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TRANSCRIPT

World Humanitarian Day - 19 August 2026

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00:00:03:24 - 00:00:13:04

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, thank you very much for being with us today for this 2026 commemoration of All Humanitarian Day.

00:00:14:08 - 00:00:16:44

I'd like to welcome you to the Paladin as soon.

00:00:16:44 - 00:00:32:92

This is a new setting also for us, but it's important that wherever we do it, we do this commemoration every year to honour the dedicated workers who provided life saving aid to millions in needs.

00:00:34:39 - 00:00:46:87

The ceremony is in English, but I'd like to also welcome very much those who are following us from home as this ceremony is webcast live on our channels.

00:00:49:20 - 00:00:57:88

19th of August, as we all know, has not been chosen by hazard by the General Assembly today.

00:00:59:00 - 00:01:12:84

In 2003, the attack against the UN compound in Baghdad killed so many of our colleagues and I like to recognise the families that are here with us today.

00:01:15:48 - 00:01:17:88

This violence has continued during the years.

00:01:17:87 - 00:01:25:91

We all know that every year humanitarian workers make the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

00:01:26:15 - 00:01:46:31

This year we have just received that the data of the Aid Worker Security Database, which recorded in 2025 another green record of violence against aid workers with 907 colleagues killed, injured or kidnapped.

00:01:49:35 - 00:01:51:43

Therefore, I think it's very, very important.

00:01:51:43 - 00:01:54:59

And today we remember and honour all these colleagues.

00:01:55:76 - 00:02:16:08

And to start the ceremony, I would like to invite the Director General of the UN Office at Geneva and Miss Gemma Connell, officer in charge of the Office of the Coordination of an Italian Affair, to come and lay a bouquet of flowers in honour all our colleagues.

00:02:46:13 - 00:03:06:59

I would now like to invite Mrs Awa Dabo, the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Laura Johnson, Executive Secretary of the Staff Council, to come and together with the Director General, Miss Connell, light the candles.

00:03:23:00 - 00:03:39:96

I would like to ask now the representatives of the survivors and families of the victims of the attack of the UN to the UN office in Baghdad and others to pay tribute to their loved ones by laying flowers on the table.

00:04:18:10 - 00:04:30:82

I would now like to invite the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations office and other international organisation in Geneva to come and also lay flowers at the table.

00:04:50:87 - 00:04:51:95

Thank you very much.

00:04:52:51 - 00:05:02:47

I would like now to ask all our colleagues to return to their seats and I'd like to invite the the Director General to come and deliver her remarks from the rostrum.

00:05:02:60 - 00:05:21:12

Director General, dear humanitarian workers, dear survivors of attacks on humanitarian personnel, dear families and friends of colleagues lost in humanitarian service.

00:05:21:68 - 00:05:41:00

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends, today we gather to commemorate World Humanitarian Day and to honour the women and men who dedicate their lives to helping others in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances.

00:05:41:68 - 00:05:45:84

This day carries a special significance for the United Nations.

00:05:46:24 - 00:06:01:80

On 19th August 2003, a bomb attack on the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, Iraq killed 22 humanitarian workers, including the Special Representative for the Secretary General for Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

00:06:02:36 - 00:06:10:43

Five years later, the United Nations General Assembly designated 19th August as World Humanitarian Day.

00:06:11:31 - 00:06:23:71

As we mark this occasion, we pay tribute to humanitarian workers around the world who bring assistance, protection and hope to people affected by conflict, disaster and displacement.

00:06:24:27 - 00:06:30:03

We also remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service of humanity.

00:06:30:51 - 00:06:37:15

Their courage, compassion and commitment embody the highest ideals of the United Nations.

00:06:37:75 - 00:06:47:43

The damage flagged displayed here, together with two commemorative plaques, stands as a reminder of the human cost of humanitarian service.

00:06:48:00 - 00:06:57:60

They bear witness to their attacks against the United Nations offices in Baghdad in 2003 and in Algier in December 2007.

00:06:58:19 - 00:07:04:63

As the plaques are currently protected during renovation works, they're represented here through

images.

00:07:05:43 - 00:07:13:12

The legacy of these colleagues, and of all those who have lost their lives in service of humanity, continues to inspire us.

00:07:13:63 - 00:07:23:24

In their honour, the United Nations flags have been lowered today to half mast at the Paladinacion and at all other duty stations.

00:07:23:87 - 00:07:31:75

This solemn gesture reflects our collective remembrance and respect for the sacrifice of the colleagues we lost.

