



Humanitarian field workers
in the middle east

Victims of duty

World Humanitarian Day

#NotATarget

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Introduction

While the world celebrates World Humanitarian Day (WHD) as declared by the United Nations on August 19, every year, medics, nurses, doctors and civil defense members in the Middle East lose their lives to indiscriminate, systematic and sometimes direct targeting, arrest or enforced disappearance.

Governments, and also militias, in the Middle East continue to consider humanitarian workers enemies; targeting doctors, nurses, paramedics and civil defense personnel, especially in war and conflict-torn areas, such as Syria, Yemen, the Palestinian Territories and Libya.

Cases of serious violations against humanitarian workers have grown even rampant in recent years, including direct targeting, which resulted in several workers being killed.

Such violations constitute a grave violation of international humanitarian law, which provides special protections for humanitarian workers in conflict zones.

On this occasion, and as part of its work to monitor and document human rights violations in these countries, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor highlights some of the violations committed by some actors against humanitarian workers in four areas; Syria, the Palestinian Territories, Yemen and Libya.

Syria

For over seven years now, Syria has witnessed an unprecedented conflict where different indiscriminate weaponry has been used, including homemade explosive barrels thrown by warplanes which caused enormous human and material damage in targeted areas.

Military operations and clashes between several local powers and proxies have been raging unabated with civilians paying the heaviest toll for the atrocities committed in this conflict.

During these years, hundreds of serious and critical violations of international laws have been recorded, including the deliberate targeting of dozens of hospitals, medical points, civil defense centers and teams operating in Syria.

Sources of Euro-Med Monitor confirmed the killing of 86 medical personnel, civil defense members and healthcare workers belonging to the Red Crescent organization in Syria over the first half of 2018.

The Syrian army carried out most of these violations, targeting 31 medical personnel and 19 members of the civil defense, while other violations have been committed by the Russian forces, international coalition forces, Islamic militant groups and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Of the attacks, 165 accounted for damages to medical centers, ambulances, civil defense and Syrian Red Crescent centers. Of these, 91 attacks have been carried out by members of the

Syrian army, 51 others by Russian forces, two by International Coalition forces, and 19 cases by other parties.

Euro-Med Monitor believes that the absence of legal accountability against these crimes led to impunity on the part of conflict parties; thus, the targeting of medical facilities and civil defense centers continued unabated, leading to a deteriorating humanitarian situation spanning conflict areas.

Syria is the worst place in modern history in terms of attacks on healthcare workers and facilities, accounting for 70 percent of all such attacks worldwide, notes Panos Moutzsis, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria.

The Palestinian Territories

Working in the field, Euro-Med Monitor's team observed and documented numerous grave human rights violations committed by the Israeli forces in the Palestinian Territories.

Such violations included the targeting of Palestinian medical personnel while on duty in the Great March of Return wave of protests sweeping the Israel-Gaza separation fence since March 30, commemorating Land Day and reaffirming their right of return to their homes under UN Resolution 194.

During the protest, Israeli forces positioned along the fence targeted medical personnel using sniper bullets aimed deliberately at them, killing three and injuring 370 others. Live fire also resulted in damages to 70 ambulance vehicles, which were clearly marked.

Israel's targeting of medical personnel was the result of large and disproportionate use of lethal force, in a clear violation of the two fundamental principles of international humanitarian law: discrimination and proportionality.

Several international bodies, including in a statement by a number of United Nations Special Rapporteurs, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Union, condemned Israel's use of excessive force against largely peaceful protests.

In particular, the case of paramedic Razan al-Najjar stood out. The 21-year-old girl was killed on 1 June 2018 by an Israeli

sniper while about 100 meters away from the fence to the east of the Khuza'a district in Khan Yunis Governorate. She was attempting to provide first aid services while wearing the uniform of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society.

Yemen

The ongoing fighting between the Houthi group and the Saudi-led Coalition's forces has resulted in deteriorating implications on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, which the United Nations said was experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

As the crisis in Yemen unfolded, many serious violations against humanitarian workers have been documented, both by the Houthi group and by the Coalition forces.

