

On World Humanitarian Day, health professionals call for protection in conflicts

Geneva, Switzerland: 19 August 2024 – On World Humanitarian Day, health professionals join humanitarians around the world to express unwavering condemnation of the escalating violence targeting healthcare facilities and personnel.

Health professionals in 76 countries and territories around the world [have signed the WHPA’s call](#) to provide health care facilities and personnel in conflict zones with the protection required by international humanitarian law (IHL).

The call comes in response to a significant increase in attacks targeting health care, with incidents becoming far more deadly. According to [global WHO data](#), the number of attacks resulting in deaths or injuries to health personnel has increased by 75% in the last three years compared to the previous three years. These attacks have led to a devastating 240% increase in deaths of personnel and patients.

Despite 75 years of universally accepted international laws designed to regulate armed conflict and limit its impact, the loss of life, physical and mental harm, and disruption of health services are becoming increasingly normalized. Attacks on healthcare facilities and vehicles, as well as their misuse for military purposes and the misuse of protective signs (such as red cross, red crescent), constitute unacceptable violations of international humanitarian law. These violations are far too often committed with impunity.

Catherine Duggan, Chair of WHPA and CEO of the International Pharmaceutical Federation, said, “If world leaders continue to look away when IHL is breached, when health professionals are targeted, killed or injured in the course of their daily work in conflict zones, then the perpetrators will continue their attacks on health facilities and personnel. The WHPA calls on leaders to uphold existing laws and hold those who violate them to account. Health professionals in conflicts provide care regardless of political, religious or ethnic affiliation, and often risk their own lives in doing so. We urge all health professionals to [sign the WHPA Open Letter](#) and support our call for health facilities and personnel to be safeguarded from harm.”

This World Humanitarian Day, WHPA demands an end to violations of international humanitarian law and the impunity with which they are committed.

It is time for those in power to stop looking away and #ActForHumanity.

Note for Editors

The *World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA)* brings together the global organizations representing the world’s dentists, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists and physicians and speaks for over 41 million health care professionals in more than 130 countries. The WHPA works to improve global



health and the quality of patient care and facilitates collaboration among the health professions and major stakeholders. www.whpa.org

World Humanitarian Day is marked on 19 August, the day in 2003 when 22 UN aid workers were killed in an attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq. The activity brings together partners from across the humanitarian system to advocate for the survival, well-being and dignity of people affected by crises, and for the safety and security of aid workers. It is organized by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). <https://2024.worldhumanitarianiday.org/>

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