

DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER NADA AL NASHIF

REMARKS TO EVENT MARKING WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY

Palais des Nations, Geneva, 19 August 2025

Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear friends,

I'm honoured to be here - to pay tribute to those who lost their lives in the service of others – and to the thousands of colleagues who are working in difficult and dangerous circumstances around the world.

On a visit to Baghdad last month, I found some personal closure, more than two decades after the attack that we mark today. I retraced my steps on that fateful day, recalling the remarkable colleagues we lost, whom we will remember and mourn, always.

But attacks and killings of humanitarian workers have risen sharply over recent years, in utter disregard for international law - and in flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions, and the protections embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These violations are taking place in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Sudan, Ukraine and elsewhere.

In Yemen, 23 UN staff and five NGO workers have been detained or held incommunicado for more than two years now, including eight of my own colleagues. We honour them and their families, as we continue to work for their immediate and unconditional release.

In Gaza alone, over 400 aid workers including 340 UNRWA staff have been killed since October 2023 – as of 1 August. And we continue to witness unspeakable daily tragedies, images that, in the words of the High Commissioner, constitute “an affront to our collective humanity”.

The weaponisation of food, in addition to restricting or preventing civilian access to life-sustaining services, constitutes a war crime. People seeking aid must be able to access it in safety and dignity. Attacks directed against civilians constitute a grave breach of international law. They must stop – and we need accountability for these crimes.

Distinguished delegates and dear friends,

The very idea of impartial, independent, neutral humanitarian action is being misused, undermined, and attacked.

As we navigate this complex and challenging environment, there is an urgent need for all of us to come together to defend the international standards, norms and values that govern our work.

All Member States, and all those responsible for adhering to the rules of war, need to ensure they are upheld, everywhere and at all times, for everyone.

International law is not optional; nor is it a luxury to be discarded when times are tough. International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law were born out of horrific circumstances and sacrifices that we honour,

Today, as we stand in solidarity with all humanitarian workers,

And **every day**, through our work to strengthen and renew our commitment to multilateralism, and to an effective, robust, and vibrant United Nations.