



# World Humanitarian Day

## Delivering Aid, Despite the Risks

They provide life-saving assistance to millions of people around the world. They work in conflict zones and areas of natural hazards. They place their own lives at risk. They are the thousands of workers providing humanitarian aid to people worldwide, who are often direct targets of those who have no respect for the humanitarian nature of their work.

In the last decade, more than 700 humanitarian workers have made the ultimate sacrifice while striving to help those most in need in some of the world's most hostile environments. Thousands more have endured bombing, kidnapping, attacks, hijacking, robbery and rape.

On 19 August 2003, a truck packed with a ton of explosives deliberately drove into the United Nations office in Iraq, killing 22 people. Among them was Sergio Vieira de Mello, then the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, longtime humanitarian and a tireless servant of those affected by disaster and conflict. Paying tribute to Sergio, former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: "He never once hesitated to take on difficult, even dangerous assignments. Victims of conflict and disasters throughout the world came to know him as someone who understood their plight and knew how to deliver results despite enormous obstacles."

The United Nations General Assembly has chosen to dedicate this day, 19 August, to honour all humanitarians. For their selfless courage in facing the challenges of an imperfect world and their inspirational mission to improve it, humanitarians deserve not only our praise. They also deserve our firm commitment to help ensure their safety and security in the line of duty.

## Humanitarian Facts and Figures

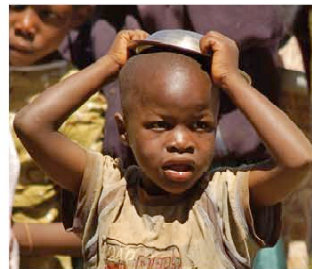
**Hunger:** According to the FAO, world hunger is projected to reach a historic high in 2009, with just over a billion people going hungry every day. The most recent increase in hunger is not just the consequence of poor global harvests, but rather a combination of underlying factors, including most recently the world economic crisis, which have dramatically reduced access to food by the poor. Almost all of the world's undernourished live in developing countries. In Asia and the Pacific, an estimated 642 million people suffer from chronic hunger (equivalent to about half the population of China). In sub-Saharan Africa that figure is 265 million (more than the population

of Indonesia, which is the fourth most populous nation on earth); in Latin America and the Caribbean 53 million; in the Near East and North Africa 42 million. In comparison, the number of people going hungry in developed countries is 15 million in total.

**Refugees and Displaced People:** Tens of millions of people around the world have been forcibly displaced, both within their own countries and across international borders. There are 15.2 million refugees, people who have been forced to flee their own countries due to violence and war. At least 26 million have been displaced within their own countries by conflict or other forms of violence. Millions more are forcibly displaced within their own countries each year by natural disasters and other causes. This number is expected to rise still further in the coming years, at least in part in the context of climate change. Often the most vulnerable people in a humanitarian crisis, those forcibly displaced from their homes are commonly at risk of further violence, discrimination and destitution.

**Children:** In 2008 more than 9 million children died before their fifth birthday. Most of these children lived in developing countries and died from a disease or a combination of diseases that could easily have been prevented or treated – antibiotics for pneumonia, or a simple mix of water, salt and sugar for diarrhoea. Malnutrition still contributes to more than a third of these deaths. Almost half of the persons of concern to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) are children. Forcible displacement exacerbates children’s exposure to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. Of all displaced persons, children are at particular risk and require special attention due to their dependence upon adults to survive, their heightened vulnerability to physical and psychological trauma and the developmental needs that must be met to ensure normal growth and development. Although children enjoy comprehensive rights under international law, more often than not, refugee, other displaced and stateless children are deprived of the most basic ones, including the right not to face discrimination, the right to health and the right to education. This is most notably the case when refugee children lack access to child protection systems in the country of asylum.

While all children have common needs, certain groups may face increased protection risks. These include unaccompanied and separated children; adolescents, especially teenage mothers and their children; victims of trafficking and sexual abuse; survivors of violence, in particular sexual and gender-based violence; children who get married under the age specified in national laws or are forced into unions; children who are or have been associated with armed groups; children in detention; children who face social discrimination; children with mental or physical disabilities; children living with or affected by HIV/AIDS; and children out of school.





