Information on World Humanitarian Day

The European Union is committed to protecting humanitarian workers and - every year - supports the World Humanitarian Day. 19 August marks the day in 2003 when 22 humanitarians died in the bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq. It is a day to honour the brave men and women who risk their lives while they provide help to people who suffer and to draw attention to the increasing dangers faced by humanitarian workers.

An Alarming Trend

In 2014, 329 aid workers were victims of violent attacks, more than one third of whom were killed. National humanitarians are most at risk; in 2014, the majority of the victims of attacks were men and women from the affected countries. Whilst there was a year-on-year reduction of attacks on aid workers from 2013 to 2014, this does not mean that the world has become a safer place. Attacks in 2014 declined, because with the volatile security situation fewer aid workers could be deployed to conflict areas. Without unhindered and safe access to victims, life-saving assistance cannot be delivered.

Attacks against humanitarian personnel are a violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The law is binding on all state and non-state actors in a conflict. It sets out their responsibilities regarding the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers, the protection of vulnerable groups such as refugees, women and children and the right of civilians in need of humanitarian assistance.

The European Union vigorously promotes respect of IHL through advocacy and humanitarian funding to ensure humanitarian access. The EU also finances training in IHL to civilian and military personnel engaged in EU crisis management operations.

Europe's Humanitarian Record

Europe has a long and proud tradition of humanitarian service. It is the birthplace of many of the world's prominent relief organisations. The European Union as a whole has provided humanitarian aid for more than 40 years and is, together with its Member States, today the world's largest donor of humanitarian aid. European solidarity has the overwhelming support of the citizens: nine out of ten Europeans say that it is important that the EU funds humanitarian aid according to the most recent Eurobarometer survey.

In 2014, the European Commission helped 121 million victims of natural and man-made disasters across more than 80 countries through its Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO). This was achieved with less than 1% of the total EU annual budget – just over €2 per EU citizen. The EU continues to assist the most vulnerable, including the victims of the conflicts in Syria, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Ukraine, the survivors of natural disasters in Asia or those affected by the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. EU humanitarian aid is delivered in partnership with more than 200 humanitarian organisations, including non-governmental and international organizations, the United Nations and the Red Cross family. EU assistance is solely based on needs and founded in the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

A Historic Opportunity

On 23 and 24 May 2016, the humanitarian community will meet in Istanbul for the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit. It is a historic opportunity to find ways to better tackle humanitarian needs in a fast-changing world. It will be the occasion to increase effectiveness of humanitarian work and to better manage risks for humanitarian workers. It is also an occasion to reaffirm the European Union's commitment to alleviate human suffering and to stand with the people affected by conflicts and crises across the world. As the world's leading humanitarian donor, the EU has a decisive role to play.

For further information

Website of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO): http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm

Website of the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos Stylianides: http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/stylianides_en

Solidarity in Action: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/core_achievements/solidarity_in_action/index_en.htm?#intro

Aid Worker Security Database: http://aidworkersecurity.org

European Year for Development: https://europa.eu/eyd2015/en

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