

# OCHA on Message: World Humanitarian Day

## What is World Humanitarian Day?

World Humanitarian Day is held every year on 19 August to pay tribute to aid workers who have risked and lost their lives in humanitarian service. The day was designated by the General Assembly in 2008 to coincide with the anniversary of the 2003 bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq.

Each year, World Humanitarian Day focuses on a particular theme, bringing together stakeholders from across the humanitarian system to advocate together for the safety and security of aid workers, and for the survival, well-being and dignity of people affected by crises.

### Safety and security of humanitarian workers

Around the world, humanitarian aid workers operate in dangerous and difficult environments.

Over the past 20 years, 4,132 aid workers have been victims of attack. In 2016, 91 aid workers were killed, 88 were injured and 73 were kidnapped in the line of duty.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of these attacks took place in South Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, the

Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia.

Attacks against aid workers are deplorable and represent clear violations of international humanitarian law. In addition to endangering aid workers, these attacks threaten humanitarian operations and the lives of millions of people who rely on humanitarian assistance to survive.

1. Humanitarian Outcomes. Aid Worker Security Database. Available from: <https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents>

### Canal Hotel bombing in Baghdad, Iraq

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

Five years later, the General Assembly adopted a resolution designating 19 August as World Humanitarian Day.

The Canal Hotel bombing was a massive loss for the United Nations and the humanitarian community, and it marked a turning point for humanitarian operations in Iraq and worldwide. Today, aid workers respond in increasingly dangerous environments, which risk their safety and impede the effectiveness of humanitarian action.

## What is OCHA's role?

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is the principal promoter of World Humanitarian Day.

As the central coordinating entity for the international humanitarian system, OCHA has a leadership role in the coordination of World Humanitarian Day activities. This is done in close collaboration with partners including Governments, UN agencies, non-governmental

organizations, private sector entities and others.

OCHA also organizes campaigns and events at headquarters and in the field. In 2016, OCHA helped to organize events in 41 countries, from a blood drive in Mali and a drawing contest for displaced children in Darfur, to the lighting of landmarks in Kobe and a 4 km race in Cairo. In previous years,

OCHA has also rallied the support of celebrities to advocate for the humanitarian cause, including Beyoncé and David Guetta.

Humanitarian aid workers across agencies and organizations are encouraged to use the day to pay tribute to their colleagues and advocate for humanitarian action worldwide.

*“World Humanitarian Day is an annual reminder of the need to act to alleviate the suffering. It is also an occasion to honour the humanitarian workers and volunteers toiling on the front lines of crises. I pay tribute to these dedicated women and men who brave danger to help others at far greater risk.”*

- Ban Ki-moon  
Former UN Secretary-General, Message on World Humanitarian Day 2016

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## What does OCHA say?

**1.** The scale of humanitarian needs is at an unprecedented high, with 128 million people in need of assistance to survive. On World Humanitarian Day, we call for global solidarity with all people affected by crises.

**2.** Every day, humanitarian workers brave tremendous dangers to deliver assistance to crisis-affected communities. On World Humanitarian Day, we pay tribute to those colleagues who have lost their lives in humanitarian service.

**3.** World Humanitarian Day is about the collective work of the humanitarian system, which is guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. It is about the partnerships that allow us to deliver assistance to people in need and the humanitarian principles that guide our work.

## To find out more

- [www.unocha.org/events/world-humanitarian-day](http://www.unocha.org/events/world-humanitarian-day)
- [www.un.org/en/events/humanitarianday/](http://www.un.org/en/events/humanitarianday/)

## Case Study

### Examples of previous World Humanitarian Day campaigns

**“We are humanitarian workers” (2010):** This campaign highlighted the contributions of humanitarian workers in the field. [A film](#) was produced for the day, which was shot in more than 40 countries in just under nine weeks, with contributions from 26 humanitarian organizations and 15 private sector partners.

**“I was here” (2012):** This groundbreaking campaign marked a milestone for World Humanitarian Day. World-renowned artist Beyoncé recorded and performed the song [“I was here”](#) for the day, which received more than 60 million views.

**“The world needs more” (2013):** To raise funds for humanitarian response, the 2013 campaign featured an innovative web platform through which the public could unlock funds donated by the private sector. A music video by David Guetta was also produced and displayed on the façade of the UN Headquarters Building in New York.

**“Humanitarian heroes” (2014):** This campaign called for greater protection of aid workers. In partnership with Humanitarian Outcomes, a media campaign brought attacks against aid workers into the spotlight, and partners organized more than 60 events around the world.

**“One humanity” (2016):** OCHA launched the “World You’d Rather” campaign, which allowed users to step into the shoes of crisis-affected people. An event at the General Assembly saw Hala Kamil, a Syrian refugee, deliver [a message to humanity](#) alongside celebrities such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Natalie Dormer.