



PRESS RELEASE

AU, UN commemorate Women Humanitarians on World Humanitarian Day



ADDIS ABABA, August 20, 2019. The African Union in collaboration with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Liaison Office to the AU on 19 August joined countries around the world to mark this Year's World Humanitarian Day at the African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa.

The theme for this year's event focused on celebrating women humanitarian workers who have dedicated their lives to assisting victims of conflicts and disasters in Africa, but some of whom have sadly ended up as victims themselves, including paying the ultimate price. The commemoration is also in line with the AU theme of the Year 2019, " The Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons; towards durable solutions to forced displacement in Africa".

World Humanitarian Day is an annual event of a day in 2003 when 22 UN staff, including women humanitarians, lost their lives in the Canal Hotel bombing in Baghdad.

Speaking on behalf of H.E. Minata Samate Cessouma, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Dr. Khabele Matlosa, Director of Political Affairs, AU Commission, noted that there is a common narrative that projects women as only victims of war, but pointed out that the narrative ignores the transformative roles played by women in preventing humanitarian challenges addressing the humanitarian needs, and finding solutions. Reiterating that women face unique challenges, Dr Matlosa said “celebrating the contributions of women humanitarians means acknowledging the tough environment and challenges they face on a daily basis such as insecurity at the workplace, risk of sexual and gender based violence and harassment, and family separation among others.”

In his remarks, Mr Cosmas Chanda, the UNHCR Representative to the AU, said the day is also a Staff Memorial Day for the UN Refugee Agency, which is a time to remember fallen colleagues and mark their courage. He noted that 2018 brought an upsurge in major attacks on aid workers and that a total of 405 UN, NGO and International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement staff were affected by major violence in 226 separate attacks. “This included 131 aid workers who lost their lives, 144 who were wounded and 131 kidnapped,” he said.

The event featured a minute of silence for fallen humanitarian workers across the globe. There was also a panel discussion on experience sharing of women humanitarians during by Ms Joyce Mends-Cole, a former UNHCR staff, Ms Bineta Diop, AU Special Envoy on Women Peace and Security, Ms Anita Kiki Gbeho, Deputy Joint Special Representative for AU/UN Hybrid Operations in Darfur, and Ms Caroline Harper Jantuah, Senior Advisor at UNHCR on Inclusion, Diversity and Gender Equity. The panel shared experiences and called for more protection of women humanitarians and urged all AU Member States to address the root causes of forced displacement in Africa.

Ambassador of the Republic of Uganda, H.E Rebecca Amuge Otenga, who is the current Chair of the Permanent Representative Committee on Refugees, Returnees and IDPs, moderated the event.

She urged Member States of the African Union to take positive measures to capacitate and facilitate the work of humanitarian workers in secure environment especially for the female workers.

“While focusing on the role of women, we should not neglect the role of men as important allies, partners and supporters in creating a collaborative and supportive work environment. The change we seek can only be fully realized with the contribution of everyone working hand in hand towards the same objective”, She said.

The event was attended by many Ambassadors, AU and UN Staff Members.

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