

## **Caritas Australia supports UN launch of declaration to protect aid workers.**

Caritas Australia has welcomed the launch of the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel; a landmark initiative aimed at strengthening international protections for aid workers operating in conflict zones.

First introduced at the UN General Assembly in 2024, the Declaration has since been championed by a Ministerial Group comprised of Australia and eight other nations. On Sunday, 21 September, the International Day of Peace, it was officially launched with the backing of 103 states.

The launch was attended by Foreign Minister the Hon. Penny Wong, ministers from the United Kingdom, Japan and Switzerland, and several leaders from the aid and development sector. While only states can formally sign the Declaration, Caritas Australia is proud to be listed as an organisation associated with its release and strongly endorses its aims.

The Declaration comes at a time of escalating danger for humanitarian workers. In 2024 alone, 383 aid personnel were killed, the vast majority being national colleagues working within their own communities.

**Kirsten Sayers, CEO of Caritas Australia**, said: “Being a locally led organisation means our partners are the people on the front lines. They are not flown in; they are born there. They know the terrain, the culture, the people, and the language. I am deeply saddened to say, they therefore make up those most at risk. As a result, we have lost colleagues in Gaza, had colleagues kidnapped in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and our partners in Ukraine describe working in a death zone.”

“These are not isolated incidents. They are part of a growing global trend that demands urgent action. There is solace amid these tragedies in seeing our government, and indeed governments around the world, working hand in hand with NGOs, by taking onboard our sector-wide experience and channelling that into global action through this declaration.”

Caritas Australia joins other humanitarian organisations, including Caritas Internationalis and many of its members, in calling for stronger accountability when protections are violated, and urges all governments to support the Declaration and its implementation.

**Pope Leo XIV**, speaking earlier this year, echoed this call for global responsibility saying “It is troubling to see that the force of international law and humanitarian law seems no longer to be binding, replaced by the alleged right to coerce others. This is unworthy of our humanity, shameful for all mankind and for the leaders of nations.”

To support Caritas Australia’s Emergency Relief Appeal, visit [www.caritas.org.au/emergency](http://www.caritas.org.au/emergency) or call 1800 024 413 toll free.

**ENDS**

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