

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026



EVENT REPORT: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY (IWD) 2026

RIGHTS. JUSTICE. ACTION.
#FORALLWOMENANDGIRLS

অন্তঃঅধিকারঃ তথ্যঃস্বাধীনতাঃ অর্জনঃ
#অধিকারঃস্বাধীনতাঃমিঃকলঃআঃলঃঅঃগঃ

আজকের পদক্ষেপ, আগামীর ন্যায়বিচার
সুরক্ষিত হোক নারী ও কন্যার অধিকার

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1. INTRODUCTION

On 8 March 2026, the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GIHA WG) and the GBV Sub-Sector, under the umbrella of the Rohingya Coordination Platform (RCP) and in collaboration with the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), officially launched the International Women's Day (IWD) campaign in Cox's Bazar. The event took place from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the Darbar Hall, Camp in Charge (CiC) Office, Camp-18.

The 2026 commemoration was guided by the global theme, "**Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls,**" along with Bangladeshi national theme as *"আজকের পদক্ষেপ, আগামীর ন্যায়বিচার- সুরক্ষিত হোক নারী ও কন্যার অধিকার"*. This theme serves as a global call to eliminate discriminatory laws and practices while ensuring that every woman and girl regardless of displacement, disability, or age can live with safety and equality.

2. PROGRAM INAUGURATION

The program officially commenced with a symbolic and vibrant inauguration ceremony held at the Camp-18 CiC Office Darbar Hall courtyard. To mark the launch of the International Women's Day 2026 campaign, Mr. Minhajul Islam, CiC of Camp- 18, led the traditional release of balloons and pigeons.

The inauguration was attended by a distinguished assembly of stakeholders, reflecting a unified humanitarian commitment to gender equality in the Rohingya response. Representatives from various UN agencies and the Rohingya Coordination Platform (RCP) were present, alongside delegates from International, National, and Local NGOs. The diverse participation of these partners underscored the collaborative effort required to address the systemic barriers facing women and girls and set a formal tone for the events proceeding.

3. OPENING REMARKS

Following the inauguration, the formal program was moderated by Ismat Jahan from SKUS, who welcomed representatives from the government, humanitarian partners, and most importantly, the

community members. The session opened with remarks from Silja Rajander, the GIHA Chapter Chair and HoSO of UN Women, who highlighted that International Women's Day is a global moment to honor the strengths and contributions of women. Reflecting on her visit to a women's center earlier that morning, she noted the importance of the community-led messages displayed at the venue. She emphasized that the 2026 theme, "**Rights, Justice, Action,**" serves as a reminder that rights cannot be realized without deliberate action, and justice requires a deep understanding of those rights. Quoting Nobel Laureate Nadia Murad, she honored the courage of Rohingya women and reminded the audience that progress occurs when men and women stand together. She specifically called upon men and boys to support the women in their families to strengthen the dignity and future of the entire community.

Adding to these reflections, David Bugden, the RCP Principal Coordinator, expressed his gratitude to the RRRC's office and the IWD Task Force for organizing the event. He emphasized that the day should be viewed as a moment for commitment rather than just a celebration, noting that the struggles faced by women and girls are daily challenges that require year-round dedication. He delivered a strong message to the men in the room, stating that supporting gender equality often means giving up space, giving up a seat at the table, and listening more. On behalf of the Rohingya Coordination Platform, he personally committed to fostering an environment where women's voices are prioritized and held the humanitarian community accountable for making the lives of Rohingya and host community women better every single day. The session concluded with a transition toward the core of the program: the presentation of voices and messages collected directly from the ground.

4. PRESENTATION OF COMMUNITY MESSAGES AND VOICES FROM THE GROUND

A key agenda item at the launch event was the presentation of community voices, led by Shahin Akhter from the RW Welfare Society (RWWS), representing the IWD Task Force. These messages were the culmination of preparatory consultations involving women, girls, men, and gender-diverse persons from across 12 Rohingya camps and 3 host community locations. To ensure the messages resonated with all attendees, they were read aloud in Bangla and translated into the Rohingya language, while English and Burmese versions were displayed via projector.

The brochure featured powerful testimonies that brought the theme of "Rights, Justice, and Action" to life. Jannat, a Rohingya woman from Cox's Bazar, emphasized the need for structural inclusion, stating, ***"Establish formal leadership roles for women at the block level so they can directly raise their concerns***

and ensure their rights are respected and addressed." Addressing the specific barriers faced by the most vulnerable, Fatema, a Rohingya girl with a disability, shared a poignant reflection: ***"A girl with a disability suffers twice from violence and from silence."***

The voices also called for a shift in societal accountability and the protection of marginalized groups. Yeasmin, a Rohingya woman, noted the prevailing culture of victim-blaming by stating, ***"When a girl reports violence, people ask what she did wrong. This must change."*** Furthermore, Arifa, a gender-diverse individual, highlighted the systemic neglect faced by their community: ***"We are gender-diverse people, and far too often, no one listens to us or thinks about our needs. When we experience violence and try to seek legal help, our voices are dismissed, and the process takes far too long."*** These quotes served as a direct call to action for the humanitarian and government stakeholders present toward tangible justice.

5. PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE WAY FORWARD

The panel discussion, moderated by Tahmina Parvin from UNHCR, provided a platform for a multi-stakeholder dialogue focused on the three pillars of the campaign: Rights, Justice, and Action. The panel featured Ms. Tapti Chakma (CiC, Camp-17), two Rohingya women leaders (Monoara and Asma Begum), and Paponi Das representing the Nari Maitree, Women-led Organization. The conversation centered on the practical challenges of safeguarding women's rights in a displacement context and the collective actions needed to overcome them.

A significant part of the discussion focused on the persistent challenges of child marriage and dowry. Ms. Tapti Chakma noted that despite daily awareness efforts by the government and humanitarian partners, families often circumvent camp regulations by conducting marriages in host community areas like Ukhiya or Cox's Bazar. She highlighted that survivors often only seek help from the CiC office after the marriage fails or rights are violated, making prevention a complex task. To address this, she emphasized that awareness must move beyond the classroom and into the household, specifically targeting men who hold significant influence over these decisions.

The Rohingya women representatives shared powerful insights into empowerment and inclusivity. Monoara, who traveled from Camp 4 to participate, testified that her confidence to speak before a large audience was built through the support of her male family members and professional exposure. She

advocated for more opportunities for women to enter public spaces and decision-making meetings, arguing that ***"if the family and community give confidence to them, women can achieve the same as men"***. She specifically called for the establishment of Rohingya women leaders at the block level to serve as accessible points of contact for justice and to help stop child marriage. Asma Begum added a crucial perspective on girls with disabilities, noting they face ***"double discrimination"*** even within their own homes. She urged humanitarian organizations to collaborate on ensuring specialized access to education and health services, noting that education could allow girls with disabilities to become self-reliant.

Representing the NGO sector, Paponi Das addressed the practical barriers to service delivery and participation. She emphasized the need for systemic engagement with men and boys to eradicate discrimination, citing the EMAP (Engaging Men in Accountable Practices) program as a vital tool for shifting harmful social norms. The panel concluded with a consensus that while rights are a birthright, achieving justice requires the active participation of men, the formal recognition of women leaders, and a dedicated effort to reach the most marginalized, including those with disabilities.

6. PUPPETRY SHOW: VISUALIZING RIGHTS AND JUSTICE

Next, the **Rohingya Community-Based Protection Team from BRAC-UNHCR** presented a compelling puppetry show. This creative medium was used to illustrate complex social issues in an engaging and accessible way for the community audience. The show featured the following key themes:

- **The Right to Education:** The first story followed a young girl's journey to access learning, highlighting the community's collective responsibility to ensure that girls are not left behind in education.
- **Advancing Gender Equality:** The second segment explored the dynamics of equality within the household and community, demonstrating how everyone benefits when women and men have equal opportunities and respect.
- **Domestic Violence and Seeking Justice:** The final story addressed the sensitive issue of domestic violence. It visually guided the audience through the process of breaking the silence, showing a survivor's path toward seeking help and the role of justice mechanisms in providing protection.

7. STORYTELLING: VOICES OF STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE

The program continued with a session titled "**Stories of Rohingya women contributing to their families and communities,**" where three narratives were shared by Rohingya women. To ensure the protection and security of the individuals involved, the stories were read aloud by other women rather than the original subjects.

- **Jannat's Story:** Jannat shared her journey of breaking cultural norms to become an electrician. She challenged the perception that technical work is only for men, stating that a woman's hands are just as capable. She now uses her skills to empower other women, advocating that financial independence and skill-building are essential for women to "stand tall."
- **Azida's Story:** Azida focused on the power of knowing one's rights within the family unit. After attending awareness sessions with her husband, she transformed her home into a place of mutual respect. She now guides her neighbors to safe spaces and advocates for more "Women Majhi" and leaders to ensure female voices are heard across every block.
- **Arefa's Story:** Arefa, a long-term community volunteer, highlighted how education and awareness are the root of establishing women's rights. She spoke of the importance of counseling and skill-building activities such as sewing and gardening, in changing traditional mindsets and fostering independence.

8. REMARKS BY CAMP-18 CiC AND THE NEW GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Mr. Md. Minhajul Islam, CiC of Camp-18, shared a powerful reflection on global and local perspectives regarding gender equality. Drawing from his personal experience visiting Japan which is widely regarded as one of the world's most peaceful nations. He noted his surprise that even there, gender-based violence remains the most prevalent crime. He used this example to highlight that the struggle for women's safety is a universal challenge, but one that is particularly acute in the displacement camps where vulnerability is heightened by a lack of formal education and the prevalence of harmful superstitions.

