
PLACE: Cox's Bazar

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Celebrating the resilience of Rohingya refugees on World Refugee Day 2021

Year on year, we are witnessing increasing forced displacement around the world. In 2020, despite the pandemic, the number of people fleeing wars, violence, persecution and human rights violations rose to nearly 82.4 million people. This is an unprecedented figure, and while the majority are internally displaced within their own countries, more than 20 million refugees have been forced to flee their countries seeking asylum from conflict and persecution in neighbouring countries. Almost 5% of these 20 million refugees are generously hosted by the Government and people of Bangladesh.

Today, World Refugee Day, is an opportunity to celebrate the resilience of refugees, particularly in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Refugees face challenges in normal circumstances, but the past year has presented new and unprecedented hurdles, including in accessing basic services such as education and healthcare, as well as COVID-19 vaccines.

The theme of this year's World Refugee Day is "together we heal, learn and shine". To celebrate the day, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Mr. Tahsan Khan visited Cox's Bazar and met with refugees to learn about their experiences.

In Cox's Bazar, Rohingya refugees have been "healing" alongside Bangladeshis in the multiple COVID-19 facilities established to serve both populations since the beginning of the pandemic. Today, World Refugee Day also marks the first Anniversary of Cox's Bazar's first Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in Sadar District Hospital, established with UNHCR support. The ICU has served more than 660 Bangladeshi and Rohingya refugee patients in the past year. Today, Tahsan inaugurated a new 24-hour laboratory to provide diagnostic services to the patients treated in the ICU.

"This ICU is the first of its kind in Cox's Bazar. In just a year, this facility has saved countless lives. The expansion of the facility to include a laboratory will ensure that more lives can be saved, both amongst the local population but also the refugees. This really is an example to the world," said Tahsan at the inauguration ceremony.

Bangladesh has shown a positive example to the world, not only in hosting the Rohingya refugee population for almost four years, but also including them in the national COVID-19 response plan and vaccination plan and ensuring essential health services continue in the camps throughout the pandemic. We expect an inclusive vaccine rollout to include both Rohingya refugees and vulnerable Bangladeshis, once the next COVAX vaccine allocation arrives in country, as until now, no Rohingya refugees have yet been vaccinated.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also significantly impacted learning worldwide, and Bangladesh is no different. Schools, educational institutions and learning centres have been closed since March 2020. With more than 52 per cent of the Rohingya refugees under the age of 18, this is having a lasting effect. We must continue to work together to ensure that refugee children can continue to "learn" and learning centres can be gradually reopened, ensuring that a generation is not lost.

To "shine" and excel is something we all aspire to, including Rohingya refugees. Through sports, art, music and creativity, they have continued to highlight their talents and keep their culture alive, despite the odds. Sports and the arts provide not only a platform to shine, but an opportunity to heal

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and to build bridges between communities. During Tahsan's visit to the Rohingya camps, he met with Rohingya musicians and filmmakers, and together performed a song.

“These young filmmakers from Omar’s Film School and these talented Rohingya musicians are doing incredible work to shine a light on the Rohingya culture and heritage through music, photography and film. They’re also working tirelessly to raise awareness about COVID-19 and other health messages. Their energy and enthusiasm is remarkable.” said Tahsan.

Until Rohingya refugees can return to Myanmar voluntarily, safely, and sustainably, we will continue to stand with them and to support them to live with dignity while they remain in Bangladesh. We continue to seek expanded education, skills training and livelihoods opportunities, to allow Rohingya refugees to live with purpose while in Bangladesh, and help facilitate their reintegration in Myanmar, when they can finally return home, as they aspire to do.

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