

Joint Humanitarian Community Press Release

Eco-friendly face masks produced by local communities and Rohingya refugees help curb COVID-19 transmission in Bangladesh

Cox's Bazar, 9 February 2021 – All Rohingya refugees over the age of 5 living in all 34 camps in Bangladesh have received 1.6 million reusable cloth masks through the latest joint effort by aid agencies to help the Government of Bangladesh curb the spread of COVID-19 and provide livelihoods opportunities to local communities. Through an innovative initiative, more than 2,480 tailors from both the Rohingya refugee population and local communities came together to produce these environmentally friendly masks that were given to people to help protect them against the transmission of COVID-19.

“People are dying and suffering as a result of being infected with COVID-19. To help them avoid that situation, I'm making these masks happily,” says Moyuna Begum, a Rohingya refugee tailor.

The reusable masks were provided in conjunction with the distribution of the monthly food aid to refugees. The production of these masks together with the distribution of food assistance to Rohingya refugees was a joint effort by UN agencies and international and Bangladeshi NGOs specializing in food security, together with livelihoods and health partners.

“Since the start of the Rohingya response, thousands of tailors have been involved with tailoring and small business development trainings and initiatives in both the host community and the refugee camps, filling a critical need in both mitigating economic repercussions felt by a global recession as well supporting the health response by ensuring the most vulnerable have access to safe and free face masks,” explains Leah Beaulac, Livelihoods Working Group Coordinator.

Each mask has three layers of breathable weave fabric stitched in line with [WHO health guidance](#) and approved by the Civil Surgeon in Cox's Bazar. Targeted messages on the safe and proper use of the reusable masks and their importance in preventing the spread of COVID-19, in combination with other public health measures, were also shared with the refugees.

The aim of the initiative is to help alleviate some of the difficulties facing refugees and the local community as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic impact. For Rohingya refugees specifically, the programme helped build skills they could utilize in Myanmar to find employment and seek livelihood opportunities, once conditions are conducive for them to return in safety and dignity.

In general, this initiative contributed to the humanitarian community's larger efforts in Bangladesh to fill the gaps in the global supply chains for face masks, which are key in preventing the transmission of COVID-19. It also helped boost the situation of people bearing the economic brunt of the pandemic. Aid agencies, in collaboration with the government authorities, local communities and the Rohingya refugee population have distributed 4.8 million masks to people in Cox's Bazar since March 2020. Further, a stockpile of more than 415,000 masks will be handed over to Health Sector to mitigate health risks over the coming year. The humanitarian community's work in Bangladesh including COVID-19 prevention and response is possible thanks to the generous contributions of the international and national community.

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