

## **World Humanitarian Day: Conflict, funding cuts and violence threaten health professionals worldwide**

Geneva, Switzerland: 19 August 2026—On [World Humanitarian Day](#), the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA) stands in solidarity with humanitarian workers around the world and calls for an immediate end to attacks on health professionals, patients and health facilities in conflict.

Every day, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, dentists and pharmacists risk their own safety to provide critical health care to people caught up in war. Increasingly, they are coming under attack simply for doing their jobs.

International humanitarian law is unequivocal: health workers, patients and medical facilities must be protected at all times. Yet these legal protections are being ignored with alarming frequency, while those responsible are too rarely held to account. This culture of impunity must end.

The scale of the crisis continues to grow. As conflicts multiply and the nature of warfare changes through new military technologies like armed drones and other advanced weapons systems, health care is increasingly caught in the crosshairs. According to the [Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2026 annual report](#), 2,546 attacks on health care were documented across 33 countries in 2025, including 790 hospitals bombed and even search-and-rescue teams targeted by drone strikes. A total of 455 health workers were killed, 218 kidnapped and 263 arrested or detained in 2025 alone. These attacks have a significant impact on health systems, undermining both service delivery and long-term health system resilience.

The impact is compounded by a worsening funding crisis. Deep cuts to health and humanitarian funding have severely reduced the availability of essential services in conflict settings, leaving communities with fewer health professionals, fewer medicines and fewer functioning facilities when needs are at their greatest. Nearly three-quarters of conflict-affected countries have seen their health services severely impacted by budget cuts, according to the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition report.

“Health professionals do not choose sides in war, they choose patients. Every day, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists and dentists put themselves at risk to provide care based on need alone, in accordance with the humanitarian principles that underpin health care. Yet too often they are attacked for doing exactly that, while cuts to humanitarian and health funding are quietly dismantling the services that civilians rely on for survival. This is a double assault on health care. States and parties to conflict must uphold international humanitarian law, protect health professionals, patients and health facilities, and ensure those responsible for attacks are held to account. Health professionals are not combatants. They are not targets. Protecting them is not only a legal obligation - it is essential to protecting patients, safeguarding health systems and preserving our shared humanity,” said Howard Catton, Chair of the WHPA and CEO of the International Council of Nurses.

On this World Humanitarian Day, WHPA calls on governments, parties to conflict and the international community to act urgently to protect health professionals, safeguard health services and ensure accountability for attacks on health care. As conflicts intensify, funding for health programmes declines, and violence against health personnel continues unabated, the ability of health professionals to deliver life-saving care is increasingly at risk. Health professionals are neither combatants nor targets, and they are protected under international humanitarian law. Protecting them is essential to protecting patients and health systems, and vital to preserving our shared humanity.

### **#ActForHumanity**

Sign WHPA's [\*open letter calling for the safeguarding of healthcare facilities and personnel in areas of conflict\*](#), in accordance with international law

### **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 47 million health care professionals in more than 179 countries and territories. 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](http://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://worldhumanitarianiday.org/>

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