

Rohingya crisis worse than Syria's, says UN

Big tragedy: William Lacy Swing, Director-General, International Organisation for Migration, with Sarat Dash, Chief of Mission, Bangladesh, on the Tamru border. Suvojit Bagchi

The Rohingya refugee crisis is worse than the exodus from Syria, William Lacy Swing, Director-General of the UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM), says.

The Rohingya exodus from southwest Myanmar to southeast Bangladesh is "man-made" and "needs a political solution", Mr. Swing said here on Monday.

He said the international community should treat the refugee influx as "a top priority" so that the problem was resolved quickly and refugees were able to go back to their country.

Mr. Swing, a career diplomat from the U.S., visited the Tamru border in Bandarban district in southeast Bangladesh, where thousands of Rohingya are stranded on no man's land between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Talking to *The Hindu* after the border visit, he said: "This [Rohingya exodus] clearly is the one that has seen faster pace than any other. In terms of numbers of people — I don't think that anytime recently we have that many people crossing the border in a small period of time between four to five weeks," the IOM chief said, in reply to a question if the exodus was growing at a rate faster than it was in Syria in 2013.

Terrible atrocities

According to the Bangladesh government, between August 25 and October 11, a total of 5,36,000 Rohingya Muslims from Rakhine State in southwest Myanmar crossed over to southeast Bangladesh.

Many of them told this correspondent that their family members were killed and houses set on fire "by the Myanmar Army, local police and the ethnic community of Rakhine".

International humanitarian agencies, such as the IOM, vetted the recent refugee figure of the Bangladesh government's Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commission.

"It [building pressure on Myanmar] has to be given top priority so that there [remains] a possibility of [the refugees] resuming their lives and returning to their livelihood and homes, which they have lost," Mr. Swing said. But, meanwhile, humanitarian relief should continue, he added.

"We are going back to our [IOM] headquarters in Geneva to take part in the pledging [for humanitarian aid] on October 23," Mr. Swing said.

The fund that the humanitarian agencies need to deal with the crisis is to the tune of \$450 million till March 2018.

Mr. Swing said they need to continue dialogue with the donors and the international community to support the people.

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