World Humanitarian Day on 19 August

2016-08-19

On the occasion of World Humanitarian Day on 19 August, the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid at the Federal Foreign Office, Bärbel Kofler, issued the following statement today (19 August 2016):

“World Humanitarian Day is an opportunity for us to pause and reflect and to remember those who have been injured or even lost their lives in their efforts to help people in need.

In the past months, reports have reached us all too frequently, particularly from Syria and Yemen, that aid workers such as doctors and medical workers have fallen victim to attacks. I condemn these attacks in the strongest possible terms. The fundamental principles of international humanitarian law are non-negotiable and must be respected by all parties to conflicts. This is the only way to allow humanitarian aid workers to help those in need.

The work done by humanitarian aid workers is more important than ever. More than 65 million people have been forced to flee their homes around the world; the same number again are in need of humanitarian aid for other reasons, including food shortages, lack of drinking water and destroyed infrastructure. These are sad records indeed. As the third-largest donor of humanitarian aid, Germany is making a major contribution to supporting people in need around the world. We have increased our commitment considerably once again. Moreover, we are working to encourage other donors to increase the level of their commitments.

At the first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May, we managed to lay important foundations for the future of humanitarian aid. These include a commitment to humanitarian principles and efforts to further the development of humanitarian aid. The increased humanitarian need must be met by sufficient funds, and involving local partners is important in order to ensure that aid measures are successful. We want to improve planning of humanitarian aid in order to optimise our response to challenges such as the El Niño phenomenon. Germany has been committed to the World Summit the outset and is at the forefront of efforts to implement innovations in the area of humanitarian aid.”

Info

Background information:

On 19 August 2003, 22 United Nations employees were killed in a bomb attack on United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. Since 2009, World Humanitarian Day has been observed on 19 August of each year in order to recognise international humanitarian aid and its principles. Aid workers who have lost their lives while alleviating suffering around the world are remembered in particular.

Attacks on humanitarian aid workers and violations of international humanitarian law continued to increase in the past year. For example, a barrel bomb attack on a clinic in Al Zafarana in Syria operated by the aid organisation Doctors Without Borders killed seven people and severely damaged the hospital in November 2015. In April, five civil defence workers died in an air strike on the Civil Defence (“White Helmets”) centre in al-Atari, west of Aleppo, while another hospital supported by Doctors Without Borders was attacked in Yemen on Tuesday this week. At least 11 people died in the attack.

Within the German Government, responsibility for humanitarian aid abroad lies with the Federal Foreign Office. According to the principle of subsidiarity, the German Government provides humanitarian aid where the government of a country hit by disaster is unable or unwilling to do so itself on a sufficient scale. In 2016, the Federal Foreign Office has provided over 1.1 billion euros to respond to humanitarian crises around the world.

Alongside the humanitarian emergency in Syria and its neighbouring countries, the crises in Iraq and Ukraine, as well as the so-called forgotten crises in Africa, such as in Congo Basin and the Lake Chad region, are the principal focuses of the Federal Foreign Office’s work in this area.

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