



19 August 2015 - Each year the size and complexity of the challenges faced by the humanitarian community are escalating. The world is becoming an ever more volatile place. The number of people at risk is growing, especially as conflicts and protracted crises engulf whole regions. At present, 78 million people in 31 countries need humanitarian assistance to survive. Natural disasters are occurring with greater frequency and intensity around the world.□

One day – the 19th of August honours humanitarian workers who have lost their lives, and those that continue to risk it every day to provide aid to people in need regardless of who they are or where they are.

However, the Day is also a global celebration of the spirit of humanity because the only way these challenges can be faced is if we all are engaged in demanding and creating a more humane world.

For this reason, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proposed to convene the first ever World Humanitarian Summit aimed at finding new ways to save lives and alleviate suffering.

On 23 and 24 May 2016, governments, humanitarian organizations, people affected by humanitarian crises and the private sector will meet in Istanbul to keep humanitarian action fit for the future.

A series of regional and thematic consultations have been rolled out around the world to hear from affected people and the humanitarian community. Online consultations are currently taking place. Everybody can share his/her ideas and make his/her views heard.

“This is Where I Need to Be”

On 25 April 2015, a powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, with the epicentre in Lamjung District (north-west) of Kathmandu. More than 8 million people were affected.

After hearing about the devastating destruction, a team of climbers abandoned plans to ascent Annapurna and undertook a relief mission by using their skills and training to help get food and other supplies to people in need.

Also part of the team is Nuri, a Sherpa, who was part of the original expedition. He decided to stay to take part in the relief effort, even though his own village, Solukhumbu, is among those devastated by the earthquake. He acts as an interpreter between the villagers and the mountaineers. Mountaineers asked him numerous times if he would like to go home and he repeatedly insisted: “This is where I need to be”.

To this day, volunteers are continuing to serve the broader community, even though they themselves have experienced intense losses in the earthquake.

“Not Losing Sight”

The current Ebola outbreak in West Africa has proven to be one of the deadliest health epidemics in the world. The virus is unforgiving, people are afraid of human physical contacts whatsoever.

Despite the significant improvements, the outbreak is not under control yet and all actors are carrying out activities to achieve zero transmission, including sensitization campaigns in hotspots areas, contact tracing, assisting patients, restoring basic health services, and helping all children to go back to school.

Issa French is a nurse, caring for Ebola patients in Kenema Hospital since the very first case appeared in his city. Despite the fear he faced, he continued to do his job.

“As a nurse, I have pledged to serve people, and it's a true honour to be able to do that. Of course, we are scared. Every day.”

Last year, he lost 37 of his colleagues to the virus, but he did not give up “I lost my mentor, Sister Balu. I stayed with her until the end, and she asked me to keep it up, so that's what I'm doing. I was so sad that I wanted to give up, but I couldn't: there are too many lives at stake.”

This is the fight against Ebola. Walking the line between life and death, without losing sight of one's humanity.

Whether in Conakry, Lampedusa, Erbil, Kiev, Sana'a or Brussels, 19 August is a day to celebrate humanity and the spirit of solidarity and belonging. With more people than ever in need of humanitarian assistance, it is critical to stand all together.

To find out more about World Humanitarian Day, please visit: www.worldhumanitarianiday.org .

To make your contribution to the World Humanitarian Summit, please visit: www.worldhumanitariansummit.org .

Photo caption: Erbil, Iraq. Credit: OCHA/Iason Athanasiadis