

## Peace & Security Campaign in the Rohingya Refugee Camps Concept Note

### Background

The escalation of the conflict in Rakhine State in November 2023, has impacted the overall protection of refugees inside the refugee camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf. The rapid deterioration of security in the camps is due to the expanded presence and operations of organized groups. As per the Protection Sector's joint protection monitoring reports, in 2023, 1,830 serious protection incidents (murder, physical assault, kidnapping/abduction, extortion) have been recorded across the camps (a 181% increase from 2022). There were 318 serious protection incidents reported in the first quarter of 2024. In quarter 2, the total number of incidents increased by a further 40%, and by nearly 300% compared to the same quarter in 2022. Verified incidents included 27 killings, 112 serious physical assaults, 183 abductions/kidnappings, 56 extortions, 109 forced recruitments, and 23 gunshots.

Protection actors in Cox's Bazar have also noted a trend of organized groups recruiting refugees ostensibly to support the armed conflict in Myanmar. Reports of systematic campaigns to recruit were recorded throughout the year, with a significant acceleration between April and May 2024. Recruitments are done through serious threats to the physical security and integrity of the targeted persons, including kidnapping, extortion, and killings, as well as threats against family members, including women and girls.

Adult male refugees, but also boys as young as 10, have come under the threat of forced and child recruitment. Over 2,000 cases of recruitment have been reported between 18 March and 26 May. Many of these individuals were forcibly returned to Myanmar, and some have died. While the majority of forced and child recruitment cases target men and boys, women and girls are also subject to significant and unique protection risks. These include intimidation to coerce the male members of the family into joining the recruitment campaigns, using women and girls to maintain control over the men and boys once recruited, as well as gender-based violence (GBV) when the organized group recruiters do not find the men and boys they were seeking to recruit. There were reports of girls being forced into 'marriage' as 'reward brides' for the combatants.

Since June, few recruitment-related cases have been reported. This reduction is attributed to a strong message sent out by the Government of Bangladesh against any such acts. A Non-Paper issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 14th May 2024 instructed relevant government entities to prevent and stop recruitment in the camps and called upon the international community to raise awareness with the communities. Refugees had also shown signs of collective resistance to the forced recruitments and more generally the violence, including on the part of women, leading in some instances to fatalities and injuries.

Nonetheless, high levels of insecurity have continued in the camps due to the resumption of violence between organized groups forcing, in one instance in June, the entire population of one block to self-relocate in a couple of days out of fear of the organized groups. In August, active confrontation including in broad daylight in Teknaf camps also affected the social cohesion between refugees and host communities. The change in government in August led to a vacuum by Law Enforcement Authorities in the camps, which has been used by organized groups to enhance their control over parts of the camps.

Community consultations in quarters 1 and 2 indicate a low level of trust among refugees towards the Armed Police Battalion (APBn). Systematic focus group discussions and Key Informant Interviews among frontline GBV service providers also indicate a higher perception of violence against women, and the reporting of sexual violence has seen a gradual increase - corroborating the perceptions around increased sexual violence against women and girls as the inter-group conflicts among organized and criminal groups escalate in the camps.

## Rationale

As part of a broader effort to promote safety and security in the camps, and restoring their humanitarian and civilian character, there is a need to strengthen the voices in support of peace and security in the camps, bolster community-based engagement for peace and social cohesion while reinforcing interventions to promote the civilian and humanitarian character of the camps. A concerted intervention by the authorities, including law enforcement authorities, and the humanitarian community to counter the violence in the camps is urgently needed, in the form of a large-scale campaign for peace and security in the camps. Building on the 14 May 2024 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Non-Paper, actions by the humanitarian actors and the communities shall be made possible by enhanced security conditions in the camps thanks to the joint interventions of the authorities.

The campaign will be guided by the principle of **Do No Harm** and **Duty of Care** to staff and refugee volunteers in its design and implementation.

The new Interim Government has confirmed its commitment to the Peace & Security Campaign and the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) approved the campaign on 9 October 2024.

## Objectives

The campaign will aim to

- Extend protection through communication with the communities on Peace & Security to regain the protection space occupied forcefully by the organised groups
- Respond to and support victims of violence to access services
- Advocate for the civilian and humanitarian character of the refugee camps
- Engage communities in dialogue to build confidence and strengthen communities' ability to manage and prevent conflicts
- Advocate, capacity build, and re-engage law enforcement actors in the camps especially APBn

## Campaign Messages

Under the overall message "**No to violence in the camps**", this joint campaign will be articulated around the key messages of

- **No to arms in the camps**
- **No to violence against children**
- **No to violence against women and girls**

These messages will be tailored depending on the messengers and the target audiences as well as the activities used to disseminate and raise awareness including messaging on where to call or report for help, and the interventions to build dialogue for peace and confidence. They will also be contextualised in Burmese, Bangla, and Rohingya to ensure they are best understood by the various audiences.

