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## UNOG Library Talk: book launch of “Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda: Case studies and interventions”, edited by Ishbel McWha-Hermann, Douglas C. Maynard, Mary O'Neill Berry

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26 January 2016

**UNOG Library Talk: book launch of “Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda: Case studies and interventions”, edited by Ishbel McWha-Hermann, Douglas C. Maynard, Mary O'Neill Berry**

Welcome remarks delivered by Mr. David A. Chikvaidze,  
Chef de Cabinet on behalf of Mr. Michael Møller  
United Nations Under-Secretary-General  
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

UNOG Library Talk: book launch of “Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda: Case studies and interventions”, edited by Ishbel McWha-Hermann, Douglas C. Maynard, Mary O'Neill Berry

Tuesday, 26 January 2016 at 1 p.m.  
Library Events Room (B-135), Palais des Nations

Dear Telma Viale,  
Dear colleagues and friends:

I am pleased to welcome you to this UNOG Library Talk to launch the book on “Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda”. We are very lucky to have with us today several of the authors of the book who will share with us their insights.

Humanitarian Work Psychology is a new field of research, building on the established knowledge in psychology, applying it to humanitarian settings. In different chapters, the book presents findings from case studies in Nigeria, India, Ghana, Hong Kong and Sierra Leone. This collection also builds the bridge to the broader sustainable development agenda, looking at the contributions made by humanitarian work and linking the individual well-being of humanitarian workers with the broader notion of societal well-being.

We live in times of humanitarian crises – 125 million people are in need of assistance. Resources are not living up to real needs. Last year only 52% of humanitarian appeals were funded. In Syria and elsewhere a shortfall in funding has necessitated a downscaling in services such as food assistance to the population in most dire need.

Humanitarian workers – international and national – are at the frontline of human suffering in emergencies due to war or natural catastrophe. Seeing and feeling the suffering on the spot without being able to provide enough support against overwhelming needs, puts humanitarians under enormous stress. They are often overstretched, work long hours, including weekends, and are close to burn-out. They find themselves in isolated places, away from families and friends who could provide emotional support. They may have to struggle with malaria or other life-threatening diseases. They are also often faced with extremely insecure conditions, witnessing abductions or executions of close colleagues or becoming themselves victims of aggression. Over the past years, the banners of the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement or other humanitarian organizations have been less and less able to protect the safety of their staff. On the contrary, the flags of their organizations sometimes have made them even more of a target. These

conditions inevitably leave a mark on the psyche of humanitarians. In a survey published by of the British newspaper The Guardian 79 % of aid workers said they had experienced a mental health issue and 93 % said these were work-related. This means that as employers we need to provide better support, helping workers to cope with their demanding professional environment. The study of The Guardian also showed that some humanitarian organizations have become increasingly aware of the issue and have been getting better at understanding and handling the special needs of their staff.

This book is one more indicator for a welcome professionalization in this field. It is indeed a timely contribution to help us better manage the working conditions of humanitarian workers, preventing burn-out and providing support in cases of post-traumatic stress disorders or depression. Taking into account the health and well-being of humanitarians, will ultimately help to ensure a more sustainable provision of humanitarian aid. As many humanitarian missions last longer than in the past, it is imperative for the United Nations, as well as our sister organizations in the field, to ensure long-term health and well-being of our most precious resource, our dedicated staff.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is very fitting, that this book should be launched in Geneva, a hub of humanitarian work with a strong link to the field. Thousands of staff on the payroll of organizations such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as well as other international agencies and countless NGOs have much practical experience to contribute to this discourse – including many of you here in this room.

I hope that the psychological conditions and needs of humanitarian workers will also be taken up at the Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul later this year. For this global discussion, the book provides important ground work.

I salute the authors for the pioneer work they have undertaken and I look forward to hearing more about the lessons learnt from the field as they will be presented by the authors of the book. Thank you for bringing this topic to the library at the United Nations.

I wish you, an enjoyable event and a good read.

Thank you very much.

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