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GENERAL DEBATE SPEECH: 151ST INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, GENEVA

**Upholding humanitarian norms and supporting humanitarian action
in times of crisis**

President, fellow delegates,

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this current and very important issue on behalf of the Australian Parliament.

We know that around the world, the death toll for humanitarian workers is on track to be the highest on record by the end of 2025.

For years, the greatest risk to aid work came from road fatalities. Today, it is drones, missiles and other weapons.

These people are our nurses, doctors and emergency responders. They risk their own lives to help others.

They are the people who will go where many others won't.

Conflict zones, disaster areas, and communities in crisis.

My own region of the Asia-Pacific is the most natural disaster-prone in the world. And our rescue and recovery efforts rely on the bravery and good-will of the people who are willing to be on the ground.

Where humanitarian workers are unable to operate safely or are prevented from operating at all, civilian populations can lose access food, water, shelter, safety and medical care.

As we know, the consequences can be totally devastating.

Today, the global humanitarian need is severely challenged by the world's capacity to respond. The number of protracted conflicts has increased while natural disasters are more frequent.

In this time of greatest humanitarian need, the risks involved for humanitarian workers are greater than ever before.

Which is why it has never been more important for our nations to move to a collective commitment to uphold international laws, to ensure accountability and to protect those workers who serve on the front lines.

A Declaration on the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel

Since 2024 we have witnessed unparalleled violence against humanitarian workers. There have been reports of kidnapping, attacks, arbitrary arrest and threats.

An unprecedented 640 humanitarian staff were killed while on duty over this period.¹ Of them, the vast majority were local staff helping their own community often while experiencing the same crisis themselves.

Recently we lost one of our very own Australian aid workers, Zomi Frankcom.

This essential life-saving work is under threat and the rules that should keep humanitarian workers and civilians safe are losing effect.

Last year, Australia formed and led a Ministerial Group for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel.

The purpose of the group was to uphold and champion international humanitarian law and pursue action to protect humanitarian workers in conflict zones.

Working in partnership with humanitarian organisations, the group committed itself to developing a global declaration to protect aid workers.²

I am pleased to inform the 151st Assembly that, just last month, the Australian-led Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel was signed on 22 September 2025 on the eve of the United Nations General Assembly High Level Week in New York.

¹ Minister for International Development, the Hon Dr Anne Aly MP, [World Humanitarian Day Memorial Service | Ministers and Assistant Ministers](#), 19 August 2025; Aid Worker Security Database, [Aid Worker Security Database | Aid Worker Security Database](#)

² Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong, [Signing ceremony, Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel | Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs](#), 22 September 2025.

The Declaration focuses on three primary issues which are:

- Improved adherence to International Humanitarian Law,
- safe and unimpeded humanitarian access together with, enhanced support for local humanitarian personnel, and
- strengthened accountability for attacks against aid workers.

The Declaration reflects Australia's leadership and longstanding commitment to humanitarian principles, a rules-based order and the protection of civilians as well as humanitarian personnel.

Over 100 countries have now endorsed the Declaration including Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, who partnered Australia to develop it.

Australia strongly encourages other countries and particularly Member Parliaments of the IPU to join in this effort and endorse the Declaration.

We also encourage IPU Member Parliaments to advocate for endorsement with their own governments.

Important role for parliaments and IPU

It has never been more important for the international community to come together and recommit itself to protecting humanitarian personnel and civilian populations caught up in armed conflict.

We as parliamentarians have a fundamental role to play in ensuring that International Humanitarian Law, including the Declaration on the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, are properly implemented under domestic law.

We have oversight responsibilities to ensure that our military and security forces have training in and knowledge of International Humanitarian Law.

Together, we can also ensure that our governments are accountable to their people for their actions in times of conflict and crisis.

Together, as members of the IPU at this 151st Assembly, let's advocate for a strong international commitment to legal frameworks to ensure that civilians in armed conflict and humanitarian workers everywhere are protected.

I thank the Assembly.