

Update on Myanmar

Overview of the situation: WFP still does not have a comprehensive picture of food insecurity and malnutrition in Maungdaw District of Rakhine State. The security situation remains volatile, exacerbating people's food and nutrition security situation. There are unconfirmed reports of theft of livestock and property and arrests by security forces in Muslim villages. Departures of refugees for Bangladesh have continued.

CFSAM: The crop and food security assessment mission (CFSAM) with participation of international staff has been approved in writing by the government and tentatively scheduled for 23 April to 15 May pending travel approvals from the authorities. The CFSAM will be composed of WFP and FAO international and national experts, including from Rome headquarters and regional bureaux. There will be an observer from the U.S. Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). Field work will start on 1 May with three sub-teams working in the southern, central and northern parts of Rakhine State to collect and analyse the information. Livelihoods and food security indicators have been included in the assessment thanks to WFP's advocacy. The government has also verbally approved the mobile-VAM survey pending final confirmation in writing. Data collection will be conducted by government enumerators to be trained in Sittwe. After the training a team of enumerators will be deployed to 208 villages and 23 internally displaced people (IDP) camps to collect data during 15 days. FAO and WFP Staff will be allowed to monitor data collection.

Access: International NGOs continue to face extraordinary challenges in obtaining travel authorization and implementing their programming in northern and central Rakhine, threatening the delivery of life-saving assistance. In central Rakhine, some international NGOs have recently had their travel authorizations rejected on the basis that they are not providing equal assistance to Buddhist and Muslim communities, even when these NGOs work in IDP camps or camp like settings with Muslim populations. In cases when travel authorizations are indeed confirmed, the local authorities have recently agreed to extend the period of validity from two weeks to one month to ease the administrative burden on international organizations in Rakhine. WFP exceptionally received 3-month travel authorizations for its all Rakhine-based international staff until end-May. However, no international WFP staff from outside its Rakhine State office, including myself, have been permitted to carry out field missions since August 2017.

Distributions: In March, WFP assisted 182,500 people in Rakhine State and continues to scale up its assistance targeting 183,000 people in April. WFP has already reached 50,000 out of the targeted 114,000 persons in central Rakhine and 36,000 out of the targeted 70,000 persons in 59 Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu villages in northern Rakhine. Distributions are ongoing and expected to be completed by the end of this month. WFP is working with NGOs and government authorities to distribute food, and is coordinating with the Red Cross Movement and other humanitarian bodies on the ground to avoid overlaps or gaps and maximize the coverage.

Repatriation: The Government of Myanmar has given a green light for 556 Muslim refugees in Cox' Bazaar, whose residence in the country has been verified, to return to Myanmar. Out of the original full list of 8,032 people sent by Bangladesh, this is the first batch cleared by the Government of Myanmar. It is unclear how the list of 8,000 names was originally devised and if the refugees identified for possible return have been consulted. On 2-8 April, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and OCHA Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms Ursula Mueller, visited Myanmar where she met with senior government officials including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and was granted access for a 1-day visit in northern Rakhine State, including Maungdaw villages, and IDP camps in central Rakhine. Following the mission, and in line with statements issued by UNHCR, Ms Mueller also concluded that Myanmar was not ready for repatriation of the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh due to lack of unhindered humanitarian access in Rakhine State, concerns about protection and continuous departures. She also stressed that she had not seen or heard of any preparations on the Myanmar side for people to be able to return to their places of origin.

Resourcing situation: WFP is grateful to the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Turkey as well as Japan Association for WFP, Myanmar Humanitarian Fund and UN Central Emergency Fund for the early support to the country strategic plan (2018-2022) totalling USD 24 million. WFP is also grateful to a number of other governments with whom it is currently finalising the negotiation of new and additional contributions.

WFP still needs USD 26 million¹ to provide assistance for the next six months to people affected by conflict and other vulnerable populations throughout the country. More funding may be required as new needs emerge pending assessment outcomes.

¹ If asked, the estimated 6-month funding requirement for Rakhine State alone is USD 17 million.