
Op-Ed by Humanitarian Coordinator Robert Piper on the occasion of World Humanitarian Day

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Today, 19 August, is World Humanitarian Day. On this day, we pay tribute to all the aid workers who have lost their lives around the world, helping the most vulnerable people, and we celebrate the spirit that inspires humanitarian work.

In the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), we today commemorate the eleven UNRWA staff and other first-responders from the Gaza Strip who tragically lost their lives during last summer's hostilities. We salute their dedication and mourn their loss. On this occasion, I would also like to extend my gratitude and admiration to the thousands of aid workers across the oPt - the vast majority of them Palestinians of course - who tirelessly continue their efforts to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground and provide much-needed assistance under difficult circumstances.

Over the last year, humanitarian aid has been delivered to 1.9 million people in the oPt, including rental subsidies and temporary shelter to over 90,000 families who lost their homes during last year's conflict in Gaza. Food assistance is now reaching some 1.4 million people in Gaza alone and more than 193,000 children and more than 41,000 adults have received psychosocial support since the start of 2015. However, 100,000 people remain displaced as a result of last summer's hostilities and the humanitarian appeal for our operations throughout oPt is only 45% funded. The jump in humanitarian funding needs over the last year is unfortunately not unique to the oPt but reflects an alarming, global trend. Humanitarian needs increasingly exceed the aid and donor community's capacity to assist the millions of people in need worldwide, creating a feeling of abandonment and frustration among some. The operating environment remains challenging. Restrictions on the free movement of people and trade in and out of Gaza impact all areas of life, by hampering basic service provision and reconstruction efforts and exacerbating an already volatile situation. Stalled intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts further complicate aid efforts. Demolitions and seizure of donor-funded assistance provided to vulnerable communities in the West Bank, coupled with limited funding, is another impediment to alleviating the suffering of people affected by crisis and moving forward towards sustainable, long-term solutions.

Through all these challenges, the resilience of the Palestinian people, coping under extremely tough circumstances, shines through. This year's World Humanitarian Day is about recognizing that each one of us can make a difference in the lives of others; and each one of us has the power to inspire our fellow human beings to take action to create a more humane world. We need to look no further than Palestine to see this in action.

http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/hc_op-ed_whd_19_august_2015_english.pdf