

World Humanitarian Day Highlights Disasters and the Sacrifice made by Humanitarian Workers

**Press Release
For Immediate Release**

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The profound impact which disasters can have on the lives of Pacific Islanders will be brought into focus this Wednesday 19 August, which has been designated the inaugural World Humanitarian Day by the United Nations General Assembly. The Day is intended to help increase public understanding of humanitarian assistance activities worldwide and to honour humanitarian workers who have lost their lives or been injured in the course of their work.

Dr Isiye Ndombi, Representative for UNICEF's Pacific Office, believes that World Humanitarian Day is particularly relevant in the Pacific, which is one of the world's most susceptible regions to natural disaster. "Small, vulnerable island states are isolated by a vast expanse of ocean and experience frequent and intense disasters with disproportionately high economic, social and environmental consequences", Dr Ndombi explained.

"Recent examples of disaster in the Pacific include the 2009 Fiji Floods, in which 11 people were killed and many thousands of people were forced to temporarily relocate to evacuation centres, the 2007 Solomon Islands Tsunami, which killed 52 people and two years later still sees thousands of people displaced and living in temporary shelter, and of course the recent ferry disaster in Tonga where 95 people lost their lives."

According to Peter Muller, UNOCHA's Regional Disaster Response Advisor for the Pacific, the humanitarian community's ability to respond rapidly, effectively and predictably to crises, natural or man made, has improved beyond all recognition in the last 20 years. "This is due largely to the dedication of the many thousands of aid workers, both local and international, who have devoted their lives to humanitarian work, matching idealism with action, and principles with practice", he said. "World Humanitarian Day is in part dedicated to the memory of aid workers who have lost their lives while bringing assistance to others, the majority of them from the communities they are trying to help."

Despite the improvements in Humanitarian Response over the last decade, Mr Muller remains far from complacent. "While much has been achieved, the challenges faced by many millions of people around the world and particularly in the Pacific are still formidable", he said.

"The need for principled and effective humanitarian action is greater than ever. Natural hazards are becoming increasingly severe and frequent and vulnerable communities face new threats generated by the combined effects of global mega-trends: climate change, chronic poverty, the food and financial crises, water and energy scarcity, migration, population growth, urbanization and pandemics."

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