthen Communication with Communities (CwC) to include direct on access to essential needs such as food, shelter, aid and other services, for Rohingya populations. This will:

- Provide a two-way communication channel for Rohingya “Undocumented Myanmar National” communities in Bangladesh, through the establishment of a dedicated information hub within the RHIS; and
- Increase the access of Rohingya communities in northern Rakhine, Bangladesh and regionally, to reliable, balanced and accurate information through digital channels.

According to the latest report from the Inter Sector Coordination Group on September 7th, there is **an urgent need for more timely and widely accessible information sharing, including clear and uniform messaging on humanitarian assistance to the influx population**. The establishment of an information hub and strengthened Communication with Communities, including information on where to access essential needs such as food, shelter aid and other services, have been identified as major needs, particularly for male-heads of house seeking resources for their families.

Internews is committed to implementing a holistic humanitarian information service and our range of activities will ensure that people affected by this terrible crisis are not left to wonder in information darkness making a bad situation even worse. They must understand how and where to access help. We will:

- Train “Community Correspondents”: these will be Rohingya speakers, likely bilingual with fluency in Bengali, to help them effectively communicate with and on behalf of Rohingya communities. They will be trained in producing relevant communications materials;
- Produce and disseminate weekly humanitarian update (audio and print) with information about: registration processes, family reunification; services; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and health campaigns; security updates; and landmine awareness;
- Connect local communities with humanitarian organisations so that they know what communities say about the services and what they need;

Please support the Rohingya people today – they need our help. They have an urgent need for information.

Immediately following a crisis, understanding what has happened, how to get help and what to do to reduce the risk of harm can save lives. In the immediate aftermath, it is the community who are the first responders.

Providing them with information about how best to react can help them take control of their own recovery.

Since the 2004 tsunami in South East Asia, Internews has played a pioneering role in humanitarian communications, working closely with aid agencies, governments and community responders to ensure that people affected by disaster have access to timely, reliable information in languages they understand. Ensuring access to information after a humanitarian disaster restores people’s dignity and respect, fulfils people’s right to know, to ask questions, and to participate in crisis response and hold responders accountable for delivery of effective services.

Please support us today by donating to our Rapid Response Fund ensuring that we can support people in crisis.