

UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTARY FUND FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE

2018-19 Special Call in support of Rohingya torture victims in Cox's Bazar



In 2018, the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT) launched a Special Call to respond to the emergency needs of Rohingya victims that fled to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Four emergency grants were awarded to civil society organizations operating in Cox's Bazar for implementation in late 2018 and 2019.

Context

Campaigns by the Myanmar military against the Rohingya people in Rakhine State, Myanmar, which intensified on 25 August 2017, led to the forcible displacement of three-quarters of a million Rohingya people to neighbouring Bangladesh, the death of at least 10,000 people, and the destruction of over 37,000 Rohingya homes and structures. More than 900,000 Rohingya refugees live in camps and makeshift settlements in Cox's Bazar.

The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar has called for accountability for these international crimes, including a referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC). It also called on the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to work with victim communities to raise awareness about justice options.

Human Rights Response

OHCHR deployed four rapid response teams to Cox's Bazar between September 2017 and July 2018 and issued two public reports. Through human rights monitoring in the refugee camps and makeshift settlements, the team identified serious protection issues, particularly affecting women and girls, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

Direct Assistance for Torture Survivors

OHCHR identified that many of the Rohingya refugees were subject to torture and required direct assistance.

A staff of the UNVFVT Secretariat, who was part of the OHCHR rapid deployment team, identified in-situ civil society organizations with the capacity to provide the required assistance and provided them with technical support on project design and development.

The Fund's Special Call generated the generous response by the German Federal Foreign Office and the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Raad Al Hussein, who donated to the Fund the prize money of his 2018 Human Rights Tulip Award.

The following four civil society organizations were awarded emergency grants totalling US\$372,375.

Organisation	Grant	Direct Assistance
Legal Action Worldwide	US\$ 99,608	Legal and psychosocial assistance to 100 female torture victims
Centre for Disability in Development	US\$100,000	Medical and psychological assistance to 600 torture victims
HelpAge International, Bangladesh	US\$ 98,567	Medical, psychological & social assistance to 5000 torture victims
Name of CSO kept confidential	US\$ 74,200	Medical and psychosocial referrals for 195 torture victims

Legal Action Worldwide (LAW)

Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) supports 400 Rohingya women and girls who constitute a survivor group known as Shanti Mohila. Women and children in the group experienced rape, torture, genital mutilation, beatings, shootings, destruction of property, and loss of family members. LAW works with Shanti Mohila to provide psychosocial support and legal advice.

In May 2018, Shanti Mohila filed a submission before the ICC, in response to the Prosecutor's request. The submission included 11 victims' applications and a group statement.

The LAW project supported by the UN Torture Fund will enable Shanti Mohila's engagement with international accountability mechanisms by preserving crucial evidence ready for use by the ICC Prosecutor, the Independent Mechanism (IM) and relevant UN mechanisms. It will also allow Shanti Mohila, with LAW's assistance, to file claims before any accountability mechanisms, while ensuring their meaningful participation in the process.

Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)

The Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) conducted a rapid assessment about people with disability in Cox's Bazar refugee camps, concluding that 25% - 30% of their current beneficiaries are torture survivors. It also identified that persons with disabilities are not reached by service providers. Few agencies offer needed rehabilitation care services for the Rohingya victims of torture, who are persons with disabilities.

This emergency project will provide specialized medical, rehabilitation and psychological services to 900 torture victims. Assistance will be provided directly through One Stop Integrated Health & Rehab Service Centre in Balukhali-2 camp and through mobile teams.

The project will also support prosthetics and orthosis measurement and fitting camps for victims who have lost their legs due to torture. CDD is the only organization that provides these services within the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar.

IMPACT OF EMERGENCY GRANTS IN COX'S BAZAR

- 5575 torture victims receive psychosocial services
- 2740 torture victims receive medical services
- 400 torture victims receive physiotherapy services
- 75 torture victims with disabilities are fitted with artificial limbs and other assistive devices
- 100 Rohingya female torture victims' informed participation in accountability mechanisms
- Capacity building of Rohingyas: 75 refugees trained on case referrals, 25 women trained as paralegals, 25 women trained by trauma specialist
- Legal and medical evidence of torture documented

HelpAge International, Bangladesh

Based on HelpAge's clinical records, 65% of older people sought assistance for injuries due to physical torture. Furthermore, 54% older people who received counselling are victims of sexual and gender-based violence by the Myanmar Army, the majority of whom are female. Despite the immense needs for rehabilitation, older persons face accessibility challenges and discrimination in accessing services.

HelpAge International has established six Age Friendly Spaces across refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. With the emergency grant from the UN Torture Fund, HelpAge will provide specialised medical, psychological and social services to 5000 elderly victims of torture, by leveraging specialized care in the Age Friendly Spaces, as well as through mobile teams.

The fourth civil society organisation supported by this special call shall remain confidential.

This awarded emergency grant will help establish a case referral mechanism to assist at least 195 torture survivors to access medical, psychological and social assistance, including children with disabilities, women widowed due to enforced disappearances or physical violence, and victims of domestic violence within the camps.

About the UNVFVT Emergency Grants

Established in 1981, the [UNVFVT](#) is a unique humanitarian tool available to the UN and OHCHR funding direct assistance to victims of torture and their family members wherever torture occurs. Since its establishment by the General Assembly, the Fund has awarded more than 700 organizations worldwide reaching out to over 50,000 victims every year.

Since 2012, the Fund has responded to human rights and humanitarian crises through the emergency grants procedure. In response to the needs of torture victims that have arisen due to specific crises, the Fund has issued special calls for emergency grant applications, including in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2012, the crisis in Mali in 2013, the civil war in Syria in 2015, and the Rohingya refugee crisis in 2018.

For more information: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Torture/UNVFVT/Pages/Emergencyfunding.aspx>