



House of Commons  
International Development  
Committee

---

**Bangladesh and Burma:  
the Rohingya crisis—  
monsoon preparedness  
in Cox's Bazar**

---

**Third Report of Session 2017–19**





House of Commons  
International Development  
Committee

---

# **Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis— monsoon preparedness in Cox's Bazar**

---

**Third Report of Session 2017–19**

*Report, together with formal minutes  
relating to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 14 March 2018*

## 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.

### Current membership

[Stephen Twigg MP](#) (*Labour (Co-op), Liverpool, West Derby*) (Chair)

[Richard Burden MP](#) (*Labour, Birmingham, Northfield*)

[James Duddridge MP](#) (*Conservative, Rochford and Southend East*)

[Mr Nigel Evans MP](#) (*Conservative, Ribble Valley*)

[Mrs Pauline Latham OBE MP](#) (*Conservative, Mid Derbyshire*)

[Chris Law MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Dundee West*)

[Mr Ivan Lewis MP](#) (*Independent, Bury South*)

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP](#) (*Labour (Co-op), Brighton, Kemptown*)

[Paul Scully MP](#) (*Conservative, Sutton and Cheam*)

[Mr Virendra Sharma MP](#) (*Labour, Ealing Southall*)

[Henry Smith MP](#) (*Conservative, Crawley*)

### 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](http://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

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the International Development Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 1223; the Committee's email address is [indcom@parliament.uk](mailto:indcom@parliament.uk).

# Contents

---

<b>Report</b>	<b>3</b>
Background	3
A new crisis	3
Extreme weather: heavy rain, storms, cyclones	3
Urgent next steps	5
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Formal minutes</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament</b>	<b>8</b>



# Report

---

## Background

1. We travelled to Bangladesh in early March 2018 as part of our inquiry into DFID’s work in Bangladesh and Burma<sup>1</sup> commenced in October 2017.<sup>2</sup>
2. As part of the programme, we visited the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar to follow-up on our interim report on that crisis (published in January 2018<sup>3</sup>). The scale of the displacement, the provision made by the Bangladesh authorities and the efforts of the various international agencies, NGOs and other organisations, have to be experienced at first hand to be fully appreciated.<sup>4</sup>

## A new crisis

3. However, during discussions in the camps and afterwards, it became clear that a second challenge was fast approaching with the potential to derail, if not utterly negate, all the painful progress made in offering the displaced Rohingya refugees a measure of sanctuary, safety and hope. The matters raised were of such urgency that we felt a further interim report was required without delay.
4. **While in Bangladesh, we heard grave and convincing concerns from many quarters that a substantial proportion of the Rohingya refugees’ accommodation was extremely vulnerable to the heavy rainfall that the imminent monsoon season would bring. Without decisions and action being taken very quickly to enable relocation to begin -- and to facilitate other mitigations -- people were going to die.**

## Extreme weather: heavy rain, storms, cyclones

5. The location, distribution and conditions of the Rohingya refugees’ camps and accommodation make them extremely vulnerable to the expected volumes of rainfall forecast for the 2018 wet weather, or ‘monsoon’, season and to the tropical storms and cyclones that are also a severe threat over the coming months. We were told that there were very serious risks of death, destruction and disease arising directly from flooding as well as consequent landslides and the escape of sewage and other forms of waste into a water-logged environment. These risks are estimated to affect some 230,000 Rohingya refugees.<sup>5</sup> With around 500 Rohingya still arriving each week into the Cox’s Bazar district, the population under threat is constantly increasing.

---

1 We were unable to visit Burma because the Burmese government [refused to issue the required visas](#).

2 See <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/international-development-committee/news-parliament-2017/dfids-work-on-bangladesh-and-burma-launch-17-19>

3 See [Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis](#), Second Report from the Committee, Session 2017–19, HC 504.

4 See, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2017/oct/09/rohingya-crisis-drone-footage-shows-expanse-of-refugee-camps-in-bangladesh-video>

5 We were informed that the latest estimates being prepared for the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) indicate that up to about 230,000 Rohingya refugees need to be relocated due to risks of flooding and landslides. [Media reports](#) indicate that 500 acres have so far been allocated by the Bangladesh authorities which are estimated to be able to accommodate 50,000 people.

