

Women humanitarians protect human rights, dignity and give hope to others

Statement by UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem on World Humanitarian Day

As we mark World Humanitarian Day, UNFPA salutes those who respond to crises around the world. This year, we call attention to the courage and commitment of women humanitarians who assist people amidst conflict, disasters and displacement.

When crisis strikes, women and girls are disproportionately affected and face increased risk of gender-based violence. Health facilities are often damaged or destroyed, leaving women, including pregnant women, without life-saving care. The fundamental needs of women and girls that allow them to uphold their dignity are often an afterthought. The leadership of women and young people is often excluded from peace processes.

Uniquely positioned to reach and assist women and girls, women humanitarians constitute a large percentage of frontline responders who risk their own lives to save the lives of others. We pay tribute to women humanitarians who, under difficult conditions, protect human rights, dignity and give hope to others.

We honour midwives who assist women in childbirth day and night in dangerous conditions. We honour women from communities and civil society who step up to stop gender-based violence, counsel survivors and ensure they get the services they need. We honour women leaders who oversee preparedness, response and recovery.

This November, the international community will gather in Nairobi to mark 25 years since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Co-convened by UNFPA and the governments of Kenya and Denmark, the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 aims to garner political and financial commitments that will, in part, ensure that lifesaving services are available to women and girls affected by crises.

We cannot leave any woman or girl behind. I call on all governments to join us for the Nairobi Summit to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights in humanitarian settings and help prevent and respond to gender-based violence on the frontlines. Together, we can make greater progress for rights, safety and dignity for all.