00:07:32:63 - 00:07:41:03

I now invite everyone present and those joining us remotely to observe a moment of silence in their memory.

00:08:33:00 - 00:08:53:61

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, I am deeply honoured and humbled to welcome to the Paladinacion today survivors and family members of humanitarian workers who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

00:08:54:21 - 00:09:02:09

Your presence reminds us that behind every statistic is a human story of loss, courage and resilience.

00:09:02:60 - 00:09:09:44

My hustle Thanks to Miss Shabbat Daher Alta Labani, who will shortly share her testimony with us.

00:09:10:44 - 00:09:20:04

Ladies and gentlemen, today as we mark the 23rd anniversary of the attack on the Kennel Hotel, we do so with a profound sense of concern.

00:09:20:51 - 00:09:24:39

The dangers facing humanitarian workers continue to grow.

00:09:25:00 - 00:09:31:36

Humanitarian personnel continue to be killed, injured, detained and abducted in alarming numbers.

00:09:31:91 - 00:09:41:03

Last year alone, at least 326 humanitarian workers were recorded as killed across 21 countries.

00:09:41:67 - 00:09:54:03

This brings the number of recorded humanitarian fatalities over the past three years to more than 1010, nearly triple the number recorded during the preceding 3 year.

00:09:54:63 - 00:10:02:39

Yet despite these dangers, humanitarian personnel continue to serve on the front lines of crisis around the world.

00:10:03:08 - 00:10:08:72

Some of the most dangerous places for them are the places where they're needed most.

00:10:09:15 - 00:10:15:24

Gaza and the West Bank, Sudan, South Sudan, Ukraine, Democratic Republic of Congo.

00:10:16:12 - 00:10:21:12

Their work deserves not only our gratitude, it demands our protection.

00:10:21:72 - 00:10:24:96

International humanitarian law must be respected.

00:10:25:27 - 00:10:28:36

Humanitarian personnel must never be targeted.

00:10:28:75 - 00:10:32:87

Humanitarian access must be safe, sustained and unimpeded.

00:10:33:48 - 00:10:38:63

Those responsible for attacks against aid workers must be held accountable.

00:10:39:32 - 00:10:47:16

Ladies and gentlemen, well, Humanitarian Day is not only a moment of remembrance, it is also a call to action.

00:10:47:67 - 00:11:03:75

As we honour those we have lost and pay tribute to those who continue to serve despite immense challenges, let us renew our commitment to protecting humanitarian workers and defending the principles that guide their mission.

00:11:04:27 - 00:11:15:36

Let us reaffirm our shared responsibility to ensure that humanitarian personnel can carry out their life saving work safely, effectively and with dignity.

00:11:15:60 - 00:11:16:08

[Other language spoken]

00:11:24:63 - 00:11:27:63

Thank you very much, Director General, for unisparing words.

00:11:28:12 - 00:11:35:72

I would like now to invite Mr Baram Salih, the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees, to deliver his remarks.

00:11:36:44 - 00:12:02:16

High Commission, Excellencies, colleagues, friends, let me begin by acknowledging the survivors of the Canal Hotel attack who are with us today and the families of those we lost.

00:12:02:79 - 00:12:13:27

Your presence makes this commemoration especially meaningful and I'm deeply, deeply honoured to be here with you today.

00:12:15:36 - 00:12:22:39

For me, 19 of August also carries a very personal memory.

00:12:23:51 - 00:12:38:67

A few days before, I spoke to my good friend Hassan Salameh and we scheduled a meeting with Sergio de Melo for the week after.

00:12:40:15 - 00:12:42:27

This meeting was not meant to be.

00:12:43:67 - 00:12:48:87

I remember that day and the profound sense of loss that followed.

00:12:50:75 - 00:12:57:96

Iraq was emerging from conflict and entering A deeply uncertain period.

00:12:59:39 - 00:13:08:75

That was so much that needed to be done and so much hope invested in what might still be possible.

00:13:09:79 - 00:13:23:55

Sergio had come to Baghdad to help and on 19th of August he and 21 of his colleagues were killed for doing precisely that.

00:13:26:51 - 00:13:37:79

While unfortunately I never had the opportunity to meet him in person, but like so many others, I knew what he represented.

00:13:38:67 - 00:13:45:39

He had spent his lives serving in some of the world's most difficult places.

00:13:45:79 - 00:13:58:95

He believed in the United Nations, in its responsibility to be present when people needed it most and the ability of international service to make a difference.