6. This issue is extremely urgent for the simple reason that, at the time of writing, it is already mid-March and persistent rain is expected to begin in Cox's Bazar in April until October with very heavy rainfall in June, July and August. **Cox's Bazar is expected to experience over two and a half metres of rainfall during these three months alone -- average annual rainfall in the UK as a whole is 885 mm.**

**Table**

Cox's Bazar	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average rainfall (mm)	7	11	22	107	252	838	1060	784	347	249	73	20

Source: Climate-data.org

7. Conditions and factors in the Rohingya refugee camps which were described to us as creating, or aggravating, weather-related threats and risks included:

- the location of the camps in an area which experiences strong winds and cyclones without the benefit of the evacuation systems and cyclone shelters that have worked effectively for the Bangladeshi population but do not have capacity for the refugees
- restrictions on the use of durable materials, coupled with the sheer weight of demand, which have prevented the construction of new emergency shelters and led to the siting of structurally poor accommodation on hilltops and slopes offering limited protection from wind and wind-born debris<sup>6</sup>
- deforestation for fuel which has denuded the landscape and the consequent loss of binding root growth which has exacerbated the structural weakness of the sand and silt-based terrain, increasing the refugees' vulnerability to mud and landslides
- the sheer size, topography and population density of the Rohingya refugee camps -- plus the inhabitants' previous lack of access to effective health care, in particular vaccinations -- which have already created conditions ripe for a public health disaster (diphtheria has already appeared<sup>7</sup>), and
- the inevitable overwhelming of temporary sanitation arrangements by heavy rainfall, resulting in the environment being flooded by sewage, creating new vectors for the spread of contagious diseases.

8. We were told that the window of opportunity for establishing risk reduction and preparedness measures is closing. As the table above demonstrates, the time remaining

6 The accommodation we saw consisted of bamboo and tarpaulin shacks without foundations; and was described as 'absolutely typical'. The priority had been to provide shelter to meet the demand. Permanent and semi-permanent structures were not permitted by the Bangladesh authorities.

7 See for example <http://www.healthmap.org/site/diseasedaily/article/diphtheria-outbreak-among-rohingya-refugees-enters-third-month-12518>

until the rains start in earnest could be a matter of days. This in itself will hamper any efforts to take the steps necessary to prepare for the genuine deluges expected to start within two and half months.

9. In addition to the challenge of taking action once the rainy season has started, a number of substantial other obstacles and barriers to reducing the level of hazard, threat and risk for the Rohingya were drawn to our attention.

- The lack of access to sufficient suitable land was a key issue, with the obvious response being the immediate relocation of the most exposed or vulnerable people to other sites away from dangerous slopes and riverbeds.
- There was, however, a consensus amongst the wide range of credible representatives we spoke to that identifying suitable alternative land was not the issue so much as the granting, by the Bangladesh authorities, of access to it.
- DFID, the UN agencies and others argued that key implementing partners, such as the NGOs, could not be operationally effective without being able to secure appropriate visas from the Bangladesh authorities which permitted sufficient access and for feasible periods of time.

### Urgent next steps

10. *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.*

11. *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.*

12. *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.<sup>8</sup> This should also be reflected at the CHOGM in April and the World Bank's meetings in the spring.*

13. *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.<sup>9</sup> 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.*

<sup>8</sup> World Humanitarian Summit Political Communique, November 2016.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world/rohingya-repatriation-unlikely-to-succeed-bangladesh-minister/article22967170.ece>

## Conclusions and recommendations

---

### A new crisis

1. While in Bangladesh, we heard grave and convincing concerns from many quarters that a substantial proportion of the Rohingya refugees' accommodation was extremely vulnerable to the heavy rainfall that the imminent monsoon season would bring. Without decisions and action being taken very quickly to enable relocation to begin -- and to facilitate other mitigations -- people were going to die. (Paragraph 4)

### Extreme weather: heavy rain, storms, cyclones

2. Cox's Bazar is expected to experience over two and a half metres of rainfall during these three months alone -average annual rainfall in the UK as a whole is 885mm. (Paragraph 6)

### Urgent next steps

3. *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)*
4. *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)*
5. *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)*
6. *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)*

## Formal minutes

---

**Wednesday 14 March 2018**

Members present:

Stephen Twigg, in the Chair

Richard Burden	Lloyd Russell-Moyle
Chris Law	Virendra Sharma
Ivan Lewis	Henry Smith

Draft Report (*Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis—monsoon preparedness in Cox's Bazar*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 13 read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till Tuesday 20 March at 9.30 am.]

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

---

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2017–19

First Report	DFID's work on education: Leaving no one behind?	HC 367
Second Report	Bangladesh and Burma: the Rohingya crisis	HC 504
First Special Report	DFID's use of private sector contractors: Government Response	HC 322
Second Special Report	UK aid: allocation of resources: Government Response	HC 323