

**VOLUNTEERISM AND PEACE BUILDINGBUILDING:
AN OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF UN VOLUNTEERS
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Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to be invited and address this meeting of individuals and groups whose work in peace and development has contributed to averting the conflicts in many parts of the world and made the world a safer place as we begin the journey of the 21st century.

My presentation is on volunteers and especially about the work of UN Volunteers in post conflict peace and confidence-building. I take this singular opportunity to salute all volunteers who sacrifice their time and energy away from their high salaries and the comfort of their homes and contribute to promoting peace all over the world. Among the numerous volunteers are the over 5000 volunteers who work for the United Nations, part of whose contribution have been in East Timor, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Guatemala, Sri-Lanka, Angola and Sierra Leone and many other places.

The United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV), established in 1971 and administered by UNDP is the United Nations programme that supports sustainable human development globally through the promotion of volunteerism and the mobilisation of volunteers. It operates against a background of growing recognition that volunteerism brings benefits to both society at large and the individual volunteer; that it makes important contributions, economically as well as socially; and that it contributes to more cohesive societies by building trust and reciprocity among citizens. Universal and inclusive, UNV embraces all types of volunteer action while holding to the values of free will, commitment, engagement and solidarity, which are the foundations of volunteerism.

Through the concept of volunteerism and volunteer action, the causes of peace and development are being served by providing opportunities for participation of all people. UN Volunteers are involved in and support the programmes of the United Nations itself and almost all UN Funds, Programmes and Specialised Agencies in areas like (i) enabling development; (ii) reducing poverty; (iii) humanitarian relief and peace efforts; and (iv) gender and environment.

The presentation draws on the report of a review work on UNV's role in Post-Conflict prepared by Jonathan Cohen and highlights the opportunities and capacities developed by UNV in the area of conflict resolution and confidence building. While the paper focuses on UNV's discrete involvement in this area, it is important to recognise that the dividing line between such work and UNV's engagement in the broader context of post-conflict situations, including reintegration, reconstruction, demobilisation and electoral support activities, can be blurred. The focus here is on specific conflict resolution and confidence building projects that have been developed beyond a responsive approach or one that services the needs of other UN agencies.

The experience of UNV over the years and in particular the achievement in promoting community peace-building activities in several countries provides UNV the unique opportunity to enhance its activities in this field. The Jonathan Cohen review report has indicated in a very clear way the significant role UNV has carved for itself in this area particularly in strategic interventions among remote communities where social and economic infrastructure have been most devastated and dislocated by conflict.

"UNV's engagement in this work has involved a number of elements: training; community support and grant giving; the promotion of reconciliation; dialogue promotion; and civil society development in general. Its approach has generally been low-key and non-threatening, characterised by flexibility, responsiveness and accessibility. Operating with the authority of the UN but the informality and flexibility of an NGO, UNV has become a means for the UN to work in regions and on issues that have not always been within its compass."

Indeed, UNVs have served in almost all post conflict situations in one capacity or the other, by either supporting DPKO missions or designing projects to support peace processes at the grassroots level. The experience cuts across the globe from Rwanda and Burundi to Tajikistan and Guatemala and in East Timor, Kosovo and Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. More specifically, UNV has acquired enormous experience in the execution/implementation of post conflict peace and confidence-building programmes. Since 1990, UNV has implemented such peace-building projects in Georgia, Bosnia, Liberia, Burundi, and supported peace processes in numerous other countries serving with other UN agencies such as UNDP, UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF.

There has been a dynamic process of defining activities within this area year after year, and project after project, by way of incorporating lessons learned, including improvement in project design and implementation. In countries where UNV has been active, peace-building projects have become visible and attracted the national governments, communities and the media. In addition, they received attention to the extent that UNV peace-building activities now constitute the human face of the UN and in most cases the front banner to community-based reconciliation activities of UNDP. These efforts in “soft ware” initiatives go a long way to compliment the “hard ware” activities of major development agencies operating in immediate post conflict situations.

In most cases, UNDP and other donor interests and support have been seen to dictate the initiation of UNV peace-building initiatives. In some instances UNV received contribution through the CAP process and SVF. However, in programme execution and implementation UNV has demonstrated its capacity to deliver in the field and nurtured activities that have attracted an increased donor interest as a result of the specificity of activities and the attraction of the concept of volunteering for such projects. The UNV peace-building projects in Bosnia and Georgia have attracted funding after their initial funding ended. It is this capacity to deliver, combined with the achievements, and the recognition of UNV in implementing discrete peace and

confidence-building projects that strengthens and even more so locates UNV as a potential and significant player in post conflict situations.

A significant aspect of UNV's approach has been to work with (train and support) internal 'third parties': people within communities (the youth) who are seeking to engage constructive change and move beyond violence towards politics. UNV's community level approach to peace-building also provides for an implementation capacity needed to translate policy and decisions on peace and security into concrete actions. In operating at this level UNV is well situated not only to work 'downstream' (with communities) but also provides the awareness required by communities to influence work policy 'upstream' (national governments).

A key strength of UNV's work is the relatively benign perception that hostile groups have to “volunteer”, combined with the fact that the project dispenses relatively small amounts of money and so is perceived as posing less threat to established power structures. UNV sees this “ice breaking” role as central to its activities and its role as an agent of first intervention for UNDP in crisis and post crises countries.

