18 August 2017 – Despite condemnations from WHO and health partners, attacks on health care in the Eastern Mediterranean have not decreased this year over last.

In the first 3 months of 2017, more than 152 attacks on health care were reported from 9 countries in the Region, compared to 57 attacks during the same time in 2016.

Behind these startling figures are real lives and real people. Every day, health workers in conflict settings face remarkable dangers and difficulties to provide care to those who need it most.

Thousands of health workers across the Region remain committed to the oath they took to save lives, sometimes knowingly risking their own lives as they refuse to abandon their patients.

World Humanitarian Day is time for us to stand with health workers, and show them that we are fulfilling our moral and human obligation to keep them safe.

Attacks on health care

#NotATarget

Photo gallery
Maher Hamzeh Abdul Kader is a health worker in the Syrian Emergency Medical System in rural Damascus, Syria. In 2015, Maher was shot twice in the back while on duty distributing blood bags to Eastern Ghouta residents, near Damascus. “Luckily, I survived,” says Maher. “After 22 years as an emergency worker in the national emergency services, and after ... for five months, I am back doing what I want to do: helping the injured and the misfortunate of this ill-fated conflict.”

Yasser Shokri Al-Hussain is a nurse at Al-Qamishli national hospital, Al-Hassakeh, Syria. He has been working there for 8 years. “Although I am supposed to work 8 hours per day, I sometimes work for 17 hours per day to fill shortages in nursing. In these difficult circumstances, it is important to provide these medicines for the patients, despite our difficult financial situation. It’s the humane thing to do” added Yasser.

Ibtisam Salam Alaik is a health worker in Aleppo, Syria.
“I have been vaccinating children in Aleppo for more than 15 years. I continued preforming my duties in the humanitarian corridors that were opened by the UN. It was a difficult time, but the knowledge that I was protecting the health and future of the children in my community gave me strength. I felt like I was saving lives,” Ibtisam added.

Hasan Kassar is a health worker who has been displaced from Al-Bab city in eastern rural Aleppo, Syria.

“I fled with my family due to escalating violence in the area and I now deliver vaccines in the main health district in Kilis city, near the Turkish border,” he said. “The situation is difficult but our colleagues on the ground are working hard to provide essential health services despite the challenges. We are grateful for the support from the international community.”

Nibal Awad is a family doctor working as part of a mobile clinic team in the West Bank, occupied Palestinian territories. She is also the co-founder of the Healing the Last negotiations team.

“Health education is a priority for me. I am passionate about improving the public health conditions of the communities I work with. I believe in the power of education to create positive change,” Nibal said.

“We are committed to providing healthcare to all, regardless of their background or location. We are proud to be part of the mobile clinic team that is making a difference in the lives of so many people.”
“The work I do is very rewarding, not financially but emotionally. When I do my job, it gives satisfaction because I care about people’s lives. As part of the ambulance service, we don’t just provide medical care, but we also provide the communities with a chance to discuss other problems they face as well. I do fear for my life, but at the same time, I can’t think of doing any other work either. This is a part of my identity.”

Raed Al-Shilleh from the West Bank in occupied Palestinian territory, is an ambulance worker with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society.
Mahmoud Almasri, from Gaza has been a volunteer paramedic at the Palestinian Red Crescent Society for 10 years.

Ahmad Zia, 40, has worked for Afghanistan’s national vaccination programme for 10 years as a campaign supervisor.

“I joined the vaccination programme because I want to serve our country and to see people protected from infectious diseases,” he says.

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Zahra recently joined Afghanistan’s national vaccination programme and works as a volunteer vaccinator.

Mohammad Ferdaus, 23, has worked as a volunteer vaccinator for 5 years. He goes from house to house...
“Almost everyone in my area accepts vaccines when we offer them. If someone initially refuses, we continue to engage with them and explain the importance of vaccination for the health of their children by giving them more information about the benefits of vaccination and why it’s essential for children’s health.”

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