00:13:59:91 - 00:14:11:71

He embodied the very best of international civil service and leadership principles, courageous and committed to people above all.

00:14:12:87 - 00:14:21:36

His loss was devastating, and the United Nations that day changed something very profound.

00:14:22:39 - 00:14:36:39

It exposed in the most terrible way the vulnerability of those who go into the most difficult places, not to fight a conflict but to help people caught within it.

00:14:37:32 - 00:14:50:36

23 years later, I think about Sergio and those we lost that day and about all those who continue to do the same service.

00:14:50:60 - 00:15:02:15

In that very spirit, as High Commissioner for Refugees, I see every day what the courage of humanitarian workers makes possible.

00:15:02:72 - 00:15:20:51

I see colleagues on the front lines, often far from world's attention, protecting families forced from their homes, delivering assistance and helping people find a path towards safety and solutions.

00:15:21:87 - 00:15:29:36

Humanitarian workers who lead their families each morning not knowing what that day will bring.

00:15:29:84 - 00:15:52:60

Overwhelmingly, they are national colleagues serving their own communities, often while they and their families are living through the same conflict in security and uncertainty as the people they help. People who remain when circumstances become dangerous because others are depending on them.

00:15:53:08 - 00:15:54:44

Some never come home.

00:15:55:27 - 00:15:59:39

The risk Sergio and his colleagues face in Baghdad have not disappeared.

00:16:00:08 - 00:16:07:56

In too many places, humanitarian workers continue to be attacked, detained, obstructed and killed.

00:16:08:48 - 00:16:11:48

Humanitarian workers must be protected.

00:16:11:96 - 00:16:16:51

International humanitarian law must be respected.

00:16:16:91 - 00:16:21:03

And when they are attacked, there must be accountability.

00:16:21:75 - 00:16:28:39

Today we remember Sergio and 21 other killed at the Canal Hotel.

00:16:29:32 - 00:16:35:00

We remember every humanitarian worker who has lost their lives in the service of others.

00:16:35:84 - 00:16:43:68

And we stand with the survivors and with the families and colleagues who continue to carry that loss.

00:16:45:32 - 00:16:59:64

I never had that meeting with Sergio in Baghdad, but 23 years later, what he represented remains as important as ever.

00:16:59:63 - 00:17:11:51

A belief in service, in principled leadership and in the responsibility to be present when people need us.

00:17:11:51 - 00:17:17:55

Most humanitarian workers around the world continue that work every day.

00:17:18:07 - 00:17:23:63

Our responsibility is to ensure that they do not pay for it with their lives.

00:17:24:00 - 00:17:24:44

[Other language spoken]

00:17:34:27 - 00:17:37:83

Thank you very much, High Commissioner, Thanks for your remarks.

00:17:37:88 - 00:17:46:36

And I would like now to invite Mrs Awa double Deputy High Commissioner, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to deliver remarks.

00:17:46:35 - 00:17:59:35

Madam, your Excellencies, dear colleagues, dear friends, good afternoon.

00:18:00:51 - 00:18:26:55

It is indeed an honour to join you for this commemoration of our colleagues, our friends and our family members killed in Baghdad 23 years ago today, and to pay tribute to the thousands of humanitarian workers around the world who dedicate their lives to serving people in need, sometimes a great danger to their lives and to their health.

00:18:27:92 - 00:18:34:44

Most of these people our local staff, committed to supporting their own communities.

00:18:36:03 - 00:18:38:35

Human rights are central to humanitarian work.

00:18:39:44 - 00:18:48:12

They are the most important tool in preventing humanitarian crises from emerging and the best means of mitigating and ending them.

00:18:49:44 - 00:18:58:12

When human rights are respected, we can avoid the terrible conditions and situations that lead to the tremendous civilian suffering.

00:18:59:11 - 00:19:04:31

Upholding human rights helps to reduce the risks and the dangers to aid workers.

00:19:06:03 - 00:19:12:20

But in recent years, respect for human rights and humanitarian law in conflict zones is being undermined.

00:19:13:44 - 00:19:23:03

There is a clear breakdown of the values, the systems and the norms that were agreed by all countries to protect all civilians in war.

00:19:24:55 - 00:19:33:55

We see the results in unacceptable civilian casualties and the large numbers of people on the move fleeing conflict and violence.

00:19:34:64 - 00:19:44:60

We see the dramatic increase in humanitarian needs around the world and in the rising number of aid workers killed and attacked, including our own UN staff.

00:19:46:07 - 00:19:56:96

In some cases, attacks on aid workers could amount to war crimes or even crimes against humanity, and far too often these attacks are going unpunished.