**Water and Access to Sanitation:** Every year, 1.8 million people die from diarrhoeal diseases. Getting water and sanitation supplies and services to victims of disasters and conflicts is a top priority for humanitarian workers. Ninety percent of deaths in children under the age of five occur in developing countries. Improving water-supply systems can reduce diarrhoea-related illness by 21 percent and better sanitation can reduce diarrhoea cases by 38 percent. The simple act of washing hands can reduce diarrhoea cases by up to 35 percent, while additional improvement to drinking water quality, such as point-of-use disinfection, reduces diarrhoea episodes by 45 percent.

**Gender-Based Violence:** Women and girls are the victims of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. In many places, men and boys are also victims of sexual violence, but this is often not reported. Many are abducted to serve as sex slaves; pregnant women are physically assaulted; and many women and girls have been infected with HIV/AIDS. Sexual violence against women and girls during or after armed conflicts has been reported in every war zone. Victims often suffer serious health consequences and risk stigmatization and political and economic exclusion. One of the current trouble spots where sexual violence has reached epidemic proportions is the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's provinces of North and South Kivu. There, substantial efforts have been made to address sexual violence, including improved reporting of cases. However, issues such as fear of reporting due to stigma and threats of reprisal make it difficult to keep accurate statistics of the problem. Information on reported cases of sexual violence indicate a larger percentage of perpetrators of sexual violence in the Kivus are members of the national army, rebels, and other parties to the conflict in the Kivus. The majority of the victims are girls.

### **Countries of Concern in 2009**

**Pakistan:** When fighting escalated in north-western Pakistan in May this year, more than two million civilians were forced to flee their homes. In areas where they have sought safety, humanitarian organisations are providing life-saving services including food aid, medical care and shelter in coordination with others. Humanitarian workers continue to provide assistance at great risk to their own lives. Four UN staff have been killed this year, three of them UNHCR members of staff. On 2 February Syed Hashim, a veteran UNHCR staffer, was shot dead during the kidnapping of John Solecki, head of the UNHCR Quetta office who was later released. On June 9, Aleksandar Vorkapic, a UNHCR staff member and Perseveranda So, a UNICEF staff member died in the bombing of the Pearl Continental hotel in Peshawar. On 16 July, Zill-e-Usman a UNHCR staff member and Chairman of the UNHCR Staff Council in Pakistan was shot and killed on duty in Katcha Gari IDP camp.

**Sri Lanka:** The bloody end to Sri Lanka's nearly 26-year civil war earlier this year created a humanitarian crisis and left hundreds of thousands of people inaccessible to most humanitarian agencies. When war-weakened and wounded civilians were finally able to leave the conflict zone in large numbers, the government and humanitarian organisations mounted a massive operation to ensure their basic needs were met with food, medical care and shelter assistance. Unfortunately, this population remains confined in IDP camps, still denied its basic right to freedom of movement. In 2006, 17 workers with the non-governmental organization (NGO) Action Against Hunger were killed in Sri Lanka in an attack on their compound by armed men. A Government investigation so far failed to find anyone responsible for the murders.

**The Horn of Africa - Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia and parts of Uganda:** Humanitarian agencies estimate that 19.8 million people, including 4 million children under the age of 5, are in need of emergency assistance as a result of inadequate rainfall. Humanitarian agencies are present in all these countries, working to stave off hunger and diseases related to malnutrition. In Somalia the humanitarian operation has been hindered and in some areas curtailed by frequent incidents of violence targeting humanitarian workers, including attacks by suicide bombers, murder, kidnapping, piracy and looting of humanitarian supplies.

**Afghanistan:** Humanitarian organisations are striving to maintain life-saving relief operations in Afghanistan despite considerable threats to their safety and security. A 2007/2008 risk and vulnerability assessment found that some 7.4 million Afghans (31 percent of the total population) are unable to access minimum food requirements. There are an estimated 235,000 internally displaced people in Afghanistan. In addition, around 400,000 people each year are seriously affected by natural disasters, such as droughts, floods, earthquakes and extreme weather conditions. In 2008, 30 incidents/attacks on WFP food aid convoys were reported, resulting in the loss of 1,200 metric tons of food valued at \$700,000. So far this year, 17 incidents have been reported with a loss of 42 metric tons of food aid, according to WFP. Last year, members of a WHO immunization team lost their lives when their convoy was targeted by a suicide bomber.

