

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

## Plight of humanity in emergencies

**Op-ed by the United Nations' humanitarian coordinator by James W. Rawley on the occasion of World Humanitarian Day**

Today, on World Humanitarian Day, we are reminded of the plight of the men, women and children around the world who are suffering as a result of armed conflict or natural disasters. We are also reminded of the many humanitarian workers who risk their lives to bring life-saving protection and assistance to these people. World Humanitarian Day commemorates their courage and spirit.

Humanitarian crises have continued to grow in scope and number in recent years. It is estimated that more than 73 million people in 24 countries, the majority of them women and children, remain in dire need of humanitarian protection and assistance. In Syria alone, more than 10 million people have been uprooted from their homes within Syria or have fled to neighboring countries. Men, women and children of all ages and backgrounds in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Chad, Somalia and Yemen face unimaginable hardships.

Humanitarian workers from the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and international organizations, strive to bring relief to those in need, wherever they are and regardless of their origin, race, religion or political opinion. They must overcome enormous challenges in doing so and many face grave physical risks. During the first six months of this year over 260 aid workers were killed in the line of duty. Despite this, thousands of humanitarian workers from every nation and faith bring emergency shelter, food, water and medical care to millions of people every day – in the spirit of our shared humanity and with the goals of saving lives, alleviating suffering and reducing the humanitarian impact of conflict and natural calamities.

World Humanitarian Day presents us with an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to these goals and there are a number of positive factors that we can draw upon. New technology can help us collect information, assess needs and share analysis with unprecedented speed; improved coordination can help us minimize duplication and maximize the effective use of resources; and strategic, innovative thinking can help us build on and strengthen the resilience of those affected. Most importantly, increased cooperation and new partnerships can enable us to go further, move faster and reach more people in need.

In recent years, the Israeli government and Israeli NGOs have taken on this international challenge and have become valued partners in addressing humanitarian needs, including by providing food, medical care and technology in emergencies, such as the aftermath of the Haiti

earthquake in 2010. Similarly, the international community has contributed to responding to emergencies in Israel. Following the Mount Carmel forest fires in December 2010 around 35 countries offered assistance, and the Palestinian Authority generously provided fire trucks and firefighters to combat the unfolding disaster.

At the same time, 1.8 million Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, together with thousands of Israeli civilians in southern Israel, continue to suffer the consequences of ongoing conflict and violence in this region – what we, humanitarians, call a protracted crisis. As the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the occupied Palestinian territory, I appeal to all concerned parties to exert efforts to end this cycle of violence which continues to have devastating consequences for Palestinian and Israeli men, women, boys and girls. Reducing, if not ending, humanitarian concerns must be a priority. It comes with putting humanity first. It is very achievable and can be undertaken immediately in accordance with international law, while at the same time maintaining adequate security measures to protect the Israeli population.

For instance, providing open access for Palestinian farmers in the West Bank and Gaza to all their lands, lifting the fishing limits imposed on fishermen in Gaza, removing the restrictions on the import of building material into Gaza, permitting Gazans to freely transfer their produce through Israeli crossing points – to name a few recommendations – would have an enormous impact on reducing humanitarian needs and concerns. Likewise, allowing Palestinians to plan and develop their lands in Area C will spur sustainable development, thereby reducing the need for humanitarian assistance.

Today, we admire all men and women of the humanitarian corps, who dedicate their lives to helping vulnerable people in this region and millions of others around the world. Today, we celebrate our shared humanity.

**Article written by the United Nations' humanitarian coordinator on the occasion of World Humanitarian Day and published by Ynet English on 19 August 2013**