UNV also recognises the importance of supporting the Youth to facilitate the process of change in post conflict environments. Evidence in many cases have shown that the youth constitute the majority of victims of conflicts and those who most need assistance in the process of confidence building, social rehabilitation and peace-building. In general the conditions of the youth are challenged in the search for education and employment, adequate health, are susceptible to violence, socially vulnerable and lack adequate sports and recreational opportunities. To be sure, the youth constitute the majority who are maimed, returnees/IDPs, soldiers, unemployed etc. They also constitute a potential prey for recruitment back into war as soldiers, as well as potential to become involved in negative social habits such as drugs, prostitution and crime, as well as the potential to contract HIV/AIDS. Such situation provides enormous opportunities to engage with the youth and empower them to release their creative potential in the search for peace and development.

While the deepening crisis provides fertile grounds to further damage the youth, it also provides an opportunity for positive intervention through a systemic programme of peace and confidence

A vital ingredient in UNVs work is to provide the software component and act as a catalyst to develop synergies of the benefits and sustainability of all other elements of peace processes. Working with UN agencies, governments and civil society organisations, UNVs work at the community level as agents of change to impact peace processes by adopting a flexible mechanism.

- The **objective** is to assist communities devastated by war to begin a process of recovery by providing an enabling environment for initiatives, which lead to community empowerment and sustained community reconciliation and integration.
- The **approach** is to work with community groups, youth and children traumatised by conflict, to provide opportunities for social, economic and political recovery. UNV Community Facilitators assist in initiating/stimulating a process of peace-building and reconciliation which involves inter-community and inter-ethnic confidence-building measures.
- **Activities** include psycho-social work; the promotion of dialogue; peace camps, training; grant making; support to disarmament, demobilisation; reintegration; minor rehabilitation of infrastructure; and the development of a constructive/responsive civil society.
- The **methodology** involves a low key and non-threatening intervention in post-conflict communities, which is characterised by flexibility, responsiveness and accessibility.

Projects developed by this mechanism are dynamic and flexible and the experience gained has strengthened UN Volunteers delivery capacities.

At this point, I will like to share with you some examples of the work of UNV in the field of community peace and confidence-building.

In **Georgia**, a UNV project focuses on promoting intercommunal confidence-building activities at the national and community levels. UNV Community Facilitators, both National and International are implementing a program strategy composed of seven elements. They include: support and consulting to local

NGOs working on programmes for mutual understanding; publication of a children's magazine; psychological rehabilitation for war victims; human rights training and confidence-building between ethnic groups; capacity building and facilitation of education for mutual understanding and peace; and income generation projects to promote inter-communal partnership and Youth Camps for peace. The UNVs have compiled a comprehensive data base of local NGOs and civil society organizations involved in peace building, have organized workshops with Georgian NGOs to facilitate the peace and security process, and have shared information to strengthen local institutions.

In **Croatia** national UNVs are working on a UNDP/UNOPS programme focusing on creating a local economic and social environment that attracts the return of all populations displaced by war to the respective target regions. It assists the government in meeting immediate recovery needs in the fields of infrastructure, support to vulnerable groups, employment, income-generation, and credit for agricultural and livestock productions. The strategy of using the services of national UNVs of different ethnic background (5 Croats, 2 Bosnian Croats, 4 Serbs and 3 of mixed family) to work together as a team has contributed promoting inter-communal trust and confidence in the communities.

In **Bosnia**, with a team of 7 National UNVs and 1 International UNV, the project established presence (through youth groups) in 11 municipalities in the federation, five municipalities in Republika Srpska and the District of Brcko. So far, the project has organised over 40 workshops in the area of peacebuilding as well as building relationships with over 600 participants. More than 350 young people have attended 6 summer camps designed to promote peace and understanding of cultural differences. With support from the project, Local Advisory Boards composed of youth from different ethnic groups have been formed to serve as resource pool for youth development issues as well as a forum for information and experience sharing. As a component part of the confidencebuilding process over 20 small-scale grants have been given out in support of economic activities initiated by the youth.

In **Sierra Leone**, a joint UNV/UNAMSIL initiative will support and promote peacebuilding and reintegration in the communities of Sierra Leone most devastated by the civil conflict. The activities will focus on Voluntary youth groups and demobilised soldiers to rebuild communities by providing an enabling environment for peace-building and socio-economic recovery. Working closely with UNAMSIL Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration field offices, activities will focus on:

1) strengthening community youth organisations active in peace and confidence-building, 2) initiate and empower through the mobilisation of volunteers a nucleus of community confidence-builders through training in conflict transformation, mediation and facilitation, 3) through social animation programmes, facilitate the peace and reintegration process at the grassroots, 4) facilitate opportunities for community reintegration, rehabilitation and recovery through voluntary action.

Indeed, beyond substantive contribution to peace programmes, Volunteers bring with them a sense of commitment and dedication which provides an environment for building trust in the communities they work in. Further, the mechanism of the using national volunteers in such programme activities have also enhanced the opportunity of nationals to gain experience working with international volunteers, increase their capacities as well as serving their communities voluntarily. Such mixed groups have facilitated the sustainability and ownership of UNV programmes after internationals UNVs leave the project.

In conclusion, I would like to state that all UN Volunteer's activities have involved partnership with NGOs as well as collaboration with international NGOs with similar objectives. I can vouch that such a partnership has been worthwhile and I suggest that it be strongly encouraged.

Thank You.