

## **Handicap International deploys backup team**

**Bangladesh, 13 October 2017.** As the number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh tops 500,000, Handicap International has expressed alarm at the plight of thousands of destitute people arriving in the country every day. Although only half of refugees have received emergency shelters from NGOs in the field, 2,000 Rohingya continue to cross the border daily. Handicap International has sent a backup team to help the most vulnerable individuals access humanitarian assistance.

Since the start of the crisis on 25 August, more than 500,000 Rohingya have taken refuge in Bangladesh, joining several hundred thousand Rohingya already living in refugee camps in conditions of extreme hardship.

Humanitarian organisations have to cope with a sudden, serious and worsening crisis as nearly 2,000 people - including many children - cross the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh every day. The needs of refugees are far from being met at this stage. Almost half are still without shelter and fewer than 20 percent have received food aid.

*"We need all sorts of supplies to assist families who are still pouring into the country. They left their villages in haste, taking nothing with them,"* explains Gilles Nouziès, Asia Desk Officer, for Handicap International. *"We've deployed more than 200 people in the field to meet immediate humanitarian needs, but clearly that's not enough. The crisis is very sudden and needs are great. The rainy season makes travel difficult and our teams find it hard to reach people. We visit the most vulnerable families on foot, dragging out the assessment stage."*

Access to humanitarian aid is one of the biggest challenges of this crisis. Most refugees live along the road bordering the district estuary. A narrow road, where most aid is distributed, it is already congested by humanitarian convoys at certain points. Many refugees live further back from the road and find it difficult to access aid distributions. People with reduced mobility, such as older or disabled people, also find it hard to reach assistance.

*"We are particularly concerned on the condition of extremely vulnerable individuals – pregnant women, elderly without caregivers, people with reduced mobility, people who are severely sick unaccompanied and separated children, survivors of violence, women with children under 1, single women with more than 3 children under 5. The scale of the crisis makes them particularly susceptible to disease, malnutrition, problems of hygiene, infections, psychological distress, and have more difficulty accessing humanitarian assistance they need than others,"* explains Reiza Dejito, Program Director for pour Handicap International in Bangladesh.

Handicap International has responded by sending a team into the field to implement logistics solutions, facilitating the transport of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable and isolated people.

Already weakened by a series of major crises, Bangladesh will find it hard to access water and food in the very near future and jobs in the longer term. The country cannot cope alone with a crisis of this magnitude.

### **ABOUT HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL**

Handicap International is an independent international aid organization. It has been working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster for 35 years. Working alongside persons

with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, our action and testimony are focused on responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions, and promoting respect for their dignity and basic rights. Handicap International has set up development programs in more than 60 countries and intervenes in numerous emergency situations. Offices in Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States work constantly to mobilize resources, jointly manage projects and to increase the impact of the organization's principles and actions. Handicap International is one of six founding organizations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997; and the winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize in 2011. Handicap International takes action and campaigns in places where "living in dignity" is no easy task.

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