00:19:58:27 - 00:20:08:96

The international community has a responsibility all countries need to redouble their efforts to pursue accountability for violence against humanitarian aid workers.

00:20:10:07 - 00:20:21:79

A climate of impunity is fuelling the violence, with devastating consequences for aid workers, for their friends and for their loved ones, and for those who depend on their very essential work.

00:20:23:24 - 00:20:31:64

Families are left without aid, children go without food, patients are unable to access healthcare, and others are placed in harm's way.

00:20:32:59 - 00:20:35:39

We need to bring those responsible to justice.

00:20:36:16 - 00:20:39:60

We need to ensure life saving aid reaches all of those in need.

00:20:40:68 - 00:20:47:08

And on World Humanitarian Day and every day, we need to protect those who work to protect all of us.

00:20:47:68 - 00:20:48:12

[Other language spoken]

00:20:59:24 - 00:21:01:20

Thank you very much, Deputy High Commissioner.

00:21:02:27 - 00:21:10:16

I'd like now to invite His Excellency Mr Saiwan Barzani, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Iraq, to deliver his remarks.

00:21:10:27 - 00:21:38:63

Ambassador Excellencies, families and colleagues of the victims, Ladies and gentlemen, today, the 19th of August, we observe the World Humanitarian Day.

00:21:39:35 - 00:21:58:03

It is a day to honour those who have lost their lives and the service of others, to stand in solidarity with the victims of terror and pay tribute to the courage and resilience of those who have survived.

00:21:59:59 - 00:22:26:07

Today we come together in particular to remember the 2003 bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, in which 22 humanitarian workers lost their lives, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Iraq, whom I had the privilege of meeting in Iraq before this tragic event.

00:22:27:59 - 00:22:41:51

This unprecedented terrorist attack against the United Nations, which occurred 23 years ago, was a grim warning of a devastating violence that would shake Iraq for the next 15 years.

00:22:42:64 - 00:22:59:24

This strategy sought to extinguish hope and to convince the Iraqi people that their aspiration for freedom and dignity were nothing but a dream and that dictatorship was the only possible form of government.

00:23:00:24 - 00:23:04:72

The symbolism of this massacre of innocent people was profound.

00:23:05:83 - 00:23:13:91

Thus, Responsible understood that the true alternative to war and terrorism are dialogue, diplomacy and humanitarian action.

00:23:14:88 - 00:23:25:44

By attacking the United Nations Headquarters, they sought to demonstrate that blind violence could prevail over humanism and peace.

00:23:26:92 - 00:23:41:68

Yet the resilience of the Iraqi people, together with the courage and the sacrifices of the international humanitarian workers, ultimately helped pave the way toward peace and the triumph of hope over darkness.

00:23:42:96 - 00:24:01:55

Tragically, on the same day and the same date six years later, on the 19th of August 2009, terrorists once again sought to strike a dialogue and diplomacy using the same method against the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Baghdad.

00:24:02:27 - 00:24:08:68

49 of our colleagues were killed and about 500 others were wounded.

00:24:10:00 - 00:24:14:31

Our response to such violence must always be 1 of resolve.

00:24:14:44 - 00:24:36:96

Humanity must continue, particularly through multilateral action, to assist victims, build bridges between people and cultures, and ensure that those who perpetrate these heinous crimes, as well as those who instigate them, are held accountable, whoever they may be.

00:24:39:03 - 00:24:46:92

This requires greater international cooperation and an unwavering commitment to dialogue, diplomacy and the principle of humanity.

00:24:47:79 - 00:25:04:59

Finally, today we share in the grave of the families and friends of the victims, while paying tribute to the survivors and all those who continue to serve humanity, often at great personal risks.

00:25:06:72 - 00:25:11:72

May the soul of Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues rest in peace.

00:25:12:20 - 00:25:18:79

The immense sacrifice reminds us that even in the darkest moment, humanity can rise again.

00:25:19:03 - 00:25:19:92

Thank you very much.

00:25:28:72 - 00:25:36:36

Thank you very much, Mr Ambassador, Mrs Chabot Taher Al Talabani.

00:25:36:75 - 00:25:52:87

You are a survivor of the 19 August 2003 terrorist attack against the UN offices in Baghdad, and you're also a former staff member who served with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for nearly 24 years.

00:25:53:24 - 00:25:55:88

You've accepted to give your testimony and we thank you.

00:25:56:20 - 00:26:14:55

Please Excellencies, colleagues and friends.

