

On International Day, UN chief urges greater protection for Organization's staff

Drawing attention to the dangers United Nations personnel face while serving the world's most vulnerable, Secretary-General António Guterres has called for greater protection for the Organization's staff to allow them to carry out their mission safely.

"Whether in their countries of origin or far from their families and homes, United Nations personnel work tirelessly to help the world's most vulnerable," Mr. Guterres said in his message on the International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members.

"Let us strengthen our resolve and our means to protect UN staff as they work tirelessly for peace, sustainable development and human rights for all," he added.

The Secretary-General also noted that the Organization continues to monitor cases of its staff having being arrested or detained as well as pursue their release.

Today, 29 UN civilian personnel are in detention. Eight are being held without known or clear charges or without the Organization being given any reasons for their arrests.

Mr. Guterres also noted that only 92 UN Member States are party to the 1994 Convention on the Safety of UN and Associated Personnel, and that only 32 have ratified the 2005 Optional Protocol, which extends protection to UN personnel delivering humanitarian, political or development assistance.

"I urge all countries that have not joined these instruments to promptly do so," he said, stressing, "the safety [UN staff] need to carry out this vital mission should be our priority."

The International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members is marked each year on 25 March, the date of the abduction of Alec Collett, who was taken by armed gunmen in 1985 while working for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). His remains were finally found in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley in 2009.