

Emergency response to the fire in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

05 March 2023



Photo by Md. Hasson

Overview

In the afternoon of 5 March 2023, a massive and devastating fire broke out in Kutupalong Balukhali refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Flames blazed for some three hours in Camp 11, which is managed by IOM, until the Rohingya refugee Safety Unit Volunteers trained on firefighting, local fire fighters and local authorities managed to contain the fire, around 5pm. 16 Three-wheeler Mobile Fire Fighting Units provided by UNHCR, were deployed from across the camps and helped reach the and congested areas. So far, no casualties have been reported yet.

- Some 12,000 refugees displaced. (32,200 population in Camp 11)
- Over 2,000 shelters destroyed or damaged.
- Over 90 facilities damaged including hospitals and learning centres.

Response

Under the lead of the RRRC, humanitarian partners were onsite from soon after the onset of the fire to assess the damage and establish a coordinated response. The RRRC, Additional RRRC, as well as the Deputy Commissioner rushed to the camp to provide support.



Site Management, Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI)

- Safety Unit Volunteers from across the camps (including those not affected) were mobilized to help extinguish the fire, as well as creating fire breaks where possible, using equipment provided by UNHCR.
- 16 three-wheeler firefighting vehicles were mobilized by UNHCR and partners.
- UNHCR evacuated the medical facilities in Camp 12 as a precaution.
- UNHCR and partners are on standby to deploy personnel including engineers to support the Shelter/NFI sector in the affected camp.

Medical

- Three Medical Mobile teams were activated.
- 90 Community Health Workers in Camp 11 and adjacent Camp12 have been deployed to initiate fire response activities, which include providing first aid necessary prior to the referral to the health facility, disseminate do's and don'ts during and after a fire incident, provide psychological first aid, and linking the refugees with other relevant services as required.
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) focal points have been activated by the MHPSS working group to coordinate with volunteers providing psychological first aid to those affected and referring cases with more individual needs.
- Food security partners supported by WFP will provide emergency food.

Protection

- UNHCR activated the tracking system to ensure identification and provision of necessary support to the fire affected population. This will help family members reunite if they were separated during the incident.
- The interagency PERU – Protection Emergency Response Unit has been activated. This is a multipurpose team trained and prepared to provide basic first aid and search and rescue.

UNHCR remains on standby to provide additional support to IOM and other humanitarian partners in the ongoing emergency response.

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