

'Civilians are Not a Target,' says UN chief on World Humanitarian Day

19 August 2017 – On World Humanitarian Day, the United Nations and its partners are calling on all global leaders to do everything in their power to protect people caught up in conflict, and to stand with the health and aid workers who risk their lives to help them.

Let the world know: Civilians are Not A Target, underscored [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres in his [message](#) on the Day.

On this day, we also take a moment to honour the brave health and aid workers who are targeted or obstructed as they set out to help people in need, and pay tribute to the government employees, and representatives of international organizations and agencies who risk their daily lives to provide humanitarian aid, he added.

Despite broad efforts, civilians – including medial and humanitarian workers – continue to bear the brunt of intense conflicts around the world.

They are attacked and their access obstructed, while humanitarian supplies and hospitals are looted by fighting parties. In addition, in cities like Juba and Aleppo, housing, markets, schools and vital civilian infrastructure are destroyed, Mr Guterres elaborated.

No one is winning these wars. We are all losing, stressed the UN chief.

The Secretary-General invited everyone to stand with us in solidarity with civilians in conflict, and with the health and aid workers who risk their lives to help them. Get involved with our online campaign at [#NotATarget](#).

On [World Humanitarian Day](#), let us commit to doing everything in our power to protect women, girls, men and boys in the line of fire, and to give them hope of a better future, he concluded.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) commended the dedication and courage of its colleagues working on the frontlines of hunger, often at great risk to their own personal safety, to ensure that children and their families have enough to eat.

Humanitarian workers [go where the need is](#), and far too often that is where conflict is as well, said David Beasley, WFP Executive Director, in his message commemorating the Day.

Fighting and violence drive 80 per cent of all humanitarian needs, and 10 of WFP's 13 largest food assistance operations are driven primarily by conflict, he continued, noting that in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan

and Yemen, more than 20 million people are on the brink of famine.

Increasingly, those involved in the conflicts in these areas are targeting aid workers," he added.

On World Humanitarian Day, we come together to reaffirm that civilians caught in conflict and those who care for them are #NotATarget. We appeal to world leaders to take action to protect them and to deliver on the promise of our mutual, shared humanity," concluded Mr. Beasley.

Gender-based violence shatters lives

For its part, the UN gender empowerment entity offered full support to the UN's #NotATarget campaign, pointing out that violations of international humanitarian law have generated a global protection crisis.

Every day, young girls are increasingly exposed to early and forced marriage and young boys are forcibly recruited into armed groups," said UN Women in a [statement](#) marking the Day.

Sexual and gender-based violence continue to shatter lives and undermine community cohesion," it added.

According to UN Women, some 60 per cent of preventable maternal deaths take place in conflict, displacement or natural disaster settings; girls are two and a half times more likely to be out of school in conflict countries; and a reported one in five refugee or displaced women experience sexual violence, with the actual numbers potentially much higher.

Women are the leaders in their families, communities and societies who drive effective responses to crisis. And it is women and girls who have insights into what is needed and what works, which must inform effective humanitarian response," said UN Women.

On World Humanitarian Day, we must come together to change the status quo " for women and girls, and for all civilians caught up in crises," concluded the statement.

During a special event yesterday at UN Headquarters in New York, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien spoke of the challenges faced by aid workers around the world.

Last year, 288 aid workers were targeted in 158 attacks. In the past three months alone, relief workers have been shelled and shot at, kidnapped and killed in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria," he said. "This is blatantly unacceptable."

Marking World Humanitarian Day, UN urges protection for civilians in armed conflict

18 August 2017 – Civilians in conflict are not a target, top United Nations officials today stressed at a special event marking World Humanitarian Day, which honours aid workers and pays homage to those killed in service, while also drawing attention to the millions of people today living in war zones.

