



Sonia Almassad, a Field Programme Officer in Yemen with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. She works to make sure civilians can receive humanitarian aid amid the war, and she's one of the only women doing it.

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## Real-life heroes: volunteers stepping forward for humanitarianism

"We the people of the United Nations, determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small..." --Preamble of the United Nations Charter

This principle, ascribed 75 years ago in the preamble of the UN Charter, symbolized a global conviction towards a new world. With a common aspiration to prevent the recurrence of the 'untold sorrow to mankind' experienced in the decades prior, the signatories committed to a restored faith in humanity. The principle permeates through all of the UN's work, be that in humanitarian assistance, development or peacekeeping.

However, in a complex and challenging world, this virtue is often tested. The present global pandemic is one of the most complex and challenging threats the world has ever faced. Now, more than ever, we need to rise to that test. Volunteers step forward to do that.

Carrying forward this dedication to human *dignity and worth* is not the burden of any one individual, community, or generation. Yet some individuals step forward to take on a greater share of that burden and champion the principle through the most difficult challenges that we face.

These people are the world's humanitarians, whose resilience we celebrate today, as we observe World Humanitarian Day.

Every year, we observe this day on 19 August, in honor of the humanitarians who fell victim to the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, where 22 people tragically lost their lives and over 150 were injured on that same day in 2003. The day recognizes the real-life heroes who continue the extraordinary work of saving lives, protecting the planet and leaving no one behind, and pays tribute to all humanitarians who have lost their lives in their course of duty.

Sergio Vierra de Mello, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to Iraq and High Commissioner for Human Rights, who was killed in the bombing, is one humanitarian who stepped forward to take a greater share of that responsibility for humanity, and he still inspires us today.

“ World Humanitarian Day has a special meaning to me, having been under the rubble with Sergio on August 19<sup>th</sup>, the day considered by a former UN Secretary-General as one of the darkest in the history of the United Nations. --Jason Pronyk

We applaud the humanitarians of today, who carry the torch of humanitarianism now and on into the future, just as their colleagues in Baghdad did. Their bravery and their devotion to the principles outlined in the UN charter is an inspiration to us all, and their altruism is a quality that the world desperately needs in times such as our current crisis.

Volunteers embody and promote that very same spirit of altruism, by stepping forward to take responsibility for others and doing so, not for material gain, but driven by a commitment to human *dignity and worth*. They exemplify the most admirable qualities of humanity. And for that, we all owe our gratitude.

We look today to the undaunted efforts of the Lebanese people in response to the tragic explosion in Beirut. Medical workers, engineers and others putting their time and energy at the service of those in need have shown the strength of resilient and connected communities.

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To all the volunteers in Beirut, we celebrate your resilience.

We also say thank you to the UN Volunteer humanitarians who provide such critical strength to the UN.

We thank UN Volunteers working to provide water supply for refugees in Eastern Sudan, those working to ensure COVID-19 response plans in Morocco are gender responsive, the nurses and doctors volunteering to safeguard the health of UN humanitarians in Yemen, and to over 6,500 UN Volunteers supporting the UN globally.

Every day, but especially on August 19<sup>th</sup>, we salute the service of those who have upheld the humanity of our world in the past. We salute those who have risked their lives, and those who have given their lives, to defend that principle. We salute those who honor their memory by carrying the torch forward through challenges of the present for generations of the future.

To all the world's humanitarians, we say: thank you.

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