

18 August 2016 – At least twice a week for the past few months, we have had to condemn attacks on hospitals and clinics in several countries of the Region. With each statement I read about innocent lives lost and health facilities destroyed, and my dismay and despair grow. Despite many condemnations from WHO and other partners, attacks on health care facilities in these countries have continued. Behind every such violation of the norms of decency and our common humanity, there is an enormous tragedy. A mother who has lost a child. Patients who have been buried alive under rubble. Utterly heroic health staff who have lost their lives trying to save the lives of others.

Thousands of health workers remain in Syria, Yemen and Iraq today, committed and faithful to the oath they took to save lives. Some have literally gone underground to keep providing care, refusing to abandon their patients. Have we the right to abandon them?

On World Humanitarian Day, it is time for us all to stand in solidarity side-by-side with these doctors, nurses and paramedics, working at the coal face of human misery and inhumanity, and to say loud and clear that these acts of barbarism must stop once and for all.

The humanitarian community can only do so much to advocate for an end to these attacks. This issue is being consistently raised at the highest levels, including the United Nations Security Council and the International Syria Support Group, yet still the attacks on health care facilities and personnel continue, with disregard for the neutrality of health, international humanitarian law, or United Nations resolutions calling for their protection.

All efforts at diplomacy have so far failed. Attacks on health workers and health facilities are commonplace in many conflicts. It is time to put an end to this indefensible situation. WHO calls on political leaders worldwide to come together and use their influence to put an end to attacks on health care workers and health facilities.

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