['Unconscionable' to kill aid workers, civilians: UN Emergency Coordinator](#)

Each year on 19 August, the world pays tribute to the humanitarians who deliver aid to vulnerable communities in some of the most dangerous crises on the planet; some of whom make the ultimate sacrifice.

"It is unconscionable that civilians and the aid workers who are trying to help them are killed and maimed in conflict zones with utter impunity," said Mark Lowcock, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Humanitarian Affairs chief.

This year, the Day also marks the fifteenth anniversary of the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, which took the lives of 22 staff and other civilians.

Overall last year, 139 aid workers were killed, 102 wounded and 72 kidnapped in the line of duty, marking the fifth consecutive year in which more than 100 humanitarians lost their lives on the job. Moreover, it is the highest recorded annual death toll since 2013, when 156 humanitarians were killed.

Also in 2017, of the 42,972 people reportedly killed or injured by explosive weapons, three out of every four victims were civilians — a 38 per cent increase on the previous year.

"We need this to end," Mr. Lowcock stressed.

[Secretary-General António Guterres](#) noted in his [Protection of Civilians report](#) published in May, that attacks in just six conflict-affected countries were responsible for more than 26,000 civilian deaths or injuries, emphasizing that to reverse such high numbers of civilian casualties, required sustained advocacy.

In addition to ensuring safe, unimpeded passage of supplies, Governments and non-State military groups are legally obligated to protect civilians and aid workers in armed conflicts.

"It is imperative that we hold men with guns and power accountable when civilians and aid workers are illegally targeted," Mr. Lowcock argued.

UNICEF/Kate Holt

Two unaccompanied girls who became separated from their parents during fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sit with workers from Save the Children UK at a UNICEF-assisted child reunification centre near Goma.

3-D portraits of solidarity

For World Humanitarian Day last year, more than two million people around the world participated in an online #NotATarget campaign, to push for change by telling stories of civilians in war and conflict areas.

Building on that success, this year the UN and humanitarian partners have launched a 'living petition,' calling on world leaders to better protect civilians and aid workers.

Global citizens are asked to 'sign' the petition with their selfies through a custom website that transforms their two-dimension photos into 3-D portraits of solidarity.

Their faces are part of an installation at UN Headquarters, and will remain in place throughout the General Assembly, which begins on 18 September.

"The thousands of faces that make up the living petition will be on display to remind world leaders of their legal obligation to protect civilians in conflict," Mr. Lowcock said.

In 2008, the General Assembly designated 19 August as World Humanitarian Day to raise awareness of humanitarian assistance and pay tribute to the people who risk their lives to provide it.