

For Immediate Release

PRESS STATEMENT

Update #3 - MERCY MALAYSIA'S CONTINUAL RESPONSE TO THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS IN COX BAZAR, BANGLADESH

Kuala Lumpur, 17 OCTOBER 2017 – MERCY Malaysia continues to call for urgent action to provide relief for Rohingya refugees in Cox Bazar, Bangladesh, as the rainy seasons bring forth new challenges such as rising prices of goods and potentially fast-spreading diseases. The refugee camps, spread across 12 designated camps in the Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox's Bazar, currently house almost a million refugees, with an estimated 60% comprising children, and 4% falling under children who are Unescorted or Separated from their caregivers.

Despite efforts from the Bangladeshi government, military and international aid organisations such as MERCY Malaysia, aid coordination remains a challenge mainly due to the large volume of people arriving almost on a daily basis to already crowded camps. With limited resources in a country already strained with an existing refugee population of 200,000, prices of essential goods and medications have begun to rise as demand exceeds supply.

“The most critical need at the moment is health services, which we have been providing at two of our Primary Health Clinics (PHCs) at the Thankhali and Balukhali camps since the end of Sept. Our medical officers at Thakhali PHC sees more than 100 patients daily, while the Balukhali camp, which is bigger, receives about 300 patients daily. To date, we have seen close to 7,000 patients, with the most common complaints being diarrhoea, headache, fever or infection, skin problems and gastritis,” said Dato' Dr Ahmad Faizal Mohd Perdaus, President of MERCY Malaysia.

Since the crisis erupted, MERCY Malaysia has deployed 20 medical doctors to the PHCs at the crisis-stricken refugee camps, the latest being mental health specialists to help refugees overcome their sense of hopelessness and helplessness. With the United Nations estimating that half of the refugee population are children below the age of 17, Dr Faizal said that there is now rising concern about the long-term effect of their sudden and treacherous exodus from the neighbouring country.

“We are in the process of creating Child-friendly Spaces for this particularly vulnerable group,” he said, adding that discussions and assessments are already underway to identify suitable locations for this purpose. The selection of suitable sites also poses a challenge, with many of the camp sites located along steep, hilly terrain. The lack of space also poses problems to the medical teams, who work in stifling, cramped clinics and face long queues of restless patients every day.

In view of the multiple challenges onsite, MERCY Malaysia will focus on developing a comprehensive health centre at the Kutupalong Expansion Block D site that will provide a wider range of medical services such as mother and child healthcare services. Plans are also underway to establish a proper clinical system which includes a triage, followed by registration, consultation and a referral system to refer patients with chronic conditions to referral centres such as Cox's Bazar General Hospital and international NGO health centres.

The language barrier is currently being managed with one translator provided by MERCY Malaysia's partner in Bangladesh, but that is clearly insufficient for the two busy clinics. Efforts are being made to get more local translators, especially those with medical knowledge, who can help with the triage and registrations so as to ease the treatment flow.

Following earlier concerns about the lack of site mapping which led to the uncontrolled mushrooming of latrines, MERCY Malaysia has been participating several cluster group meetings to ensure our Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and other relief initiatives are well coordinated with other agencies and partners.

“Initial plans for clean water distribution through water trucks are now replaced with plans for tube wells, which is more sustainable and can benefit a larger population. We have identified possible locations for a communal tube well and latrines at the Kutupalong site,” said Mohammad Said Alhudzari Ibrahim, who heads MERCY Malaysia’s Programme Development and Operations Department.

“We are also in talks with our local partner to build a semi-permanent communal latrine with zinc roofing and concrete walls, which will provide users more privacy and safety, apart from being more lasting,” added Said.

The communal latrines, which will house 4 toilet cubicles and 2 bathrooms, will have better drainage systems to address the problem of faecal sludge flowing into the water system. Being wider and deeper, they can be used for a longer time compared to earlier mobile latrines, which fill up all too quickly due to heavy use from the large number of people.

So far, 30 families have received MERCY Malaysia’s hygiene kits comprising a bucket, jerry can, lamp, dinner plates and two cooking pots. For a start, a total of 1,000 hygiene kits will be distributed to families in need, with more in the pipeline with the support of generous donations from Malaysians.

“Our main concern is the possibility of outbreaks in view of the cramped and crowded living conditions. We appeal to everyone to chip in any amount to make the lives of even one child, or one family at Cox’s Bazar, a little better,” urged Dr Faizal. MERCY Malaysia is trying to raise RM5 million to support its humanitarian efforts in Cox Bazar, Bangladesh, while a minimum of RM1 million is urgently needed to help internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Northern Rakhine, Myanmar. Donations can be made to MERCY Malaysia’s ‘Rohingya Relief Fund’ by logging on to www.mercy.org.my.

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About MERCY Malaysia

MERCY Malaysia is a non-profit organisation focused on providing medical relief, sustainable health-related development and risk reduction activities for vulnerable communities in both crisis and non-crisis situations, both locally and internationally. MERCY Malaysia recognises the value of working with partners and volunteers as well as providing opportunities for individuals to serve with professionalism. We uphold the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief and hold ourselves accountable to our donors and beneficiaries. For more information, please proceed to www.mercy.org.my

How is MERCY Malaysia funded?

To ensure independence and impartiality, MERCY Malaysia relies on donations from the general public for financial support. A portion of our income is obtained from institutional donors, individual government grants and other international organizations, which are given on project basis. MERCY Malaysia spends 80% of its income in carrying out its relief operations and support.

Important Note to Media: Usage of Wordmark MERCY Malaysia

In order to avoid confusion with other organisation(s) that uses “Mercy” as the organisation’s name or part of the organisation’s name, please take note that in addressing the name of our organisation, the wordmark for MERCY Malaysia is with capitalised “MERCY”, followed by the word “Malaysia”. When describing the organisation, the term “MERCY Malaysia” must always be used in full, and should not be partially referred to as “MERCY”, or “Mercy”. Thank you for your cooperation.

