

## **Media Statement**

# **UNHCR Statement on Voluntary Repatriation to Myanmar**

22 August 2019

Through their bilateral Joint Working Group on repatriation, the Government of Myanmar conveyed to the Government of Bangladesh the names of 3,450 Rohingya refugees who have been cleared for return to Rakhine State, Myanmar. UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, sees Myanmar's engagement in this process as a positive step in the affirmation of the right to return of Rohingya refugees.

UNHCR has been assisting the Government of Bangladesh in surveying these refugees on whether they wish to return to Myanmar and to confirm the voluntariness of any individual decision to do so.

Over the past few days, together with Bangladeshi officials, UNHCR has visited refugee families in their shelters to establish whether they wish to return to Myanmar. So far, none of those interviewed have indicated a willingness to repatriate at this time. UNHCR will continue assisting the Government of Bangladesh in this process to ensure that all those cleared for return are interviewed. UNHCR appreciates the consistent commitment by Government of Bangladesh to ensure that the refugees' decisions will be respected.

UNHCR has agreed with the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar that any repatriation of refugees must be voluntary, safe and dignified. Respect for these principles will also have the practical effect of helping to ensure that return is sustainable. This has been confirmed in discussions Bangladesh authorities and UNHCR have had with Rohingya refugees this week. Many stated that they do hope to go home to Myanmar as soon as conditions allow and that assurances regarding their citizenship status, freedom of movement, and security in Myanmar could be provided.

Building confidence is essential. In late July, senior officials from Myanmar met with Rohingya refugees in the camps in Bangladesh. This was an important first step, and the dialogue should continue. Together with UNDP, UNHCR is supporting the Government of Myanmar's efforts through the implementation of quick impact projects to improve conditions for all communities in Rakhine State and promote social cohesion between them, so that the voluntary return and reintegration of refugees is possible. However, it is essential that UNHCR and UNDP have more predictable and effective access to refugees' places of origin and potential areas of return in Rakhine State.

The voluntary repatriation of refugees will require the continuous engagement of all concerned to build the trust of refugees, and is a process, not a one-off event. UNHCR remains committed to its role in supporting both governments in this process.

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