The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

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Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website and in print by Order of the House. Evidence relating to this Report is published on the relevant inquiry page of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Fergus Reid (Clerk), Rob Page (Second Clerk), Jake Barker, Emma Makey and Louise Whitley (Committee Specialists), Alison Pickard (Senior Committee Assistant), Zainab Balogun, Paul Hampson and Rowena Macdonald (Committee Assistants), and Estelle Currie (Media Officer).

Contacts

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Fifth Special Report

On 20 March 2018, the International Development Committee published its Third Report of Session 2017-19, on Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis - monsoon preparedness in Cox’s Bazar. The response from the Government was received on 14 May 2018. The response is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Conclusion 1:

We strongly urge the UK Government to urgently step up its efforts with other donor nations and international agencies to encourage and work with the Bangladesh government to overcome the barriers we have identified and meet this next challenge in practice. (Paragraph 10)

DFID response: Agree

The UK Government agrees on the need for monsoon and cyclone preparedness activities to be stepped up. The international humanitarian Joint Response Plan (JRP) estimates that more than 200,000 Rohingya refugees are living in areas at risk from flooding and landslides during the rainy season. Of these, 24,000 are extremely vulnerable and in need of relocation. The UK Government is working in close conjunction with the government of Bangladesh, other donors and humanitarian organisations to improve preparedness.

The government of Bangladesh has an excellent track record in disaster preparedness. It is important that this expertise and experience is extended to the Rohingya sheltering there. UK Ministers and officials have been in close contact with their Bangladeshi counterparts on this. We are encouraging Bangladesh to take measures to save lives, such as allocating land at lower risk of flooding, reducing population density in the existing camps and putting evacuation plans in place. The Foreign Secretary and DFID Secretary of State wrote jointly to Prime Minister Hasina on 20 March, urging Bangladesh to fully harness its expertise in these ways and reaffirming our strong support.

DFID commenced preparedness planning as early as December and has worked closely with the donor community, the UN and implementing partners to support coordinated action. DFID helped to shape the preparedness taskforce (which sits under the Inter Sector Coordination Group in Cox’s Bazar) following the deployment of a DFID preparedness mission in January. DFID has taken steps to advance preparedness measures for the monsoon and cyclone seasons by ensuring no sudden end to funding during the transition from the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) to the Joint Response Plan (JRP) in March, and by asking our partners to adapt their approaches to ensure resilience.

UK aid is ensuring that more than 250,000 people will continue to have access to safe drinking water throughout the rainy season. More than 7,000 latrines have been constructed and strategically placed throughout the camps, and more than 6,700 latrines will be decommissioned. UK-supported cholera, measles and diphtheria vaccination campaigns have been carried out in readiness. These will provide protection against some
of the most common communicable diseases in the camps, which are expected to be more widespread during the rainy season. More than 391,000 children under the age of seven have been vaccinated to date. Healthcare workers are also being trained to prevent, identify and treat common illnesses expected during the rainy season and to manage higher caseloads.

DFID has also taken steps to strengthen health preparedness. We provided funding for a field hospital to be deployed alongside the UK Emergency Medical Team (EMT) in December to address the diphtheria outbreak and continue operations to receive cholera cases. DFID is supporting the deployment of experts in communicable diseases, and water and sanitation, as well as supporting the Red Cross/Red Crescent appeal, which is providing critical field hospital capacity.

DFID is funding the reinforcement of shelters and other community infrastructure to increase resilience to rains and wind, and to provide the most at risk households with reinforced shelter materials and sandbags to protect from high winds and flood water. Around 450,000 people have benefited from support to make their shelters more resilient to rain and heavy winds.

UN agencies, with support from the UK, have started works to mitigate monsoon and cyclone risks including heavy engineering to support improvements in site access routes and infrastructure. Site improvements include improved drainage, protecting pathways, and stabilising steps and bridges to enable access are being undertaken. DFID is funding and encouraging other donors to support the Site Mitigation Engineering Project (SMEP), which will relocate or accommodate up to 30,000 of the most vulnerable refugees. We welcome the fact that the government of Bangladesh has made an additional 800 acres of land available close to the existing camps. The SMEP is working to make as much of this land as possible suitable for safe relocation of refugees. Given the topography and recent deforestation of the land in Cox’s Bazar however, it is not possible to guard against all landslide risk or to prevent flooding everywhere in the camps.

Conclusion 2:

We urge the UK Government to press for the Rohingya crisis to be considered as a priority by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April 2018.