On June 29, the Houthi group stormed the (World Food Program) WFP warehouses in Al Hudaydah Governorate, kidnapped two staff members and took them to an unknown destination.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced the death of one of its employees, Hanna Lahoud, following an attack on one of the ICRC vehicles in Taiz, Yemen, in April this year.

The Red Cross has withdrawn 71 of its staff in Yemen. ICRC Operations Director Dominique Stellehart announced then that

his organization's activities have stopped, and its staff has been threatened and targeted.

The withdrawal of the Red Cross appeared to be the result of an imminent attack by the Coalition's forces, mainly backed by the UAE and Saudi Arabia, on the Al Hudaydah, which is the gateway to entry of nearly 80% of foreign aid to Yemen.

In August, Al-Thawra Hospital in the city of Al Hudaydah was targeted, killing 14 people and wounding more than 30, most of them civilians, and many other paramedics and nurses. Meanwhile, the Yemeni government blamed the Houthi group for the attack.

The Saudi-led military coalition targeted a medical center for the treatment of cholera, which belongs to Médecins Sans Frontières in the Hajjah area, northwest of Sanaa, prompting the organization to freeze its work in the city. Médecins Sans Frontières said on its Twitter account that the attack by the Saudi-UAE alliance demonstrates a total lack of respect for medical facilities and patients.

The targeting of medical facilities prevents the providence of adequate support for humanitarian programs in Yemen and also denies humanitarian assistance to those affected.

Patients suffer the most, especially with the spread of infectious diseases. A number of cities were affected as a result of the lack of humanitarian and medical services provided to the Yemeni people.

Libya

The unstable security situation in Libya impacts humanitarian action. The rapporteur of the National Committee for Human Rights in Libya (NCHRL) Ahmed Hamza, stated that: Murder, assault, and kidnapping has grown into a phenomenon in the country that it affected not only Libyan citizens, but also humanitarian workers.

According to statistics by the Committee, 34 cases of assault and illegal arbitrary detention were reported against staff members of relief societies and organizations, in addition to some cases of threats against journalists and human rights activists in Tripoli, Benghazi, and Sabha.

Two members of Shaik Tahir Azzawi Charity Organisation (STACO), which partners with international human rights organizations, were kidnapped in the Shweiref Neighborhood, southern Libya.

According to unofficial statistics by the Commission of Civil Society in Libya, over 15 employees of local relief societies were killed, while nine women were detained and tortured by armed groups because they helped victims in the armed conflict.

Euro-Med Monitor contacted the Libyan Red Crescent only to know that three members of the Red Crescent were killed between early 2017 and July 2018, in addition to the injury of five others and the kidnapping of one by armed groups.

The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that one of its staff, who was part of an aid convoy, was killed after being shot in Sirte, and another was kidnapped, resulting in delays in civilians' access to humanitarian aid.

Also, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya reported that one of its aid workers was killed in 2017, in addition to two others in 2018, while another was kidnapped for two months.

Recommendations

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor reaffirms that paramedics, nurses, doctors, and members of the civil defense are protected by international law. Crimes committed against humanitarian intervention workers by any conflicting party are a stark violation of the principles of international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and may amount to war crimes. To avoid further violations, Euro-Med Monitor recommends that:

All parties to the conflict in the Palestinian Territories, Syria, Yemen, Libya, or in any other state should protect humanitarian workers when military operations are launched. Parties should also adhere to the principles and rules of international law when attacking another party.

All sides; governments, armed groups, or political parties should respect humanitarian aid workers, protect them and spare them the repercussions of the conflict. Everyone in need has a right to humanitarian aid, without discrimination.

The Human Rights Council and its special rapporteurs should follow up on the violations against humanitarian workers and should send an investigation commission to bring perpetrators to justice through the Security Council or the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor expresses deep regret for the loss of lives among humanitarian workers, and equally expresses deep appreciation for those who risk their

lives to deliver aid to children, women, the wounded and the sick in the midst of war and conflict.



