

LIVING ON THE EDGE



The brutal crackdown by military forces in Myanmar following attacks by Rohingya militants in August 2017 has led to a major humanitarian crisis. Over 646,000 Rohingya refugees have now fled over the border into neighbouring Bangladesh where they find themselves hungry, homeless and desperately in need of our help.

Many are traumatised, having seen members of their family and loved ones butchered by machetes, shot or burned alive. Everything they owned has been stolen or destroyed.

Shawkat Ava is 37 years old, five months pregnant and living in Kutupalong refugee camp with her husband. When Val Morgan, Communications Manager at SCIAF visited the camp in December 2017, Shawkat told her story.

"The military attacked us in the night. We saw what they did with our own eyes. Our village was burning. They asked boys who were around 10 and 11 years old to stand in a line. Then they chased them with machetes and killed them. One elderly neighbor of ours was shot and then they burned him alive. He was just an old man.

Everybody just ran. The children were most affected as they can't run. It was raining and we were always cold and wet. It made me sick. My hand was broken when I crawled in the jungle. We were hungry for many days. We hid in the bush for 15 days. We were robbed of our gold necklaces and bracelets on the Myanmar border.

We got some help when escaping. There are some good people in Myanmar. Some Muslims gave us food, shelter and helped us. In Bangladesh, they have helped us a lot. I've been here for three and a half months now.

I brought nothing from home. When I first came here I had to sell my nose stud to buy food. Then the community here helped us. I have received food and cooking utensils from Caritas Bangladesh.

These things are very useful - more than the money. These things are helping us more than anything. My parents died on the journey here when they crossed the river from Myanmar so now I always try to help the elderly around us in the camp by giving them food."

Caritas Bangladesh has provided 40,000 families with rice, lentils, sugar and oil, as well as plates, saucepans, glasses and cooking utensils. The Caritas team has also distributed blankets and sleeping mats to a further 14,600 families so they can keep warm at night.

While very basic, this aid has given many Rohingya families the help they need, and a little space to grieve for their loss of family and friends, and overcome the appalling trauma they have experienced.

With no belongings, no money, no potential to work, and a return to their burnt out villages looking unlikely in the short term, the Rohingya refugees continue to live on a knife-edge.



Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund

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