

**MEDIA RELEASE: Massive fire sweeps through Cox's Bazar, leaving thousands of Rohingya refugees without shelter**

23 March 2021

On March 22, a massive fire swept through Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, destroying thousands of refugee shelters, as well as health centres and other facilities.

Caritas Bangladesh reports that nearly 6,000 shelters have been destroyed, leaving approximately 9,000 households without a place to live.

"The blaze at Balukhali camp in Cox's Bazar district erupted in the late afternoon on Monday and spread quickly through at least four blocks," said Mohammad Shamsud Douza, a representative of the government's Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC).

Videos shared on social media showed thick columns of smoke over the camp, as aid workers and emergency services worked together to fight the flames and get the refugees to safety.

This is the third blaze to hit the camp in four days. The cause of the fire is still unknown, but is believed to have been spread by exploding gas cylinders used for cooking in the shelters.

Nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees live in cramped conditions in the camps in Cox's Bazar after fleeing conflict in Rakhine state in Myanmar in 2017, making the camp the largest refugee camp in the world.

"Rohingya families in the camps have been living without adequate access to food, clean water, education and health services for several years, which only became worse during COVID-19," said Bernice Sarpong, Caritas Australia's Humanitarian Program Coordinator for Asia.

"Fires like this are unfortunately common in the overcrowded camps, but they have a serious impact on already vulnerable families who have been struggling to cope with the combined impacts of displacement, poverty and the pandemic."

"The damage to health centres is especially worrying, as addressing health issues in the camps is already complex, and with the damage to health centres, this will only become more challenging."

"Our local partner, Caritas Bangladesh, is working with local emergency services and assessing the damage that has been done to infrastructure and shelters so that we can respond as effectively as possible."

Caritas Australia is supporting church and NGO partners on the ground. Caritas Australia is accepting donations to help support vulnerable communities in Asia through the Asia Emergency Appeal.



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**Note:**

**Bernice Sarpong, Caritas Australia's Humanitarian Program Coordinator for Asia is available for interview.**

**Marcel Ratan Guda, Project Director at Caritas Bangladesh is available for interview from Bangladesh.**

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