

Terror attacks strike people 'from all walks of life, the UN included'

The terrorist attack on UN headquarters in Iraq in 2003 that claimed the lives of 22 people should serve as a reminder that the organization's locally recruited staff often face the greatest dangers in the world's most hostile places, amid increasing attacks on humanitarians, the head of the United Nations in Geneva said on Thursday.

Speaking just ahead of the 15th anniversary of the Baghdad atrocity, at the UN's main [World Humanitarian Day event](#) in the Swiss city, Michael Møller said that for the fifth year in a row, more than 100 humanitarians have lost their lives while at work.

"That horrible afternoon in Iraq does not stand in isolation," he noted. "It was followed by other attacks against the United Nations. At the end of 2007 we lost 17 colleagues in Algiers. Last year alone, 148 peacekeepers and 139 humanitarian workers were killed."

Turning to the attack in Baghdad, which led to the [UN General Assembly's](#) decision in 2008 to create an annual day of remembrance for humanitarian workers on 19 August, Mr. Møller recalled UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's description of those who were killed as "the best of the best, the most committed of the committed, the hope of the UN until their lives were cut short".

The victims of the attack were also the "hope and the future" of the organization, he said, adding that "our blue flag only flies because committed people wave it".



UN Geneva/Violaine Martin

Michael Møller, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva speaking at the World Humanitarian Day event at Palais des Nations, Geneva.

The UN's top official in Geneva also noted that while many of the victims were international staff, it is the organization's local workers who "are always faced with more serious situations".

"When international staff leave following violent incidents, local staff often remain to continue the UN's work in the world's most dangerous places," Mr. Møller added.

His comments echoed a video message by [UN Secretary-General](#) António Guterres, who paid tribute to those who died "in the service of peace, development and human rights" in the attack on the Canal Hotel attack in Baghdad 15 years ago.

Their loss was not in vain, the UN chief insisted. Among the dead was [Sergio Vieira de Mello](#), who in addition to serving as the UN's top official in Iraq, was UN High Commissioner for [Human Rights](#).

"I was always impressed by the way he embodied UN values and our spirit of service," Mr Guterres said, sentiments shared by Master of Ceremonies on Thursday, Ahmad Fawzi, who was Mr. de Mello's spokesperson in Iraq, and avoided the blast after being recalled temporarily to London shortly before the attack.

"We have been targeted again and again and again," Fawzi said, noting that terror attacks had claimed thousands of lives all around the world "from all walks of life, the UN included".



UN Geneva/Violaine Martin

Kahtan Al-Orfali, father of Omar Kahtan Mohamed Al-Orfali, victim of the 19 August 2003 terrorist attack against the United Nations Mission in Baghdad, speaking at the World Humanitarian Day event at Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Among the other speakers at the event in Geneva was Khatan al-Orfali, whose son Omar was killed in the Baghdad attack while he was working for international aid organization Christian Children's Fund of Canada.

In a moving speech in which Mr al-Orfali said that his only son's wish had been to help others, and described the young man's joy at finding a job, he appealed for fresh information about the circumstances surrounding the attack.

"Until today we do not know how this vicious crime was committed so quickly and so easily," he said. "We still do not know who allowed the car bomb through."

And although the Canal hotel that served as the UN's headquarters was heavily protected, "we still don't know who gave the perpetrators the intel", Mr al-Orfali said, or "who financed them, what were the results of the investigation, results that we are entitled to know."

Despite the pain of his loss, and in a message of hope to the organization, he made a final appeal to the UN, "to remind this great organization that the peoples of the world still believe in the UN's humanitarian role. We expect a lot from the UN and hope it will not let us down."