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Nobel Peace Prize Lifts Morale of Aid Workers

Effective WFP aid limits COVID-19 infections in Rohingya camps



The award of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize to the UN's [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#) will lift the spirits of aid workers at a time when international aid is reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic, predicts a former AP Peace Fellow who works for the WFP in Bangladesh.

Talley Diggs [served as a Peace Fellow in Kenya in 2017](#) and sits on the [AP board of directors](#). She described the peace award as a

“massive boost of morale” for WFP workers who have spent months away from their families in lock-down.

“This has been such a difficult time,” said Ms Diggs. “It will lift everyone’s spirits to have this international recognition.”

Ms Diggs is among more than 500 WFP officials who support 860,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh (**photo**). She has been working remotely from the US since March. About 70 international WFP officials have remained in Bangladesh.

The Rohingyas are victims of one of the world’s most intractable refugee crises, and aid officials had feared a catastrophe if the COVID-19 virus entered the camps. So far, however, less than 300 cases of infection have been reported even though the virus is rampant outside the camps in the region of Cox’s Bazar.

Ms Diggs described this as a “miracle” and suggested that it has been achieved by “restricting the humanitarian footprint,” limiting visits by aid workers and concentrating the distribution of aid in the camps.

While the infection rate in the Rohingya camps may be encouraging, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disastrous impact on global food security overall. David Beasley,

executive director of WFP, said on Friday that the number of people facing starvation has increased from 135 million in March to 270 million.

A [recent report from the Gates Foundation](#) estimated that the pandemic had set back 25 years of development progress in just 25 weeks.

The Nobel award is also a timely reminder of the link between starvation and conflict. In 2017, Ms Diggs served as a Peace Fellow with [Children Peace Initiative Kenya](#) in northwest Kenya, where drought is threatening food sources and triggering violence among pastoralists (**photo below**).

One in three people in the African nation of Mali, where AP also supports partners, need humanitarian assistance as conflict has overwhelmed the center of the country where much of Mali's food is grown.

Meanwhile, there is no end in sight to the Rohingya refugee crisis itself. [Amnesty International](#) has expressed concern that the army in Myanmar is stepping up indiscriminate attacks against civilians, raising the prospect of more expulsions.

The Rohingya crisis also shows how climate change exacerbates a humanitarian crisis. The camps in Bangladesh are situated in a low-lying region and thousands of refugees had to be relocated after extensive flooding in June. Ms Diggs described the combination of flooding and the pandemic as a "double whammy."

The Nobel committee was heavily criticized in 2019 for questioning the link between climate change and war.



Talley Diggs came face to face with the impact of drought, hunger and conflict during her [2017 fellowship in Kenya](#).



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