“For the millions of people caught in conflict, struggling to find food, water, and safe shelter; who have been driven from their homes with little hope of return; whose schools have been bombed; and who await life-saving medical care [we cannot afford to fail](#),” [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said, urging each person and country to stand in solidarity with civilians in conflict.

Standing at Headquarters in New York alongside UN aid workers and staff who lost colleagues in war zones, the Secretary-General lent his support to the [#NotATarget](#) campaign, which highlights the need to protect civilians caught in conflict, including humanitarian and medical workers.

Joining Mr. Guterres to mark [World Humanitarian Day](#), which is officially commemorated on 19 August, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien spoke of the challenges faced by aid workers around the world.

“Last year, 288 aid workers were targeted in 158 attacks. In the past three months alone, relief workers have been shelled and shot at, kidnapped and killed in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria,” he said. “This is blatantly unacceptable.”

VIDEO: Remarks Secretary-General António Guterres at the “Stand Together” event to mark World Humanitarian Day 2017.

Earlier in the week, the UN and partners launched the [#NotATarget](#) petition urging global leaders do more to ensure the rules of war are upheld and civilians are protected in armed conflicts.

With more than 10,500 signatures, the petitioners demand that world leaders do more to protect people trapped in conflicts, with a particular focus on those living in urban areas, children, targets of sexual violence, forcibly displaced people, humanitarian workers and health workers.

The petition will be presented to the Secretary-General during the high-level General Assembly, which opens on 12 September this year.

The UN General Assembly designated 19 August as World Humanitarian Day in 2008, selecting the date to coincide with the anniversary of the deadly 2003 bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad.

Originally coined by Médecins Sans Frontières in 2015, the #NotATarget hashtag is being used in the World Humanitarian Day digital campaign this year to call for action on behalf of all civilians trapped in conflicts.

Yemen's 'man-made catastrophe' is ravaging country, senior UN officials tell Security Council

18 August 2017 – Warning about escalating suffering in Yemen's man-made catastrophe, senior United Nations officials today addressed the Security Council, calling on the international community to push for a political solution to the more than two-year-old conflict.

“Death looms for Yemenis by air, land and sea,” Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed told the 15-member Council in New York.

Reiterating one of the key points from Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, who addressed the Council just moment earlier, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed said that that diseases and epidemics are at unprecedented levels in Yemen.

“Those who survived cholera will continue to suffer the consequences of 'political cholera' that infects Yemen and continues to obstruct the road towards peace,” added Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed.

He noted that while the international community is united in its support of a peaceful solution, certain parties to the conflict take advantage of internal divisions and focus on personal interests.

“What is missing at this point is for the parties to the conflict, without any delays, excuses or procrastination, to demonstrate their intention to end the war and put the national interest above any personal gains,” the UN envoy said.

Every day without serious action means more destruction and death, as well as the spread of terrorist groups UN envoy for Yemen

Every day spent without serious action means more destruction and death, he said, as well as the spread of terrorist groups such as the Al Qaeda

in the Arabian Peninsula and uncontrolled migration through the Gulf of Aden to Yemen, where more than 41 migrants died in early August after being forced to abandon their boats and jump.

Before the conflict, Yemen had been making progress, with fewer people hungry and rising school enrolment, Mr. O'Brien said in his statement.

All of this has not been sharply reversed, he said, noting that 17 million Yemenis are hungry, nearly 7 million facing famine, and about 16 million lack access to water or sanitation.



Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, briefs the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Yemen. UN Photo/Kim Haughton



Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed (on screen), the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen, briefs the Security Council via video conference. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

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Mr. O'Brien highlighted several key challenges, including a funding shortage and the \$2.3 billion Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan is only 39 per cent funded.

He also underscored the interference to movement of critical commercial and humanitarian supplies and staff.

De facto authorities in Sana'a or local officials in areas under their control block, delay or otherwise interfere with humanitarian action, said Mr. O'Brien.

The humanitarian official urged the international community to ensure that all ports are open to civilian, including to commercial traffic.

