

UNITED NATIONS



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As delivered

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS AT THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY EVENT

General Assembly Hall
New York, 19 August 2016

Distinguished participants and performers,

Dear Friends,

Today is a day to remember sacrifices and to honor courageous action. Today is also a day of celebrating our common humanity and our determination to live up to the values and principles of the UN Charter.

On this World Humanitarian Day, we pay tribute to the thousands and thousands of humanitarian workers and volunteers, who risk their lives to deliver life-saving aid to people in need on the frontlines of crises and utter despair.

Last year 109 aid workers were killed, 110 were wounded and 68 were kidnapped. Most of them worked in five countries: Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Today is also a day to show solidarity with the millions of people who are living in conflict and grave humanitarian need.

This magnificent General Assembly hall is the symbol of our pursuit to improve the conditions of humanity, serving as

we should “We the peoples” of the United Nations, the first three words of the Charter. During the seven decades since the Charter was written, we have seen many advances for peace, development and human rights.

Yet, today, the scale of human suffering is greater than at any time since the Organization was founded.

A record 130 million people are now dependent on the United Nations and our partners for their protection and survival from conflict and disaster.

More than 65 million people have been displaced as they flee violence or persecution. It is the highest number since World War II. Half of the displaced are children. What life and what future do they have?

The needs around us are staggering and hard to comprehend.

Yet, they tell only a fraction of the story.

Behind the statistics are individuals and families whose lives have been devastated. They are all our fellow human

beings with dreams and aspirations for a different life, a different, a better future.

These women, men and children face horrible situations and impossible choices every day.

They are parents who must choose between buying food or bringing medicine for their children.

They are children who cannot go to school because their buildings have been destroyed.

They are families who must risk bombing and death at home or make a perilous escape by sea or across a desert.

Humanitarian workers also must make heart-breaking choices.

Think of the nurse in Yemen, who has run out of medical supplies and must decide who to treat, who to save.

Or the aid workers in South Sudan, who cannot feed all of the malnourished children in their camp.

I have been engaged in humanitarian work ever since my time as the first UN Emergency Relief Coordinator in the 90ies. Over the years, I have faced impossible choices and unspeakable suffering.

I have seen the plight of refugees and victims of floods, earthquakes and drought, not to speak of innumerable innocent victims of warfare. And I have watched the anguish of colleagues and friends struggling to help people in dangerous and often underfunded operations.

Dear Friends,

Earlier this year, 9,000 participants met in Istanbul for the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit. World leaders committed to transform the lives of people in acute need, in support of the Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity.

As we reflect on the meaning of World Humanitarian Day, we should recall and sound the alarm about the barbarity which is taking place every day in different parts of the world.

Let me highlight the unspeakable tragedy of Syria.

Time and time again, the United Nations has appealed for an end to the killing and destruction. Yet, those fighting persist in searching for military victory. And those watching from the outside are not preventing the violence from reaching new depths of atrocities.

The Syrian people are subject to daily horrors. Barrel bombs. Terrorist acts. Chlorine gas attacks. Hospital bombings. Torture. Starvation. Siege. Desperate flight. The past two days, we have been haunted by the image of Omran Daqneesh, the young boy rescued from the rubble of a bombing in Aleppo.

Let us remember that even wars have rules. Let nobody be under any illusion: today's crimes are being recorded for tomorrow's justice.

In Aleppo, we urgently need a ceasefire or, at least, sufficient humanitarian pauses to reach the huge number of people in desperate need of food and medical supplies.

We now pin our hope on the proposal of Special Envoy de Mistura and OCHA, on behalf of the Secretary-General, to observe a 48 hour humanitarian pause next week. I call on all

parties to support this proposal in order to give the population in Aleppo the relief they so desperately need.

I join the Secretary-General in urging the Security Council and all actors, with influence on the ground, to end the hostilities and to make possible political talks. Such talks could finally lead to a transition to peace for the suffering people of Syria.

Dear Friends,

Let me end on a more hopeful note.

This year, we have embarked on a transformative journey to a better future, staked out by last year's achievements by UN Member States. A road to a future, where no one is forced to make impossible choices, a future where no one is left behind.

UN member states made great progress in Sendai, Addis, New York, Paris and Istanbul. You committed to work for a world of peace and justice, opportunity and dignity for all.

To reach that brighter future, we must all work together in solidarity and with passion and compassion: governments, parliaments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and the scientific community.

We have an historic opportunity to make further progress at the Summit on large movements of refugees and migrants in September in New York and at Habitat III in Quito.

On this World Humanitarian Day, let us recognize the world as it is – and it is a troubled place. But let us never forget to strive for the world as it should be.

To reduce this gap – between the world as it is and the world as it should be – is the mission of the United Nations, and the mission for all of us here tonight.

Thank you.