



United Nations Association in Canada
Association canadienne pour les Nations Unies

Media Notice

August 19th - the first World Humanitarian Day

Ottawa: August 17, 2009: In December 2008 the United Nations General Assembly determined that the 19th of August should be marked annually as **World Humanitarian Day**. The objective of this new Day is to “contribute to increasing public awareness about humanitarian assistance activities worldwide and the importance of international cooperation in this regard, as well as to honour all humanitarian and UN and associated personnel who have worked in the promotion of the humanitarian cause and those who have lost their lives in the cause of this duty.”

19 August is the same day as the Canal Hotel bombing in Baghdad in 2003 that led to the death of 22 people, including the Brazilian, Sergio Vieira de Mello, who was serving as the Special Representative of the Secretary General managing UN relief efforts in Iraq. In marking the Day in this first year the focus for the UN will be primarily on commemorating those whose lives have been lost while engaged in humanitarian operations at a time when humanitarian work is becoming more dangerous every year. But the longer-term purpose of the Day is also to put emphasis on current humanitarian needs and challenges and, particularly, on the beneficiaries on whose behalf all humanitarian workers go about their extraordinary work.

For Canadians this should become an important date on our collective calendars. As a country we take justifiable pride in the numbers of dedicated individuals who, over the years and in all corners of the globe, have given of their talents, energy and time – often for minimal recompense or recognition and sometimes in situations of real danger. There were two Canadians among those who died in that Baghdad explosion (Gillian Clark and Chris Klein-Beekman). We are also aware that two other Canadian aid workers were killed in Afghanistan last August, and a local employee of a Canadian NGO died in Sudan this past March. There may well be others of whom we are not aware – all deeply missed by their families and their colleagues, as well as those with whom they were engaged in the field.

Kathryn White, UNA-Canada’s Executive Director, notes that “this Day reminds us of the challenges facing humanitarian agencies around the world - how do we meet the life-or-death needs of the world’s most vulnerable people while making sure those who provide that help are kept safe? It is also an opportunity to pay tribute to all of those men and women – Canadian and other – who step forward to meet these challenges year in and year out. They are all true heroes.”

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For further information, or to arrange an interview with Kate White please contact:

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World Humanitarian Day materials are also available on the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ web site at <http://ochaonline.un.org/whd>