00:26:16:44 - 00:26:30:00

Following Security Council Resolution 1483, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sergio Viara de Milo, was appointed the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Iraq.

00:26:30:88 - 00:26:35:64

He arrived in Baghdad with his team on 1st June 2003.

00:26:37:07 - 00:26:42:63

From the very beginning, Sergio and his team maintained an open door policy.

00:26:43:35 - 00:26:56:95

They listened to the concerns of Iraqi people, understood their hopes and worked tirelessly to support the country, the country's future during one of its most difficult moments.

00:27:00:20 - 00:27:02:79

The 19 August began as an ordinary day.

00:27:04:07 - 00:27:06:31

As usual, it was very hot.

00:27:08:07 - 00:27:20:51

We left our modest hotels in the blue UN Transit vans and made our way through the crowded streets of Baghdad to Canal Hotel, which served as our headquarters.

00:27:22:03 - 00:27:24:39

We settled into our daily routine.

00:27:26:11 - 00:27:35:39

Rick Cooper arrived despite another sleepless night, determined to complete his important report.

00:27:39:44 - 00:27:50:20

Sergio Vieira de Milo and his senior political adviser Hassan Salama moved between individual and shared meetings and discussions.

00:27:51:07 - 00:27:58:00

They're serious conversations, often punctuated by jokes and bursts of laughter.

00:28:00:27 - 00:28:09:07

Nadia Eunice walked through the crowded corridor, her latest instruction accompanied by her elegant smile.

00:28:11:59 - 00:28:23:07

Raid Al Mehdawi from our IT team and his colleagues hurried from office to office, solving the technical problems that kept the mission running.

00:28:24:83 - 00:28:34:72

Sad Abuna made his familiar rounds with a tray of coffee, offering quiet kindness to colleagues and visitors alike.

00:28:37:31 - 00:28:49:27

John Selim Canaan showed photographs of his three weeks old son Matthias Selim before rushing off to his next meeting.

00:28:51:75 - 00:28:56:79

None of us knew that everything was about to change.

00:29:01:20 - 00:29:13:40

Then just minutes before 430 PMA, deafening explosion tore through the building plus flew every direction.

00:29:14:51 - 00:29:15:79

Ceilings collapsed.

00:29:16:83 - 00:29:19:59

The Canal Hotel shook violently.

00:29:22:31 - 00:29:32:20

Then came an eerie silence, broken only by muffled cries, scattered moans and desperate call for

help.

00:29:35:64 - 00:29:48:64

That evening, some of us returned to our hotels overwhelmed by grief, waiting anxiously to see which familiar faces would appear.

00:29:49:16 - 00:30:19:51

And those who never would Sergio, John, Salim, Nadia, Sad, Rod, Rick and 16 colleagues Alia, Arthur, Ehsan, Christopher, Omar, Ranilo, Manuel, Rosa, Khoder, Lin, Gillian, Riham, Ahmad, Marta, Fiona and Bassem lost their lives that day.

00:30:23:44 - 00:30:29:08

More than 180 international and national staff members were injured.

00:30:30:16 - 00:30:35:51

Many endured years of surgeries, treatment and rehabilitation.

00:30:36:20 - 00:30:42:20

For some, that journey continue even today, 23 years later.

00:30:44:31 - 00:30:51:67

Whether they were international or national staff or local contractors, they shared one common purpose.

00:30:52:51 - 00:31:00:11

They believed deeply in the principles of the UN, and in the future of Iraq, they came to serve others.

00:31:04:27 - 00:31:12:96

In the aftermath of the attack, international staff were evacuated while many Iraqi colleagues remained behind.

00:31:13:83 - 00:31:15:51

Some felt abandoned.

00:31:16:40 - 00:31:26:32

Many became targets simply because their association with the United Nations and endured years of insecurity and hardship.

00:31:27:79 - 00:31:36:15

Only a few were fortunate enough to continue their service in another UN missions of an equally dangerous conflict zone.

00:31:39:24 - 00:31:57:68

The loss of our colleagues in Baghdad, and of all those who have since or before 2003, given their lives while servicing the UN around the world, was never simply another tragedy or another list of names added to our memorials.

00:31:58:92 - 00:32:00:92

It was deeply personal.

00:32:02:07 - 00:32:07:15

Voices had filled our offices, our meetings.

00:32:07:92 - 00:32:11:44

Our daily lives were suddenly silenced.

00:32:12:40 - 00:32:19:72

Colleagues became memories, friends became names engraved in stone.

