“My children have
grown up amid war. They have seen people die.”
–Ranim, 31, from Syria

Crisis alert: Bangladesh under pressure

More than half a million children and adults from the ethnic Rohingya minority have fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar since late August. The 2,000 Rohingyas that arrive in Bangladesh each day are exhausted, hungry, and tell our staff horrifying stories about why they fled for their lives.

Their needs are far from being met. Almost half are still without shelter and more than 80% lack food aid.

Reina Dejito, HI’s country director in Bangladesh, notes that when refugees are occupied in activities to survive, such as standing in line for supplies, people with disabilities are often left behind. “We are particularly concerned about the condition of extremely vulnerable individuals, such as pregnant women, older people without caregivers, people with reduced mobility, people who are severely sick, and unaccompanied or separated children.

They are particularly susceptible to disease, malnutrition, hygiene problems, infections, psychological distress, and more.

Handicap International makes every effort to identify them, assess their needs, provide psychological and rehabilitation assistance, and meet their basic survival requirements.”

Thanks to our donors, more than 200 staff are supplying aid to new arrivals. Since August, teams have provided support to more than 20,000 people.

Gilles Nouziès, who oversees Handicap International’s Asian programs, notes how “the Rohingyas left their villages in haste, taking nothing with them. 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, [which is] dragging out the assessment stage.”

In recent months, Bangladesh has also been affected by monsoon rains and severe flooding. Rising waters have ruined crops and food supplies, including livestock, exasperating the already tense situation.
Note from the Executive Director

This edition of The Next Step illustrates what your gifts make possible—touching lives everywhere from Syria and Burkina Faso to the Philippines and Bangladesh.

We began celebrating Handicap International’s 35th birthday in July. As this incredible, award-winning organization has matured over the decades, so has the range of our projects and services. No longer does “Handicap International” encapsulate what donors like you make possible. What’s more, the word “handicap” is truly antiquated. Bearing that description diminishes our beneficiaries’ resilience in the face of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster.

I’m proud to tell you that we’ll unveil a brand new name on January 24. We’ll pack a special-edition of The Next Step in January with news, and more about the surveys and interviews that steered us towards a strong, new identity that showcases how our teams celebrate inclusion and offer compassion and aid that no other NGO in the world can do on our scale.

We’re excited for January 24, and know you will be too. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me directly.

Jeff Meer
Executive Director
Twitter: @Jeff_HIUS

Asia visit pushes for greater access to decent jobs

PROJECT UPDATE

Jessica Cox, Goodwill Ambassador and the world’s first licensed armless pilot, raised awareness about the importance of people with disabilities accessing decent, waged employment through visits to HI inclusion projects in Nepal and the Philippines in September.

In Kathmandu, Nepal, Jessica visited a center where women with disabilities learn new job skills. Some now print Braille books for local school libraries, while others make incense, candles, small felt animals, and clothing. The work is consistent, and earns these women a fair wage. Jessica was particularly touched by Bhuwan, a woman with a disability who gained confidence and independence through the training. Bhuwan now owns a modified motorbike that she uses to get around with ease. Nearly 2,600 miles away, in the middle of a rice paddy outside Roxas City, Philippines, Jessica met April Joy, 24, who has physical and intellectual disabilities. Because of HI’s work after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, the teams got to know April, seeing that she had untapped skills that would help her earn money if only she could be given the chance.

Our donors provided April with her own computer and wifi access. She’s able to charge local students a small fee for helping them conduct online research and typing for school, offering a healthy supplement to her parents’ income from farming rice. Jessica encouraged everyone she met, as well as people who learned about her story on local TV shows. However, she says she was the one most inspired by the work we’re doing to ensure that people with disabilities can reach their goals.

Ramesh: Going for gold

May 2015
The April 2015 earthquake collapsed a building on the legs of Ramesh Khatri, now 18. The crushing injuries left doctors with no choice but to amputate his legs. Physical therapists and the rest of the Handicap International rehabilitation team began providing him with vital support not long after his surgery at the hospital.

