

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Statement on World Humanitarian Day

August 19, 2010

Seven years ago today, terrorists heinously attacked the U.N. Headquarters in Baghdad, killing 22 innocent people who were in Iraq to support Iraqis in their quest to live with freedom, dignity, and security. That outrageous attack highlighted the increasing dangers faced by unarmed humanitarians from around the world who dedicate their lives to serving their fellow human beings, often in extremely difficult circumstances. It is our respect and gratitude for their contributions that has led the international community to designate August 19 as World Humanitarian Day.

These humanitarians live and work in the world's most dangerous and difficult places, often at great risk to their own lives. From Somalia to Sudan, Haiti to Iraq, Burma to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Pakistan to Afghanistan, these individuals, often unheralded, provide life-sustaining support to millions. Today we honor their selfless service and the humanitarian principles that they embody.

These local and international humanitarian aid workers have distinguished themselves again this year. In the aftermath of the deadly earthquake in Haiti, humanitarian aid workers from around the world mobilized immediately for emergency rescue efforts and remain in the country today to support ongoing relief and recovery efforts. Today, humanitarian aid workers are providing food, water, and other lifesaving assistance to millions of Pakistanis devastated by flooding. In Sudan, aid workers risk violent attacks and kidnaping to try to feed the displaced of Darfur and help the south prepare for its approaching referendum.

Today we also mourn the losses of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in pursuit of humanitarian ideals. This month, 10 American, Afghan, German, and British humanitarian workers in Afghanistan were brutally murdered. They died distributing medicine, eyeglasses, and other assistance urgently needed by the people of Afghanistan. And they are the victims of a dangerous trend. Armed groups are increasingly targeting the humanitarian workers whose simple goal is to help innocent civilians in times of danger and suffering. Over the past decade, over 700 humanitarian workers have lost their lives in service, and murders of humanitarian aid workers have more than tripled annually to 102 deaths in 2009.

On this World Humanitarian Day, the United States condemns the killing, kidnaping, and other attacks against humanitarian aid workers, and we reaffirm our enduring commitment to the goals to which they have dedicated their lives. Every humanitarian aid worker must be free to serve without fear for their safety, and every person in the world must be able to pursue their aspirations in peace and security.

Categories: Statements by the President : World Humanitarian Day.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Insurgency and terrorist attacks; Afghanistan : International assistance; Haiti : Earthquake, damage and recovery efforts; Haiti : International assistance; Iraq : United Nations staff members, deaths in Baghdad in 2003; Natural disasters : Haiti, earthquake; Natural disasters : Pakistan, floods; Pakistan : Floods, damage and recovery efforts; Pakistan : International assistance; Sudan : Darfur, conflict and human rights crisis; Sudan : International assistance; Sudan : Peace efforts; United Nations : Iraq, staff members, deaths in Baghdad in 2003; World Humanitarian Day.

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