00:32:22:44 - 00:32:37:12

Each of them carried out demanding responsibilities, not merely as a professional duties, but as a profound moral commitment to the principles upon which this organisation was founded.

00:32:39:44 - 00:32:40:16

[Other language spoken]

00:32:40:44 - 00:32:55:64

Human rights, respects for human dignity, the peaceful settlement of disputes, sovereign equality among nations, international cooperation and pursuit, and the pursuit of peace through dialogue rather than force.

00:32:59:11 - 00:33:05:91

Their sacrifice is not only a remembrance of the past, it is a call to action.

00:33:07:40 - 00:33:21:88

The UN must continue to structurally transform and strengthen its policies, support systems and security measures to better protect those who serve in dangerous environment across the world.

00:33:23:00 - 00:33:36:79

No mandate can be fulfilled, no resolution implemented and no peace sustained without the courage and dedication of the women and men who willingly accept extraordinary risks in the service of humanity.

00:33:39:92 - 00:33:51:75

For our memorial to be truly worthy of those we honour, remembrance must be accompanied by accountability and reparation.

00:33:52:92 - 00:34:03:36

2323 years after the attack, we are still waiting for the organisation to release the full investigation report.

00:34:05:07 - 00:34:09:88

Families, survivors and colleagues deserve the truth.

00:34:10:88 - 00:34:16:20

Not a partial truth, not a delayed truth, but the full truth.

00:34:17:59 - 00:34:23:40

Accountability honours the fallen as surely as remembrance does.

00:34:26:36 - 00:34:36:88

We also call upon Member States to renew not only their commitment to the United Nations but also their commitments to peace itself.

00:34:40:36 - 00:34:44:00

The women and men who serve under the UN flag are your citizens.

00:34:45:40 - 00:34:50:07

They do not choose the conflict into which they are deployed.

00:34:51:07 - 00:35:07:36

They go because Member States have asked them, have asked this organisation to act where diplomacy has felt, where war has displaced families, where humanitarian crisis have unfloated and where hope must be preserved.

00:35:08:51 - 00:35:13:32

They carry out the mandate that you have negotiated and adopted.

00:35:14:84 - 00:35:18:24

With these mandates come shared responsibility.

00:35:18:67 - 00:35:32:27

Member States be the primary responsibility under the Charter to prevent conflict, to pursue the peaceful settlement of dispute, to uphold international law, and to protect those who serve in the

course of peace.

00:35:32:63 - 00:35:39:55

When these responsibilities are neglected, it's often UN personnel who bear the consequences.

00:35:42:00 - 00:35:48:71

Peace is not the responsibility of those who risks their life to uphold it alone.

00:35:49:71 - 00:35:54:91

It's first the responsibility of those with the authority to preserve it.

00:35:58:55 - 00:36:03:63

Honouring our following colleague requires more than words of remembrance.

00:36:04:23 - 00:36:09:31

It requires the political courage to prevent future tragedies.

00:36:10:71 - 00:36:18:87

We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the principles for which they served peace, justice, human dignity and hope.

00:36:20:28 - 00:36:24:36

May our colleagues, our friends, and our loved ones rest in peace.

00:36:25:32 - 00:36:29:36

Their memory is more than our responsibility, it's our obligation.

00:36:30:59 - 00:36:33:11

Their sacrifice must never be forgotten.

00:36:34:15 - 00:36:36:63

Their legacy will continue to guide us.

00:36:37:71 - 00:36:38:11

[Other language spoken]

00:37:05:19 - 00:37:11:91

Missus Taher Al Talabani, thank you so much for sharing your testimony with us and for your appeal to accountability.

00:37:12:76 - 00:37:19:52

I'd like now to invite Missus Laura Johnson, Executive Secretary of the UNOC Staff Union, to deliver her remarks.

00:37:19:51 - 00:37:31:88

Laura, I might have said this last year, but I'm going to repeat.

00:37:32:80 - 00:37:53:40

Being asked to deliver remarks on this day is the greatest honour that I've had as a staff representative because I'm so truly proud to represent humanitarian workers, humanitarian human rights officers and other staff performing such essential work across the world.

00:37:54:88 - 00:38:05:20

Something that I'm very saddened to repeat however, is that yet again, last year was one of the deadliest years on record for humanitarians.

00:38:06:51 - 00:38:26:44

As AUN staff member who believes in the organisation, it's also very disappointing to have to read that the trend is increasingly that the threat to humanitarians comes from state actors and that so far member States and international organisations have not been able to come together to prevent this.

