

World Humanitarian Day

*By Aaron Fleury-Charles (he/him/his), Junior Solution Architect and DEI Champion
Middletown Campus*

World Humanitarian Day was created in 2009 to recognize the August 19th bombing of Canal Hotel in Iraq which killed 22 people, including the chief humanitarian in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello. The day was formalized by the United Nations General Assembly to pay tribute to humanitarian workers across the globe that are killed or injured in their line of work and to advocate for their safety and the survival/well-being of those who are affected by crises.



Each year the UN focuses on a theme for World Humanitarian Day. The main theme that was started last year is #TheHumanRace which is a global challenge to help bring attention to climate challenge, especially to those who are climate vulnerable. The challenge was to do any activity for 100 minutes between August 16th and August 31st to tell world leaders that you expect the developed countries to deliver on their decade-old pledge of \$100 billion annually for climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. [Click here](#) to learn more about this \$100 billion pledge.

Climate-vulnerable countries are countries that are disproportionately affected by climate change. They typically do not have the resources needed to adequately recover from natural disasters including earthquakes, tsunamis, heat waves, etc. One of the most climate-vulnerable countries is Haiti which experienced a devastating earthquake in 2010 and another in 2021. Haiti relies on the continuous support of the UN and donor countries to provide relief/recovery efforts and financial backing so they can build better infrastructure to withstand future disasters. [Click here](#) to learn more on the Haiti recovery efforts.

Who was Sergio Vieira de Mello?

Sergio was born in Rio de Janeiro in March of 1948. He spent much of his early childhood in various places around the world accompanying his father at his diplomatic postings. Vieira de Mello studied philosophy at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro but continued his education at the University of Paris. In 1969, he landed his first job as an editor for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). From there he moved into field work in Bangladesh in 1971, Sudan 1972, and Cyprus in 1974 to help organize food, shelter, and other types of aid for refugees. Sergio travelled all over the world to help bring



humanitarian aid to places in crisis. He spent much of the 1990s clearing land mines in Cambodia and Yugoslavia. In the early 2000s, he became the UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, where he then took on the role of UN Transitional Administrator in East Timor, and in 2002 became the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In May of 2003, Sergio was appointed as the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to Iraq, an appointment that outlasted the original four month planned stay. Sergio was eventually killed in the Canal Hotel Bombing of August 19, 2003, in Baghdad, Iraq.

I was not able to capture all of Sergio's accomplishments and the impact he had in this article, so I encourage you to read the full biography [here](#), on his foundation's website