**Sudan:** One of the world's largest relief operations is in Darfur, western Sudan, where relief agencies provide emergency humanitarian services to an estimated 4.7 million people, including nearly 2.7 million people displaced by the conflict there. Despite challenging political, geographical and climatic obstacles to their work, and the constant threat of kidnapping and attack, aid agencies continue to meet displaced people's basic needs. In 2008, some 317,000 people were newly displaced, often for the second or third time since the conflict started in early 2003. Targeted violence against humanitarian workers and their assets has continued at alarmingly high levels, further constraining humanitarian access.





The humanitarian situation in Southern Sudan during the second quarter of 2009 deteriorated sharply as a result of inter-tribal fighting and violence associated with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Clashes with the LRA in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have caused further refugee influxes into Western and Central Equatoria States. Epidemic diseases and the challenge of reintegrating internally displaced persons and refugees returning home to Southern Sudan have also been major humanitarian priorities. Southern Sudan still has some of the worst child and maternal health indicators in the world. One child in every seven dies under the age of five. The most common causes of morbidity and mortality are preventable and treatable, with malaria accounting for over 40 percent of all health facility visits. Children remain particularly vulnerable as Southern Sudan has one of the lowest routine immunisation coverage rates in the world. One out of seven women dies as a result of child birth related causes. The majority of births are unassisted, as there are only 10 registered midwives in the whole of Southern Sudan.

**Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):** A succession of conflicts in the DRC since 1997 has spawned one of the most intractable humanitarian crises in Africa. The provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu in the east of the country are the worst affected. The country has a total of 1.7 million internally displaced people, 450,000 of them in South Kivu alone. Humanitarian organisations are often targeted for attack by the various warring factions in both North and South Kivu. For instance, between January and April 2009, 44 attacks against humanitarian workers were reported – one attack every three days on average. All armed groups in the area, including the national army, also stand accused of committing atrocities against civilians. Crimes against civilians include murder, rape, looting and arson. General insecurity and the targeting of humanitarian workers and their assets in the Kivus continue.

**Iraq:** United Nations agencies and partner organisations provided emergency humanitarian assistance to more than 2.5 million people in 2008 with funds contributed by donors through the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). Despite very difficult security conditions, UN agencies and NGOs reached nearly one in every 10 Iraqis, meeting the most critical needs of people affected by the situation there.

**occupied Palestinian territory (oPt):** A total of 1.5 million people live under effective embargo in Gaza because the crossing points are closed to all but a small proportion of needed items. Humanitarian agencies are working hard, despite severe restrictions imposed on the humanitarian effort, to continue providing life-saving services to the Palestinian community. The criteria used for allowing the import of humanitarian and other goods remain unpredictable. Medical supplies can be subject to long delays. Despite major shelter and

reconstruction needs following the hostilities earlier this year, only a fraction of the required construction materials have so far been allowed by Israel into Gaza. For example, 18 schools were completely destroyed and at least 280 were damaged during the hostilities. None of these schools have been properly rebuilt or rehabilitated due to lack of construction materials. Around one-fifth of school children in Gaza are iodine deficient. The prevalence of anaemia among children 9 - 12 months of age is 61.6%; prevalence among pregnant women is around 29%, and 22% of children 12 - 59 months old lack Vitamin A.

### **New Challenges**

The total number of people affected by the natural disasters has risen sharply over the past decade. An average of 211 million people are directly affected each year, nearly five times the number affected by conflict. Women and children in particular are those already struggling with poverty, insecurity, hunger, poor health and environmental decline.

Climate change is also expected to dramatically affect patterns of migration and population movement. The millions expected to be displaced by prolonged droughts and repeated floods or storms will be especially vulnerable, requiring significant assistance and protection.

Recognizing that climate change is increasingly the cause of weather events that have humanitarian consequences, aid agencies are united in calling for the humanitarian impacts of climate change to be addressed in the successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol in Copenhagen in December 2009.

The global economic crisis puts pressure on the aid budgets of all donor governments, but the impact of the recession is mostly felt by crisis-stricken people in poor countries. Jobs – already rare – are lost; remittances from relatives abroad decline; food and fuel prices remain high; and farming inputs become harder to access, making food production less secure.

Humanitarian needs are increasing because of the economic crisis and other global challenges such as population pressure; global health pandemics; increasing food insecurity; price spikes in, for example, oil; water scarcity; and increasing numbers of people on the move. Meeting these challenges needs more flexible funding and adaptable humanitarian work to address these emerging and complex developments.