00:38:26:44 - 00:38:31:24

Using the type of diplomacy and international action that the UN was founded for.

00:38:33:11 - 00:38:46:67

I'd like to pay a special tribute to my colleagues in Gaza, which remained the most dangerous place to work for humanitarians and particularly the national staff.

00:38:47:55 - 00:39:00:92

I was struck when reading the report on the threats faced by humanitarians over the past year that almost all humanitarians who lost their lives were nationals of the countries where they were killed.

00:39:02:32 - 00:39:08:88

It's the UN is often struggled to protect it's national staff, and we will need to do better.

00:39:11:48 - 00:39:23:40

Something else that's continued over the past year is that while humanitarian assistance is as necessary as ever, more necessary than ever, the funding has decreased.

00:39:24:84 - 00:39:34:96

It's meant that the UN hasn't been able to fulfil all its mandates, and it's meant that many

colleagues from across the UN system have left the organisation in one way or another.

00:39:36:23 - 00:39:54:15

It's my hope that we would change course, that some of that funding could be restored and that perhaps some of those experienced colleagues with vital skills could return to the organisation and begin delivering again on behalf of humanity.

00:39:55:03 - 00:40:05:59

So I would like to call for that in addition, as always, for stronger protection for humanitarian workers and accountability for any attacks on them.

00:40:05:96 - 00:40:06:44

[Other language spoken]

00:40:16:53 - 00:40:17:77

Thank you very much, Laura.

00:40:18:30 - 00:40:29:14

Our last, but definitely not least speaker is Mrs Gemma Connell, Officer in Charge, Humanitarian Sector Division at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

00:40:35:92 - 00:40:50:40

Excellencies, colleagues, friends, survivors, family members, it's the deepest honour to stand alongside you today as we mark the horrific attack on our UN colleagues in Baghdad all those years ago.

00:40:51:03 - 00:40:53:67

An attack which sent shock waves around the world.

00:40:53:67 - 00:41:02:59

Shock waves that still to this day, in the survivors, in this room, in the loved ones in this room, but also in the UN family.

00:41:02:59 - 00:41:05:75

Collectively, we are still reeling from today.

00:41:07:15 - 00:41:13:63

Since that catastrophic day, thousands of our humanitarian colleagues have been killed in the line of service.

00:41:14:03 - 00:41:17:96

What's worse, their deaths hardly ever even make the headlines.

00:41:18:59 - 00:41:32:11

From the hundreds of our UN Relief and Work Agency UNRWA colleagues killed in Gaza to our colleagues working in Sudan and other countries around the world, we rarely hear of the killing of aid workers.

00:41:32:48 - 00:41:36:51

And yet we have the highest numbers being killed in recent history.

00:41:37:71 - 00:41:49:75

The killing of our colleagues betrays a far wider erosion of the norms that should protect civilians in conflict, and a daily undermining of the laws that were designed specifically to minimise the human cost of war.

00:41:50:19 - 00:41:59:67

In a world where atrocities have been normalised and impunity reigns, attacks against aid workers are now part of the way wars have fought, not an exception to it.

00:42:00:32 - 00:42:02:36

We should never have ended up in this place.

00:42:03:59 - 00:42:07:96

This is not for lack of frameworks, not for lack of laws, not for lack of policies.

00:42:07:96 - 00:42:13:07

The international humanitarian law that we all hold dear protect civilians, including aid workers.

00:42:13:28 - 00:42:26:72

The UN Security Council has adopted a specific resolution on precisely this, and more recently, the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, which we warmly welcome, seeks to bring these commitments to life.

00:42:27:07 - 00:42:37:88

And yet, as you heard today, in 2025, just last year, over 900 of our humanitarian colleagues were killed, injured or kidnapped.

00:42:38:63 - 00:42:52:35

The vast majority of them, as we've reiterated today, working in their own communities and their own countries, from people evacuating civilians from the front lines in Ukraine to young volunteers in the emergency response rooms of Sudan.

00:42:53:51 - 00:42:59:00

And as we saw here again today, in the presence of family members of survivors.

00:42:59:00 - 00:43:09:88

Behind each of these statistics is a family, a family whose world has been torn apart, whose sister, husband, wife, aunt, uncle will not return home.

00:43:11:03 - 00:43:20:75

And that goes for those killed, but also for the lifelong impact of injuries and for our colleagues who sit today in detention, whose families are still waiting for them to return.

