

World Humanitarian Day: ICN calls for protection of nurses and other aid workers during current crises



Geneva, Switzerland, 19 August 2021 – On World Humanitarian Day, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) remembers colleagues who have lost their lives in humanitarian service and during the pandemic, and honours healthcare and aid workers who continue to support people in conflicts and disasters across the world.

As the world faces a serious pandemic and the growing threat to health of global warming, nursing's collaboration with humanitarian organisations will be increasingly important in the battle to maintain people's health in a rapidly changing climate.

This year's World Humanitarian Day (19 August) highlights the immediate human costs of the climate crisis and is an opportunity to pressure world leaders into taking immediate meaningful climate action to protect the world's most vulnerable people.

It also shines a spotlight on the fact that the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, who have contributed least to the global climate emergency, have been hit the hardest by it, with millions of people already losing their homes, their livelihoods and their lives.

The latest report from the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) confirms the science on human activity-related global warming, and recent [research](#) from Harvard University and others shows that the fossil fuels, which contribute to climate change, are also responsible for the air pollution that causes one in five deaths worldwide each year.

ICN President Annette Kennedy said the effects of climate change on human health, wellbeing and global development will be even worse than those of the pandemic:

“As we have seen in the pandemic, the most vulnerable populations - especially women, older people and racialised communities – will be hit hardest. Protecting the world's most vulnerable people is essential to health, gender and social equity.”

Ms Kennedy said nurses are already seeing and responding to the impacts of climate change on the health of patients, communities and health systems.

“Nurses are making a powerful contribution to mitigate climate change and support people and communities around the world to adapt to its impacts. As patient and community advocates, they can be the voice for climate-vulnerable populations. Disasters directly linked to climate change are increasing in frequency and intensity. Nurses’ collaborations and partnerships with humanitarian organisations will become even more important as the challenges and adverse health impacts from disasters, coupled with displacement of populations, will be complex and long-term.”

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the tragic deaths of at least 115,000 healthcare workers, have made humanitarian relief work more challenging than ever.

“The world continues to fail to do enough to protect healthcare workers whether fighting the pandemic or the devastating effects of the crisis unfolding in Afghanistan. Healthcare worker rights are human rights and non-negotiable and that is why ICN is calling for the international community to ensure that the respect and recognition of healthcare workers, the vast majority of whom are women, are at the heart of the political discussions on Afghanistan in the coming days. Let’s not forget that nursing is a high-risk profession with 90% of its workforce made up of women, who are particularly vulnerable and often subject to attack.

‘ICN is a founding member of the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, and its most recent [report](#) showed that healthcare workers are still at risk, despite the United Nations vow in 2015 to protect healthcare in conflict zones. The World Health Organization’s recent [Health Worker Safety Charter](#) must be implemented in full if healthcare workers are to be afforded the protection they so richly deserve.”

Ms Kennedy said: “This issue is not new, and governments’ inaction on it means that nurses, far from being protected, are experiencing increasing mental and physical stress. Ultimately this will lead to a mass exodus from the profession, which nobody wants. Governments must take action now because humanity begins at home: look after you nurses, or they will not be around to look after you.”

More information about the 2021 World Humanitarian Day campaign can be found [here](#).

See ICN’s recent web-story on the Haiti and Afghanistan crises [here](#).

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Note for Editors

The **International Council of Nurses** (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

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