



“The city yet to come is a “city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). His plan calls for an intense work of construction, in which all of us must be personally involved.” – Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 108th World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

The Day of Prayer for Refugees and Migrants on June 18th, 2023, is a day to work on ***Building a future for all***. Pope Francis encourages us to take time to think of those who may have been forgotten, and how they can be part of the future that is being built. The resources this year focus on the Rohingya, reminding us of the terrible reality they are forced to live, and challenging us to think about what we can do to ensure their inclusion in the construction of the future.

Who are the Rohingya?

The Rohingya are an ethnic Muslim minority from Myanmar, a majority Buddhist country in Southeast Asia. They mostly live in the Rakhine State of Myanmar, on the West coast. Rohingya are not recognized by Myanmar as citizens and have been legally stateless since the introduction of the Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Law. They have no voting rights, and Rohingya living in Myanmar have been forced to carry national verification cards, which effectively identify them as foreigners.

What caused the current crisis?

In 2017, the Myanmar military launched a violent attack in Rakhine State, destroying Rohingya villages and killing many. The attacks, which have been labelled as an act of genocide by the United Nations, caused over **750,000** people to flee from their homes to Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. In 2021, the military seized power in Myanmar, increasing instability and making it more difficult for Rohingya to return home.

What’s happening now?

More than five years on from the violence in 2017, there are now over **920,000** Rohingya living in the camps in Cox’s Bazar, making it the largest refugee camp in the world. **Approximately half of the camp’s overall population are children.** Thousands more people have fled Myanmar and Bangladesh by sea, heading south to Malaysia and Indonesia. **In 2022 alone, approximately 3,500 Rohingya attempted sea crossings, and at least 348 people died or went missing as a result.** In March 2023, a fire at the camp left approximately 12,000 people without homes or shelter. Fires are common in the camps in Cox’s Bazar, and the camps are also prone to flooding, particularly during Monsoon season, which sees many houses destroyed. Safety and security are scarce, with women and children often being targets of Gender-Based Violence, including rape and human trafficking. The camps at Cox’s Bazar are solely reliant on support from humanitarian agencies, and there has been a decrease in aid money as public, media, and government interest has faded.

What is Caritas doing?

Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand has been working with **Caritas Bangladesh** and **Catholic Relief Services** in Bangladesh to support Rohingya living at the camps at Cox’s Bazar. In 2018, Caritas Bangladesh launched the **BareFoot Counsellors Project** in Camp 4 and Camp 4 Extension, two of the 32 camps. The project aims to provide community-based protection and support for those living in these camps. Staff and volunteers run home visits and protection-based awareness training, and work to eliminate gender-based violence.





Since the beginning of the BareFoot Counsellors Project, people involved have greatly benefited from the work being done. Women have reported experiencing an increase in their strength, dignity, self-awareness, and self-dependency. There are increased feelings of safety and protection. The BareFoot Counsellors Project volunteers are doing incredible work to support the Rohingya communities living at the camps in Cox’s Bazar, their practices underpinned by the Catholic Social Teaching principles of human dignity, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, and subsidiarity. They truly embody the mission of Caritas to be “love in action.”

In 2022, the BareFoot Counsellors Project formed nine Community-based Protection Committees. Through this:



13,592 household visits were made



24,975 people attended awareness-messaging sessions



767 people received psychosocial support



266 people were provided with health, shelter, legal, and other services

Action Guide

Think about what you can do for the Day of Prayer for Refugees and Migrants. Here are some practical ideas for you and your community, especially towards raising awareness of the plight of the Rohingya communities displaced from their homes.

- **Display the Caritas poster** that has been prepared for the Day of Prayer for Refugees and Migrants. More posters are available upon request to caritas@caritas.org.nz.
- **Pray for peace and protection** for all those fleeing war, hatred, persecution, and poverty.
- **Educate and raise awareness** about the situation that Rohingya are facing, so they are not forgotten and abandoned by the world.
- **Collect or fundraise** for the work done to support refugees in Aotearoa or overseas. You may wish to use the Day of Prayer for Refugees and Migrants to raise funds for:
 - Local initiatives to resettle former refugees in Aotearoa.
 - Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand’s appeals for the Rohingya Refugee Crisis, peace in the Middle East, or refugees fleeing war in Ukraine.

Definitions

- **Migrant:** Someone who moves to other places (in their own country or across borders) in search of better work and/or living conditions (migrants from ‘Western’ countries are often referred to as expats – expatriates).
- **Asylum Seeker:** Someone who has left their country and is seeking protection due to a well-founded fear or experience of persecution, and who is yet to be granted refugee status.
- **Refugee:** Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted. They must be granted refugee status by a government or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- **Internally Displaced Person (IDP):** Someone who has been forced to leave their home but remains within their country of origin.