April 2017
Two years later, Ramesh is training at a swimming pool in Kathmandu. His walls are decorated with numerous medals from swimming meets and wheelchair races, and he dreams of representing Nepal in the 2020 Paralympic Games in Japan. Go for the gold, Ramesh!
local teachers and community groups to send him to school, they contacted Samadou’s parents to encourage them they began.

It goes a long way. When they met the rights of people with disabilities have learned that a simple lesson in as students. Over time, our teams like Samadou from a chance to shine very barriers that prevent bright kids from

Children like Samadou illustrate the need for inclusive education. The teams also worked with the government of Burkina Faso to ensure that census takers count every child to understand the big picture of disability in Burkina Faso.

Teachers are often anxious about accepting a child with a disability into their classroom. They told our teams that they feared that the child would require too much of their time, and disrupt classmates. Or else they said they lacked teaching strategies, or the physical resources to make learning practical.

To give them more support, our staff integrated a cohort of visiting teachers who have been extensively trained in providing one-to-one support. These teachers can also help children with visual or hearing impairments to learn Braille and sign language.

Meanwhile, at national teacher training schools, we advocate for future teachers to learn about inclusive education. The teachers learn how best to welcome a child with a disability to their classroom, and to support the students’ education so they can lead independent lives as adults.

Samadou loves school. He attends all of the same classes as his classmates and is progressing well. He also benefits from a visiting teacher at home. Together they follow an education plan that is adapted to his needs, and are working to make the school more physically accessible.

Most important, he is involved in activities outside of school. He can be seen chasing lizards with his friends, or speeding along on the back of his brother’s bike!

Our inclusive education projects are helping 170,000 children across West Africa.

Handicap International was recently awarded the Knight’s title in the Order of Academic Palms of Burkina Faso for our work on the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.
This summer, we welcomed Brazilian soccer sensation Neymar Jr. as the first-ever Global Ambassador of Handicap International. Through this partnership, Neymar Jr. is lending his huge fame to a good cause: empowering the most vulnerable people in the world, people with disabilities living in poor countries and victims of conflicts and natural disasters.

Neymar Jr.’s first action as ambassador was to send a message of support to people with disabilities across the world. On August 15, he went on the top of the 39-foot Broken Chair monument in Geneva and called for more inclusion of people with disabilities in society. Symbolically, this message took the shape of a soccer ball with the HI logo on it. He then kicked the ball down the row of flags in front of the Palace of Nations. The event was followed by a press conference hosted by the United Nations.

The Broken Chair is the work of the Swiss artist Daniel Berset, erected 20 years ago by HI in front of the United Nations headquarters to call for a ban on antipersonnel landmines.

The star initially met our team in 2016 to discuss access to artificial limbs for amputee children, a subject that’s particularly close to Neymar Jr.’s heart, and a cause he has already supported. He wanted to support similar actions on a global scale, and got to know Handicap International’s prosthetic and orthotic programs.

In October 2016, Neymar Jr. showed his support to Haitians impacted by the devastating Hurricane Matthew by urging his followers on social media to support our work in the hard-hit nation.

This September, he told his 81 million Instagram followers that he stands with our Stop Bombing Civilians campaign by writing “STOP” on his hand, then posting a selfie on Instagram. In Sao Paulo, Brazil, children benefiting from his foundation, Instituto Neymar Jr., added their support by taking pictures with the “STOP” message written on their hands, too.

This effort was part of HI’s social media campaign to create buzz for the global advocacy campaign that demands an end to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We’re thankful to Neymar Jr. and the other 365,000 people who added their voices to this important effort, getting us even closer to our goal of 1 million signatures that we’ll present to political decision-makers at the United Nations next year.

In North America, Handicap International benefits from the committed support of two Goodwill Ambassadors: American pilot, motivational speaker and RightFooted star Jessica Cox, and Canadian Dark Matter actor Anthony Lemke.

Handicap International’s website has the most up-to-date news, plus photos and videos of the people your donations help.

Sign up for regular e-newsletters: www.handicap-international.us/join

Follow your impact:
We’re real people and we’d love to hear from you!
Touch base any time with comments, questions, or suggestions.
ReachOut@handicap-international.us
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Earlier this year, we celebrated our 35th birthday with cakes made by our staff. Can you spot the nine differences between these two delicious-looking pictures?