00:43:21:76 - 00:43:29:48

One of the most alarming trends we've seen is the use of cheap, adaptable armed drones to attack civilians and the aid workers who serve them.

00:43:30:03 - 00:43:35:03

We're putting lethal power into evermore hands, and our colleagues are in the crosshairs.

00:43:35:44 - 00:43:41:36

In March this year, a UNICEF colleague, Karine, was killed in a drone strike on a residential building in DRC.

00:43:41:71 - 00:43:48:03

And in just one week, one week in May, 4 humanitarian convoys were hit by drones in Ukraine.

00:43:48:67 - 00:43:50:00

The rules have not changed.

00:43:50:40 - 00:43:54:11

International humanitarian law applies regardless of the weapons used.

00:43:54:36 - 00:44:03:20

Civilians must be protected, humanitarian and medical personnel must be protected, and aid operations must be respected and allowed to reach the people in need.

00:44:03:80 - 00:44:08:51

Because an attack on an aid worker is an attack on the people who we exist to serve.

00:44:08:76 - 00:44:12:52

It deprives them of food, healthcare, protection and hope.

00:44:13:11 - 00:44:16:35

And right now, we're striving to reach millions of people around the world.

00:44:17:23 - 00:44:25:47

As so many have said today, statements of concern do not protect the thousands of our colleagues who are keeping humanitarian action running on the front line.

00:44:25:80 - 00:44:26:80

[Other language spoken]

00:44:27:76 - 00:44:38:48

We must act individually and collectively at every single lever to demand that aid attacks against aid workers end and the parties are held to account wherever they occur.

00:44:39:48 - 00:44:45:63

We thank the group of friends who are working with determination to uphold international law and take practical steps.

00:44:46:00 - 00:44:47:55

This is needed now more than ever.

00:44:48:40 - 00:44:56:88

Today, the UN flag will fly at half mast around the world, honouring humanitarian personnel who have lost their lives in the service of humanity.

00:44:57:19 - 00:44:59:83

But our colleagues deserve so much more than this.

00:45:00:36 - 00:45:04:20

They deserve to see the perpetrators of the crimes against them brought to justice.

00:45:04:59 - 00:45:17:03

They deserve to see their families supported and most of all, they deserve to know that their stories will live on and that those of us who remain will honour them by taking action to end the impunity that allowed them to be killed.

00:45:17:36 - 00:45:17:80

[Other language spoken]

00:45:29:82 - 00:45:32:90

Thank you very much, Tim, for this, for this remarks.

00:45:34:05 - 00:45:40:01

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, this brings us to the end of our ceremony of today.

00:45:40:67 - 00:45:55:39

I would like, of course, to thank security and all the colleagues who have helped bring in together this event and the cameramen who have been helping us bringing it outside the walls of the Palais.

00:45:56:55 - 00:46:12:88

Before we conclude, I would like to inform you that the Sergio de Viera de Mayo Foundation, together with the publisher Lajoie de Lira, I've taken the initiative to publish a graphic book called When the World Calls.

00:46:14:32 - 00:46:25:51

The book is intended for young adults, motivating them to engage in humanitarian work, and as a red line, the life of Serge Riviera de Melio is woven throughout the book.

00:46:26:00 - 00:46:40:32

The book will be launched just after the ceremony at the end of the corridor, so we invite you to attend the launch if you want, in the presence of the publisher, author and cartoonist, and we thank the Foundation for this.

00:46:41:92 - 00:47:00:92

I would also like to tell to the colleagues who are here with us in person, if they wish to honour the memory of those who lost their lives, to come and light a candle and place it on the table that is located right on the on the right of the long table.

00:47:03:03 - 00:47:15:15

And I would like to thank you all for attending this ceremony here at home and to leave you with the words of the Secretary General in his message on World Humanitarian Day.

00:47:16:44 - 00:47:18:76

The world has made commitments.

00:47:18:76 - 00:47:30:08

Now it must act to respect the rules of war, ensure safe access, hold perpetrators accountable and provide sufficient resources.

00:47:30:80 - 00:47:33:88

Humanitarian workers stand up for people in need.

00:47:34:36 - 00:47:36:40

We must stand up for them.

00:47:36:80 - 00:47:39:48

We must act for humanity now.

00:47:39:92 - 00:47:40:92

Thank you very much.

00:48:40:80 - 00:48:41:03

[Other language spoken]

00:49:59:21 - 00:49:59:33

[Other language spoken]

00:50:53:17 - 00:50:53:36

[Other language spoken]

00:52:48:07 - 00:52:48:19

[Other language spoken]