

MESSAGE BY H.E. DR. AISHA ABDULLAHI

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ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY-AFRICA

Every year, World Humanitarian Day (WHD), a United Nations General Assembly designated day, is commemorated on the 19th of August to coincide with the day in 2003 when the then Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to Iraq, Sérgio Vieira de Mello, and twenty-one of his colleagues were killed in the bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad. This day is dedicated to the recognition of humanitarian personnel and those who have lost their lives working for humanitarian causes. It is a day to honor and celebrate those that face danger and difficulty in the service of others, their communities, and their countries.

This year, Africa is celebrating its own during World Humanitarian Day. Today is a continental celebration of Africans helping their fellow Africans, in a myriad of big and small ways, often in difficult and trying situations. Multitudes across the continent are assisting their neighbors, their communities, and their countries at large. We have much to celebrate across the continent- from organized volunteers that work with national societies, youth leaders who propose creative solutions to the problems facing their communities, communities who mobilize resources to empower themselves in times of disasters and conflicts, individuals who contribute resources, time, and support to those in need around them, and more.

The African Union Commission and the humanitarian community in Addis Ababa will be marking the 2013 WHD under the theme 'Helping Hands'. Through the 'Helping Hands' Initiative, the African Union Commission and its partners seek to recognize the valiant efforts of African humanitarian heroes and heroines by providing a platform for illuminating their efforts. The campaign will recognize those who have made a difference in their local, national and regional communities.

Helping Hands speaks to the African tradition and humanist philosophy of Ubuntu- that one is because of others, and that responding to distress is not a duty but the natural reaction of human beings. Helping Hands will showcase stories and projects by Africans and the African Diaspora that have made great impact in their communities. It is an opportunity to give Africans the chance to tell *their* story- not only to raise awareness about the great humanitarian work that they have been doing to uplift communities but also to inspire future generations to emulate innovative and exciting approaches to making a difference.

World Humanitarian Day-Africa should also alert us to the need to work towards a continent that is self-sufficient and built on the capacities, creativity, and collaborative strength of its citizens. The continent is certainly building its capacity at local, national, and regional levels for humanitarian action. Countries that have gone far ahead in this regard are supporting their neighboring countries to boost their capacities and share experiences and tools. Regional bodies are looking at building up teams of local responders as well as creating national emergency response rosters. The IGAD-Kenya

Red Cross is a case in point as well as the ECOWAS Emergency Response Teams. The AU Commission looks to increasingly play a significant role in facilitating this collaboration between institutions and Member States-and commits itself to the principle of greater ownership and capacity for Africa's humanitarian agenda.

Join me today in acknowledging and celebrating all those among us, the many helping hands, on this great continent who are present and active during its times of need and difficult- making a difference and building resilient communities, countries, and continent. Over the next month, you will have the opportunity to see, hear, and experience the stories of our laudable fellow Africans. Celebrate them, emulate them, support them!