

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.

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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.

[UN agencies rushing aid to more than 3,000 displaced in flood-hit Sierra Leone](#)

17 August 2017 – United Nations agencies are stepping up efforts to aid displaced families affected by the deadly flooding and landslides in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, and surrounding areas.

"The scale of the damage is [unprecedented](#)," said UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Representative Hamid El-Bashir Ibrahim.

He noted that at least 109 children are counted among the several hundred people killed in the disaster that struck on Monday.

"Children have been left homeless, vulnerable and terrified. We must do all we can to protect them from disease and exploitation," he added.

UNICEF teams, working with the Government of Sierra Leone and partners, are providing safe drinking water and sanitation, and delivering supplies including medicines, tents and gloves following the Government's request for support. UNICEF is also offering psycho-social support to those traumatized by the events.

While the mudslides have left [death and destruction](#) behind them, the Director and Representative of the World Food Program (WFP) in Sierra Leone, Housainou Taal, said his UN agency is focusing on survivors so that they can rise and move forward.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sierra Leone, Sunil Saigal, appointed Mr. Taal to coordinate the UN's humanitarian response to ensure timely distribution of aid, including food and shelter.

In the hours following the landslides in Freetown, WFP began distributing food aid to some 7,500 people affected by disasters. The aid, which includes rations of vegetable oil and vegetable oil lenses for at least two weeks, has

been distributed to Regent, Sugar Loaf and Mortomeh neighbourhoods around the affected area.

According to preliminary results of site assessments conducted by the Sierra Leone National Security Office and the United Nations Interagency Rapid Response Team, 1,039 households from several neighborhoods in Freetown (including Regent, Kamayamah, Dworzak, Culvert and Kaningo) and 100 individuals currently in a mountain cut shelter have been affected by floods and landslides.

Sierra Leone's Office of National Security (ONS) estimates that more than 3,000 people have lost their homes.

[South Sudan refugees in Uganda exceed one million; UN renews appeal for help](#)

17 August 2017 – As the number of refugees from South Sudan in Uganda passes one million the vast majority of whom are women and children the United Nations refugee agency today reiterated its call for urgent additional support.

Over the past 12 months, [an average of 1,800 South Sudanese have been arriving](#) in Uganda every day, said the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) in a statement to the press.

In addition to the million there, a million or even more South Sudanese refugees are being hosted by Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central African Republic, it added.

More than 85 per cent of the refugees who have arrived in Uganda are women and children, below age 18 years.

Recent arrivals continue to speak of barbaric violence, with armed groups reportedly burning down houses with civilians inside, people being killed in front of family members, sexual assaults of women and girls, and kidnapping of boys for forced conscription, emphasized UNHCR, explaining that even as thousands of refugees arrive, aid deliveries are increasingly falling short.

The UN agency underscored that although \$674 million is needed for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda this year, so far only a fifth of this amount, or 21 per cent, has been received.

Elsewhere in the region, the picture is only marginally better, the statement continued, saying that while a total of \$883.5 million is needed for the South Sudan situation, only \$250 million has been received.

The funding shortfall in Uganda is now significantly impacting the abilities to deliver life-saving aid and key basic services.

In June, the World Food Programme was forced to cut food rations for refugees. Across settlements in northern Uganda, health clinics are being forced to provide vital medical care with too few doctors, healthcare workers and medicines, UNHCR elaborated.

Meanwhile, schooling is also being impacted. Class sizes often exceed 200 pupils, with some lessons held in the open air. Many refugee children are dropping out of education as the nearest schools are too far away for them to easily access.

Since December 2013, when South Sudan's crisis erupted in Juba, more than two million South Sudanese have fled to neighbouring countries, while another two million people are estimated to be internally displaced, UNHCR concluded the statement.

[In East Darfur, UN refugee chief urges international support for Sudan](#)

17 August 2017 – The United Nations refugee chief has called for international solidarity and resources to aid Sudan, which is one of the major hosting countries for refugees fleeing the conflict in South Sudan.

Sudan's generosity [must be matched with international solidarity and resources](#). Much more donor support is required and urgently so that we can help the hundreds of thousands of refugees in the country and the communities that are hosting them, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, said yesterday wrapping up his first visit as the head of UNHCR to Sudan.

The UN refugee chief also reiterated his call on the international community to do much more to end the fighting in South Sudan, which is causing the world's fastest growing forced displacement tragedy, without an immediate end in sight.

Parties to the conflict, regional states and the international community need to put an end to this tragedy, he said.

During the visit this week, Mr. Grandi met with South Sudanese refugees and their local hosts at the Al-Nimir refugee camp in East Darfur, Sudan.

My coming here has one reason just as I did in Uganda, Ethiopia and from Juba itself, to appeal to the leadership of South Sudan, to the opposition of South Sudan, to the States in the region and to the

international community at large, [to inject some sense of urgency](#) in the quest of peace in South Sudan itself,” Mr. Grandi said.

The High Commissioners met with Sudan's President, Omar al-Bashir, and, according to a UNHCR press release, welcomed the President's assurances that Sudan will continue providing safety to those fleeing conflict and persecution – including those who arrive from South Sudan, and other countries in the region.

Sudan has hosted over 416,000 South Sudanese refugees since 2013, including some 170,000 new arrivals in 2017, making it one of the largest refugee-receiving countries in the region, UNHCR reported.

Hundreds of thousands of other South Sudanese who stayed in Sudan following the separation of the two countries are also in need of humanitarian assistance. Sudan also continues to host refugees from Eritrea, Syria, Yemen, Chad and other countries.