Reflecting on his two-year tenure in the camp, the CiC shared about structural changes directed by the RRRC. He shared that the camps are transitioning toward a "**Community Representative Team**" model. A core requirement of this new system will be that at least one woman must be formally included in every

representative team, he shared. This reform is designed to dismantle the barriers created by the male-dominated Majhi system, where women often felt unable to share their specific needs or grievances. By ensuring women are part of the society's leadership team, the CiC noted that female residents will finally have a safe and direct pathway to express themselves and seek justice.

Addressing the men in the audience, he invoked religious and moral duties to champion women's rights. He reminded them that in Islam, the highest priority is given to women, specifically citing the Hadith where the Prophet Muhammad emphasized honoring one's mother three times before the father. He challenged the men to extend the deep respect they hold for their mothers to their wives, daughters, and sisters. He argued that a man cannot be a "perfect Muslim" if he honors one woman while dishonoring or acting partially against another. He concluded by calling for a unified effort between the government and humanitarian colleagues to ensure that by next year, the "parameters" of safety and empowerment for women in the camps are significantly improved.

9. Reflections and Commitments from Humanitarian Leadership

After the remark from the camp -18 CiC, the program featured a series of reflections from the leadership of key UN agencies, emphasizing that the theme of "Rights, Justice, and Action" must be translated into daily operations. The speakers highlighted a shift from viewing women solely as vulnerable beneficiaries to recognizing them as the backbone of the humanitarian response.

- **UNHCR (Marcel Colun, Head of Sub-Office):** Mr. Colun asserted that because women and girls make up 50% of the camp population, they should hold at least 50% of the "vote" in all matters affecting their lives. He celebrated the resilience of Rohingya women and called on all partners to translate the day's celebration into tangible actions that empower women to master their own futures.
- **UNFPA (Subarna Shaha, representing the Head of Sub-Office):** Describing the campaign theme as the "mandate" of UNFPA's work, Ms. Shaha acknowledged the extraordinary leadership roles women are already taking. She reaffirmed UNFPA's commitment to providing survivor-centered services and moving "beyond aid" toward true empowerment. UNFPA is translating the theme of "Rights, Justice, Action" by prioritizing reproductive health, strengthening life saving Gender Based Violence (GBV) services, and investing in women's leadership and empowerment.

- **IOM (Augustine Lambert, representing the Head of Sub-Office):** Drawing from a personal story of gender mainstreaming in Kenya, Mr. Lambert noted that a "decline in reporting" remains a challenge due to family pressure and fear of retaliation. He urged a collective responsibility to foster a supportive environment where survivors can seek justice without stigma.
- **UNHCR (Astrid Castelein, Assistant Representative - Protection):** Ms. Astrid reminded the audience that while women carry the heaviest burdens in conflict, they also serve as primary examples of courage. She specifically honored female volunteers and skilled workers such as the electricians mentioned in the storytelling session for their dedication to a better world.
- **WFP (Sadikur Rahman, representing the Head of Area office):** Mr. Rahman provided a data-driven perspective, noting that 70 – 80% of women now access food outlets and participation in volunteer work has increased compared to 2018. However, he echoed the need for structural change, urging more women in community leadership positions (Majhis) to further reduce gender-based violence.

10. Closing Remarks and Appreciations

The event concluded with a powerful call for collective accountability and a summary of the day's commitments. The closing session featured remarks from the GBV Sub-Sector leadership and the IWD 2026 Task Force.

- **GBV Sub-Sector (Dr. Eumna Rahman, representing the GBV Sub-Sector Coordinator):** Dr. Rahman expressed gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh, the RRRC, and the camp-level CiCs for their partnership. She emphasized that the presence of such a diverse group of stakeholders reflected a true commitment to the 2026 theme. Most importantly, she addressed the community directly, stating that the voices heard during the session would not remain "just voices" but would be the central force in designing and implementing future GBV responses. She reminded the audience that women are not merely participants in services but are the primary change-makers and leaders within their community. She concluded by noting that gender equality is not the sole responsibility of gender partners, but a collective duty across all sectors to mitigate risks and ensure a safe, dignified society.

- **Appreciation to IWD 2026 Task Force (Fahomida Amin, representing the Task Force and GBV Sub Sector):** Ms. Amin acknowledged the intensive month-long effort of the Task Force members that culminated in the launch. She extended thanks to the community leaders, youth, and volunteers whose daily work on the ground facilitates access to justice. She noted that the success of the impactful and colorful event was a direct result of strong coordination and the leadership of those working "behind the scenes."
- **Final Call to Action (Magfuzur Rahman Shana, representing the Task Force and UN Women):** To close the ceremony, Mr. Shana led the participants in a synchronized chant of the campaign's core pillars. The hall resonated with the collective voices of government officials, humanitarian workers, and community members shouting: **"Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls."**

11. Representative Photos



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