(Paragraph 11)

DFID response: Agree

We agree with this conclusion. The Rohingya crisis was a priority for the UK government at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

The Foreign Secretary and Canadian Foreign Minister co-hosted a roundtable event to discuss the Rohingya crisis with selected Commonwealth Foreign Ministers at CHOGM on 17 April. The group, which included the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister, discussed the role of the UN in resolving the crisis, the need for access for UNHCR to Rakhine State in advance of any returns process and the UN Security Council visit to the region in April. There was agreement that any returns must be safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified,
and monitored by the UNHCR on both sides of the border. Attendees also discussed monsoon and cyclone preparedness, accountability options and the need for a credible independent investigation into mounting reports of atrocities.

The UK Government also helped to negotiate the inclusion of language on the Rohingya crisis in the CHOGM communiqué. It expresses solidarity with the government and people of Bangladesh, and commends Bangladesh for providing shelter to the Rohingya. It calls for a halt to all violence, a restoration of normality and accountability. Commonwealth heads agreed on the need for the sustainable return of Rohingya refugees to Burma with UNHCR oversight and for the creation of the necessary conditions for sustainable returns in safety, security and dignity. The communiqué calls for action to address the root causes of the crisis, including through the implementation of the Rakhine Advisory Commission’s recommendations.

Conclusion 3:
The international community must now further assist Bangladesh, as a matter of urgency, to build upon its humane and generous gesture in providing initial sanctuary for the Rohingya and to consolidate, in the terms of the international Humanitarian Summit, the ‘global public good’ it has provided the international community in this respect. This should also be reflected at the CHOGM in April and the World Bank’s meetings in the spring. (Paragraph 12)

DFID response: Agree

The UK Government welcomes the generosity shown by the government of Bangladesh and host communities in Cox’s Bazar in welcoming Rohingya refugees. We agree with the International Development Committee and echo the sentiments of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit that Bangladesh is providing an important ‘global public good’ in this crisis. It is important for the international community to continue providing strong backing to Bangladesh to support the Rohingya refugee population.

The UK remains one of the biggest donors to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh and has provided £129 million to support the refugees since the current crisis began in August 2017. This includes £70 million in new funding (announced on 7 May 2018) for the international humanitarian Joint Response Plan (JRP), which targets 1.3 million people in total, including 336,000 host community members. UK aid is making a big difference on the ground, providing emergency food for up to 367,000 people, and safe water and hygiene for up to 250,000 people.

The UK Government has taken every opportunity to engage with others in the international community to encourage them to support the government of Bangladesh and the Rohingya crisis response. The UK initiated a UN Security Council Presidential Statement on 6 November 2017, and encouraged and co-led a Security Council visit to Burma and Bangladesh in April. The UK co-sponsored a UN Human Rights Council Resolution in March, as well as Human Rights Council and General Assembly resolution in December 2017. Following the UK announcement of additional funding, the UK is actively engaging with other countries to encourage them to contribute to the JRP and over the longer-term.
The UK participated in a side event on the Rohingya crisis at the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings in Washington DC in April. The World Bank and Bangladesh publicly agreed to use International Development Association (IDA) funding to support Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh. The UK also secured support for the Rohingya crisis at the CHOGM (see above) and G7 Foreign Ministers meeting in Toronto in April.

**Conclusion 4:**

The Rohingya have suffered a completely man-made disaster at the hands of the Burmese regime -- described by the Bangladesh Finance Minister, A M A Muhith, as “absolute evil” after our meeting with him. It would be a further tragedy if huge numbers of these survivors were to fall victim to a completely predictable natural disaster, largely due to a lack of coordination, collaboration, political will, timely decision-making and practical action across donor nations and Bangladesh as the host. (Paragraph 13)

**DFID response: Agree**

We are appalled by the terrible violence that has taken place in Burma’s Rakhine State, which amounts to ethnic cleansing. More than 687,000 Rohingya have fled since the latest violence in August 2017. They join around 300,000 who have fled previous waves of violence, bringing the total Rohingya population in Bangladesh to approximately one million.

The UK Government is committed to a five-point plan for addressing the current crisis. We continue to urge the Burmese authorities to end the violence and ensure security for all without discrimination in northern Rakhine State; to grant full humanitarian access; to cooperate with the UN Fact-Finding Mission; to ensure that refugee returns can take place in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner; and to implement the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission, including those which relate to civil rights and citizenship.

In addition, we continue to work with the government of Bangladesh to ensure that refugees receive the humanitarian assistance they require. Comprehensive preparedness for the monsoon and cyclone season in the Rohingya refugee camps is an important part of this. We are in close contact with the government of Bangladesh, other donors and humanitarian agencies to ensure a concerted approach. The UK Government has carried out its own comprehensive cross-departmental planning to ensure its readiness to respond. We stand ready to support, if required, a robust international humanitarian response.