

**MR EDWARD KALLON
THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR IN NIGERIA**

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STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY

Abuja, 19 August 2020

This is now the fourth consecutive year I mark World Humanitarian Day in Nigeria. This year, humanitarian workers are stretched like never before, and so are the people of Nigeria - particularly the most vulnerable who need our assistance to survive.

A resurgence in violence continues to ravage entire communities eleven years into a protracted conflict in the north-eastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. Aid workers and the people they are trying to help face extraordinary challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic - a global health crisis that no country was adequately prepared for. The dire consequence of these two unprecedented challenges have caused a major increase in humanitarian needs.

The number of people needing humanitarian assistance in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states is the highest ever recorded in five years of a joint humanitarian response. Up by 50 per cent from last year, some 10.6 million people require life-saving assistance in the three crisis-affected states, while getting assistance to them is more dangerous and difficult than ever before.

The imperative of protecting aid workers and the assistance they deliver has never been as pressing as it is today. Yet, insecurity and attacks against aid workers are still occurring despite our repeated calls for protection of civilians and the urgency to facilitate unimpeded access for humanitarian aid.

Protection of civilians and of aid workers is not just the Government's responsibility. Today in Nigeria, we all have a role to play. Rumours and misinformation about humanitarian personnel and health workers can put their lives at risk. Refraining from spreading misinformation and false perceptions about humanitarian organisations is crucial to the safety of frontline staff who put their life on the line to serve others.

We cannot forget any of our colleagues and the thousands of civilians who have lost their lives in the eleven-year long crisis in the north-east. We also honour today the health workers who have paid the heaviest price trying to treat and save people infected with COVID-19.

Families are still mourning the gruesome killing of our colleagues and partners less than a month ago. Not a single day passes without Alice Loksha and Grace Taku crossing into our thoughts and prayers. These two young talented women were selflessly risking their lives serving the most vulnerable in remote areas of Borno state and are now suffering in untold conditions held in

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captivity by non-state armed groups. We continually and adamantly reiterate calls for their immediate and safe release.

We are also here to pay tribute to the thousands of colleagues, partners, community members and volunteers, who, for months, are relentlessly leaving the safety of their home to join our collective fight against the deadly coronavirus that has claimed the lives of close to a thousand people in Nigeria so far.

This year, we celebrate them: people who are often in need themselves, like internally displaced people now helping host communities, local health workers who care for the sick and vaccinate children, and humanitarians who negotiate access in areas of conflict to bring food, water and medicine. They are today's unsung heroes. They all too often risk their own lives to save that of others. The very least we can do to honour their sacrifice and dedication is to support and protect them.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, taking responsibility and adopting prevention measures can protect ourselves, our loved ones, but also others, including the health workers and aid workers who are taking risks to protect all of us.

We also pay tribute to our steadfast partners who have been at the heart of humanitarian action in Nigeria for years. Like never before, we can be stronger together if we all get involved and show greater collaboration and solidarity. All of us and any of us can make a difference.

Often, humanitarian work can be bittersweet, and World Humanitarian Day is a stark reminder of this duality. Today we commemorate those who have lost their lives or been maimed trying to improve the lives of others. Today we pay tribute to all of them but also to the values they were upholding and striving for. Today we also celebrate the achievements we have made, and the positive effect humanitarian action has had for countless communities in the north-east. It is difficult to see Nigerian people enduring hardship, and it is a remarkable honour to be able to help make a difference. I hope that in these especially trying times we can continue changing lives for the better – this is what makes us human and this is what defines everyday heroes: a commitment to humanity and the values that bind us in solidarity to one another.

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