

‘We Are the Easter People’: Missionary Brings Hope to Refugees of Modern Genocide

Bodies wash, lifeless, up to shore. Mothers carry their deceased children as they race across the border. Utter despair radiates from the people as they're hunted for slaughter in what's quickly becoming the world's most recent genocide.

"Sorrow, pain, depression, hopelessness, desperation," Bob Roberts Jr., a Fuller Seminary grad and founding pastor of NorthWood Church in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. He has been involved in the planting of a hundred congregations in the United States. He is a member of the Faith Coalition to Stop the Genocide in Burma. Roberts describes what he saw in the world's largest refugee camp.

Just across the border in Bangladesh, Rohingya Muslims seek refuge from the ethnic cleansing in Myanmar.

Kutupalong in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, is not only the biggest refugee camp on the planet, with a population of 1 million and counting, it's also the most densely populated, World Food Program USA reports. It's doubled in size in just six months.

"[It's] total filth and people trying to survive. I couldn't stand there and do nothing," Roberts says. Roberts was part of a recent humanitarian aid delegation sent to assist the refugees.

The latest exodus began in 2017. BBC reports at least 6,700 Rohingya, including at least 730 children under the age of 5, were killed in the month after the violence broke out, according to Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF). Nearly 700,000 Rohingya have fled Rakhine into Bangladesh since insurgent

attacks sparked a security crackdown in August, joining 200,000 refugees from a previous exodus, Reuters reports.

CNN reports Myanmar's military has intensified what it calls "clearance operations" targeting "terrorists" after Rohingya militants attacked police posts, killing 12 security officials.

"They killed and killed and piled the bodies up high. It was like cut bamboo," Mumtaz, a Rohingya woman from the village of Tula Toli in western Myanmar.

This is where missionaries like Roberts come in.

"We are the Easter people of hope and light [when] there is suffering and hopelessness," Roberts says. "Matthew 25 makes it clear we should love others and help them. If we ignore it, people suffer, and it's left wide open for extremist [violence]."

Roberts is the author of *Transformation: How Glocal Churches Transform Lives and the World* and *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Engage a Flat World*. Roberts and others are anxious to see Jesus move in the camp.

"I want them to know as His followers, we love them and want to help them. We are also blessed with skills and resources few people on earth have. God gives us what he does first and foremost to glorify him and bless others," he says.

Roberts says the refugees need every kind of volunteer imaginable: Teachers in makeshift schools, engineers for raw sewage, landscapers to build retaining walls, doctors and nurses, among others.

Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse has also responded to the Rohingya plight.

In November, the ministry announced its plan to build a surgical ward at a longtime partner hospital, which will

essentially double the hospital's capacity to perform these surgeries.

Samaritan's Purse says World Medical Mission sent field nurses and doctors to care for the patients at the 24-bed Rohingya Care Unit and will continue to recruit more medical professionals for the next several months.

A Christian Aid Missions team visited the camp earlier this year and returned with the following report:

800,000 Refugees Are Taking Shelter in Bangladesh

Fearing the violence would reach their villages, 800,000 Rohingya fled to neighboring Bangladesh. But Bangladesh, the poorest country in the region, is unable to provide them with adequate housing or aid. As a result, a huge slum camp has grown near the border with thousands in need of help.

"Pretty much everyone, all 800,000, are living in shelters made of tarps with flimsy wooden frames and dirt floors," said a CAM team member who visited Bangladesh to see how we can help. More than half of the refugees are children.

Many Experience Terrible Conditions Inside the Camp

Deep in the camp, our staff found great needs. "Several people had severe wounds left untreated because they would have to be carried a long way through difficult terrain to a clinic," the team reported. "We saw a boy with a partial foot amputation that looked like it needed a good cleaning. We saw children with rashes and swollen bellies, and babies who looked in need of better nutrition."

An estimated 25,000 babies are expected to be born in the camp this year. Yet there appeared to be no midwifery. A nurse practitioner from the CAM team reported, "Most women

smiled back when I smiled at them ... But there were those women who didn't smile back, whose eyes remained dull, their faces expressionless. I wondered what their stories were."

CAM is gathering a team of medical personnel and opening a clinic in a remote part of the camp. We will also supply women's health kits.

Immediate Needs Are Medical Care and Clean Water Systems

Besides the need for medical care, there is a huge need for clean water and good latrines. Many are drinking stagnant water from ditches, making them sick. Already the camp has experienced cholera, measles and diphtheria. CAM plans to drill several tube wells and build quality latrines in the area surrounding our clinic. We will also teach proper hygiene to prevent disease and sickness in the crowded camp.

For missionaries like Roberts, these simple donations are a way to spread the gospel and be the hands and feet of Christ within the camp.

"I did meet some Christians who are living their faith and serving as best they can and I want to help them," Roberts says. "I'm praying that God will be moving in our Jesus-loving, serving, sharing churches here to be a blessing to them."