## Modalities

Starting with the **communication** channels that least expose the humanitarian actors, the refugee volunteers and other actors will be promoting these key messages. The campaign will then be widened to encompass a wider range of communication channels as well as community-based interventions with the communities, in particular the youth. This will be done in cooperation with the Protection Sector, Child Protection Sub-Sector, GBV Sub-Sector UN and agency partners, as well as WFP and UNDP, and the Youth Working Group, GiHA Working Group and AAP Technical Working Group members. Others may also join the campaign.

The key messages will be discussed with the refugee communities and tailored to various audiences and communication channels. Of paramount importance is the timing of the interventions by the humanitarian community as security conditions must be enhanced to enable safe communication in the camps.

Building on the message of peace in Islam and the international legal prohibitions of child recruitment and violence against women and girls, the RRRC and law enforcement authorities will work in a **concurrent but separate** manner with the humanitarian actors and other key messengers in the communities. Through a Do No Harm and Duty of Care approach, the following messengers will be engaged in a progressive manner:

- Camp-in-Charges
- Law enforcement authorities
- UN and humanitarian actors in the camps
- Religious leaders, including female religious teachers
- Community leaders (majhis and others)
- Youth leaders
- Women and girl leaders
- Children

Various communication modalities will be used in a phased approach as permitted by the security situation:

- Billboards, posters
- Audio messages through Interactive Voice Response (IVR)
- Radio broadcast and radio listening groups
- Messaging by influential community leaders (imams, mulavis, mahjis etc.)
- Face-to-face messaging using normal programme activities with women, mothers/parents, children, and youth to message with a Do No Harm approach
- Community events (sports, arts, youth activities etc.)
- Trainings
- Awareness Raising
- Happenings and other form of community mobilization

Led by the Protection Sector, the Child Protection and GBV Sub-Sector actors, with support of the Youth Working Group, GiHA Working Group and AAP Technical Working Group members as well as the participation of other partners such as UNDP, WFP and others who may join the campaign, the campaign will also aim to respond to the needs of victims of violence and persons at risk through responses. Helplines, including those offering Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) will be used as a channel to provide support. Tailored messaging and referral mechanisms will be put in place to assist refugees. As part of the Duty of Care, their frontline staff will be supported to ensure their wellbeing and security as the number of callers in relation to violence in the camps increases.

A **community-based approach**, supported by the humanitarian community, is adopted in this campaign. This encompasses the meaningful engagement of key stakeholders in the camps to first inform the messages, the communication channels and build the resilience of the refugees in the camps. This approach will in turn be made possible by enhanced security conditions in the camps thanks to the interventions of camp civilian authorities as well as law enforcement authorities.

The campaign will therefore engage with the communities, refugees and host, to support confidence building measures- initiatives to rebuild trust including with law enforcement actors in the camps and peaceful initiatives led by the refugees and their host communities -such as sports for protection, arts for peace etc. These initiatives will be particularly focused on the engagement of youths, particularly males. Social cohesion initiatives to support peace across the refugee and host communities will also be rolled out, where relevant.

The campaign will be founded on **evidence** gathered through regular community consultations and perception surveys to guide the response, as well as research in areas of gaps given the complexity of the engagement at the nexus between peace, social cohesion, security, protection and the wider humanitarian action. **Advocacy** for peace and security with a primary focus on the imperative of maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of the refugee camps shall be central to the campaign.

An inter-agency **work plan** will be developed and revised as required to ensure a flexible approach to a constantly evolving security situation in the camps. The work plan will support the two pillars of the campaign: Peace and Security and will enable:

- An evidence-based response
- Communication with the communities on P&S
- Response and support to the victims of violence
- Community engagement and dialogue for confidence building
- Advocacy for P&S
- Advocacy for enhanced security including capacity building and training of law enforcement Actors

Given the pace at which the security situation has been evolving over the past months in particular, the campaign work plan adopts a flexible approach and will be reviewed regularly to ensure prioritized activities respond to the situation on the ground and adapt to new and emerging trends. A mix of activities involving all the actors supporting the campaign including government entities, joint interventions between some humanitarian actors and their partners, as well as activities led by a single agency and organization depending on the objective, mandate, expertise, location and resources - shall be prioritized.

A **toolbox** will be developed to support the objectives of the campaign including tools to enable humanitarian actors and refugee volunteers to enhance response to victims of violence and persons at risk of various forms of violence.

## Organization

A working group, led by the Protection Sector and the two sub-sectors, Child Protection and GBV has been established to organize the campaign and associated activities with the communities. The Terms of Reference of the Working Group are developed. Regular briefings will be provided to the Protection Sector partners, UN HoSO and ROCT in Cox's Bazar and the UN RR and the SEG in Dhaka.