He called for those Governments and individuals with influence to influence the fighting parties to respect the international humanitarian and human rights law and to strengthen accountability.

With 1.2 million public employees not paid regularly for months, he also urged that civil servant salaries be paid so that the basic services in the country do not collapse.

This human tragedy is deliberate and wanton and it is political and, with will and with courage which are both in short supply, it is stoppable, he said, reiterating the UN's ongoing calls for a political solution to the conflict.

Protecting aid workers ‘paramount,’ UN official stresses ahead of International Day

17 August 2017 – As conflicts around the world continue to take a massive toll on people’s lives, the top United Nations relief official stressed the importance of ensuring that the brave men and women who risk their lives to help those in need are not themselves a target.

“The protection of aid workers is paramount,” Stephen O’Brien, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, underscored in an interview with *UN News* ahead of this year’s World Humanitarian Day.

The Day, observed annually on 19 August, seeks to pay tribute to aid workers who risk their lives in humanitarian service, and rally support for people affected by crises worldwide. It was designated by the General Assembly to coincide with the date of the 2003 bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq, in which 22 staff lost their lives.

The protection of aid workers is paramount Stephen O’Brien

This year, humanitarian partners are coming together under the [#NotATarget](#) campaign to highlight the need to protect civilians caught in conflict, including humanitarian and medical workers.

“World Humanitarian Day is an opportunity for us to focus on protecting humanitarian aid workers, particularly in the medical field,” Mr. O’Brien noted.

Currently, he said, humanitarian workers are operating in 40 countries across the world, often for many years, despite insufferable difficulties.

“People put themselves at great risk to reach people in need, in some of the most dangerous environments, in protracted crises around the world,” he stated.

VIDEO: Ahead of World Humanitarian Day, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien hails the ‘extraordinary’ job done by aid workers worldwide while lamenting not being able to respond to increasing the needs. Credit: UN News

Just recently, seven Syrian volunteer rescuers, known as White Helmets, were

killed. Mr. O'Brien acknowledged that such incidents are becoming too commonplace. "My heart grieves for the family and friends of those brave people who gave the ultimate sacrifice to help others," he said.

Despite the difficulties and dangers, Mr. O'Brien stated that humanitarian work is moving forward "at every point."

"Member States, humanitarian aid workers, coordinators of humanitarian relief – all of us continue to supply strength, determination, courage and conviction," he said. "There is no higher international public good than seeking to save the lives and protect the civilians caught up in crisis."

The [#NotATarget](#) campaign follows the launch earlier this year of the UN Secretary-General's report on protection of civilians, in which he called for enhanced respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, and protection of civilians.

There is no higher international public good than seeking to save the lives and protect the civilians caught up in crisis
Stephen O'Brien

According to the report, those most in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and protection are civilians in urban areas; children; targets of sexual violence; humanitarian workers; health workers; and forcibly displaced people.

Mr. O'Brien said that making a difference on the ground requires "physical will and relationships with players in all the various places" to get the necessary access to those in need.

"We are in the business of trying to protect civilians. We are trying to put in place the right balance. To do this, we must make sure that the perpetrators of violence are held accountable for their actions," he added.

It is important, he stressed, that everyone adhere to agreed international norms, laws and principles, "to make sure that people are held to account."

[UN chief Guterres condemns deadly terrorist attack in Barcelona](#)

17 August 2017 – Condemning today's terrorist attack on Barcelona, Spain, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said the United Nations stands in solidarity with the Government and people of Spain in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

He extends his heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of those killed and to the Government and people of Spain, according to a [statement](#) issued by UN Deputy Spokesman Farhan Haq.

The statement added that Mr. Guterres wishes a speedy recovery to those injured and hopes that those responsible for this heinous violence will be swiftly brought to justice.

According to media reports, a van ran into a crowd of pedestrians walking through Barcelona's famed Las Ramblas area, killing at least 13 people and wounding dozens of others.