

UN officials call for urgent action to protect humanitarian workers

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UN officials have raised alarm over the escalating threats to humanitarian workers and urged immediate measures to ensure their safety and hold perpetrators accountable.

Addressing the UN Security Council on Tuesday, Lisa Doughten, director of financing and partnerships at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), revealed a sharp rise in aid worker casualties. She highlighted that 280 aid workers were killed in 2023 across 20 countries, marking a 137% increase from the previous year.

Doughten attributed much of this surge to the Gaza conflict, where over 330 humanitarian workers, primarily UNRWA staff, have died since October 7, 2023. She called on the Council to condemn these attacks, ensure accountability, and provide robust support for survivors.

“Impunity for crimes against aid workers must end,” said Doughten, urging action against misinformation and hate speech targeting UN personnel.

Gilles Michaud, under secretary-general for safety and security at the UN Department of Safety and Security (DSS), echoed these concerns, describing the worsening conditions faced by aid workers in high-risk areas. He highlighted the severe psychosocial toll on personnel in Gaza and demanded member states fulfill their obligations to protect UN staff.

“No UN colleague should have their life upended by conflict,” Michaud stated, emphasizing the need for stronger protections and recovery support for aid workers, whom he described as the “backbone” of global humanitarian efforts.

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