

Development and Peace gets additional \$500,000 to help Rohingya refugees

Development and Peace has received an additional \$500,000 from Global Affairs Canada to spend between now and Christmas to keep Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh safe, warm and dry.

A year into the crisis that created the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, just beyond the reach of Myanmar's generals, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace has already distributed \$750,000 in federal government funding on food, clothes, building materials and more for Rohingya refugees through its regional partner, Caritas Bangladesh.

But it's going to take a lot more than the \$1.25 million marshalled so far to deal with more than 900,000 refugees fleeing genocidal attacks that burned down their villages, subjected women to gang rapes and shot villagers in the back as they were running away, said Dominique Godbout, Development and Peace humanitarian program officer for Asia.

In August, a report by the United Nations said Myanmar's military leaders should be prosecuted at the International Criminal Court in the Hague for genocide.

Canadian government money, supplemented by donations, has provided emergency food rations to 25,000 people who settled in and around refugee camps in Kutupalong and Nayapara beginning last August. Working through and with Caritas Bangladesh, Development and Peace has been able to build water points, latrines and shelters.

But the aid item in highest demand is gas stoves. The fast-growing refugee city had consumed all the wood in the area, leaving nothing for cooking.

"The girls would walk for three hours. They had to walk so far, because there was no wood," said Godbout.

Caritas Bangladesh has distributed 12,000 cookers, 2,000 of them contributed by Development and Peace. But on a visit to the refugee camps in June, Godbout discovered one small problem.

"We met with families. They showed us the stove and they were like 'We don't have any gas left,'" she said.

The next shipment of stoves will be accompanied by a six-month supply of gas. While Development and Peace would like to deliver additional services and programs, the Bangladeshi government is reluctant to grant permissions for anything that would make the camps permanent.

“We have to work with the Bangladeshi government. They have shown great solidarity and humanity by welcoming all these people,” said Godbout. “But now we have to find a way to integrate (the refugees) with the host population. We have to find also a way to make sure the host population is treated well.”

There are many reasons for Catholics to donate to Development and Peace’s special fund for the Rohingya crisis , but Godbout has one more based on her experience of walking through the camp.

“If they could see the children,” she said. “With what they’ve been through, yet they’re still smiling, still playing. And there’s still hope in their eyes. You want to give. You want to work for that, for sure.”