

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
DEPUTY EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR URSULA MUELLER**

**Opening remarks at the Secretary-General's Spokesperson's
noon briefing on World Humanitarian Day – *near verbatim***

New York, 19 August 2019

We mark today, World Humanitarian Day, to honour aid workers around the world who often risk their own lives to help save and improve the lives of others.

Sixteen years ago, on 19 August 2003, the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, Iraq, was attacked, killing 22 of our colleagues, including a great humanitarian, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

And since then, more than 4,500 aid workers have been killed, injured, detained, assaulted or kidnapped while carrying out their work. That is equivalent to 280 humanitarians attacked every year.

That is too many of our colleagues and fellow humanitarians killed or injured, and too many making the ultimate sacrifice.

As respect for the laws of war weaken around the world, aid workers are increasingly vulnerable when they are more needed than ever before.

Last year was the worst for violence against aid workers in five years, and the second worst on record overall.

In 2018, there were 405 victims, with 131 killed, 144 wounded and 130 kidnapped in 35 crisis-affected countries.

So far in 2019, some 156 aid workers have been attacked on the job, with 57 killed, 59 wounded and 40 kidnapped.

But even amid these risks, over half a million professional humanitarians work every day to protect, save and improve the lives of tens of millions of vulnerable people.

Today, on the tenth anniversary of World Humanitarian Day, we are paying special tribute to the women among them.

Women make up over 40 per cent of the humanitarian work force throughout the world. They are active in every aspect of humanitarian action: from negotiating access to people in need, to fighting deadly diseases such as measles and Ebola.

From reuniting separated children with their families, to ensuring people uprooted by natural disasters and conflict have shelter, access to clean water, healthcare, food and nutrition.

Women humanitarians are even better able to access women and girls who might otherwise be out of reach, to bring them the services, vital information and support which they need.

And women strengthen humanitarian response by bringing different perspective, insights and experiences.

An effective humanitarian response is an inclusive one, and women must play a central role in humanitarian decision-making, programme design and implementation.

This World Humanitarian Day, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has launched a campaign showcasing 24 compelling stories of 24 women over a cycle of 24 hours, to show the breadth and the diversity of women's contributions to humanitarian action.

There are countless other stories that could have been told, but we chose 24 remarkable women in many different contexts.

Each of the 24 hours uses the routines of our everyday lives to show the contrasting daily experiences of women humanitarians who are working in some of the world's most challenging, difficult and dangerous environments.

The campaign, with the hashtag #WomenHumanitarians, reminds us of just how different a morning routine, a meeting at work or a commute home looks for women on the ground helping to deliver aid.

For instance, Barbara is the only female driver working for WFP in Central African Republic, so, breaking a stereotype, the only female driver among a 15-car convoy to deliver supplies across conflict zones.

For Vanda at Plan International in Indonesia, the first thing on her daily to-do list is to meet with displaced families and find out if they are receiving the right help.

And for Maya in Lebanon dinnertime means distributing free meals to hundreds of Syrian refugee families.

Today, on World Humanitarian Day, we invite everyone to join this campaign and share the stories of impressive women who are helping to further humanity.

Actually, ahead of World Humanitarian Day, we had a survey among 1,000 women humanitarians in 115 countries and asked them what motivates them and they said they want to contribute to humanity and further social justice.

So having this campaign is our shared way of honouring their work - and the work of all humanitarians - who together are helping to save and improve the lives of millions of women, men and children most in need.

All of these examples, and many more, show the impact of women humanitarians, who – despite ongoing risk and insecurity in many places – stand their ground to save and improve people’s lives.

Women humanitarians can also help make response efforts more effective, and strengthen gender equality in crisis settings. And this is why we need women in the humanitarian sector, and we need them at all levels – from the frontlines of the response to the top leadership levels.

Today, on World Humanitarian Day, we invite everyone to join this campaign and honor their work – and that of all humanitarians.

Thank you.