



UN

Volunteers

**Statement by
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"Volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at, inter alia...social integration and, in particular overcoming social exclusion and discrimination" (UNGA/Res/56/38, Recommendations on Support for Volunteering – New York, 2002)

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Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to address the Commission for Social Development in the context of UNV's mandate to contribute to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. Volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges and it can transform the pace and nature of development. It is in this context, distinguished delegates, that volunteerism contributes to promoting social integration.

I want to thank the Commission for Social Development for embracing the resolution (A/RES/63/153) recently adopted by the GA Third Committee. This resolution not only paves the way for marking the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Volunteer in 2011, it also provides a great opportunity for joint actions to enrich the understanding of, and support for, the contribution volunteerism brings to enhancing social integration.

I also want to acknowledge that this is not the first time the Commission has recognized the significance of volunteerism to its agenda.

During 2001, which was designated as the International Year of Volunteers (IYV), the Commission exhibited strong leadership on this topic. Members of the Commission supported the organization of IYV National Committees at country level and the co-sponsorship of a number of volunteer related General Assembly resolutions subsequently. These resolutions, consistently attested to the contribution of volunteerism for achieving national economic and social development goals. The role of voluntary action by individual citizens, both spontaneous and through organizations, in helping to address development and humanitarian challenges, is extensive. Volunteer contributions to social development are well documented. Today, research is focusing on the development and application of methodologies to measure the additionality that volunteers bring to national economies, with impressive results.

The Report of the Secretary General that underpins the deliberations of this 47th session of the CSD recalls the consensus definition from the 1995 World Summit on Social Development, of social integration, as "... a process of building the values, relations and institutions essential for the creation of ... of an equitable and dynamic ... society for all". Furthermore, the goal of social integration, the Report continues, is "... to bring all social groups and individuals into the political, social, cultural and economic structures of a society ... to enable their participation in decision-making and improving their access to opportunities." Since 2001, with increased research into, and documentation of its impact, volunteerism is proving to be a significant and acknowledged asset for contributing to the shaping of society as envisioned in Copenhagen in 1995.

Today, there is clear demonstration that under certain circumstances, for people experiencing social exclusion that results in their marginalization from the mainstream of their societies, volunteerism can lead to higher levels of integration. Specifically, it can help combat feelings of personal isolation, empower individuals by giving them confidence and feelings of self-worth; challenge stereotyping of excluded groups by others, and by excluded groups towards themselves; and offer opportunities to people to acquire skills and contacts that enable them to change their environment and themselves. There is evidence of growing recognition on the part of governments of the potential of volunteerism for meeting national development goals, as well as the need for putting in place supportive policy frameworks and developing appropriate programmes. Nonetheless, the concept of volunteerism as a force for more cohesive societies, with potential for bringing about social inclusion, is rarely expressed in national policy despite

having featured in the outcome document adopted by governments at the World Summit on Social Development+5 held in Geneva in 2000.

Madame Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, volunteerism has contributed to developing social capital for each of the social groups, whose situation is being regularly monitored by the CSD: youth, older persons, women, persons with disabilities, and other groups that traditionally find themselves marginalized from mainstream participation in development activities.

As noted in the Secretary-General's 2008 Report on the Follow-Up to the implementation of the International Year of the Volunteer, opening up opportunities for excluded people to participate actively in volunteerism is increasingly seen as a means to promoting social inclusion.

For example, volunteerism is one response to the phenomenon of disenfranchised or marginalized youth, contributing to dialogue, participation and inclusion. The United Nations World Youth Report 2007 highlighted youth volunteerism as a means of enhancing participation and engaging the positive energy and innovation of young people towards realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Countries such as Liberia, Niger, the United Republic of Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Brazil, Ukraine, and Uruguay are developing or expanding youth volunteer service programmes to offer opportunities to enhance their employability, and enable their increased participation in community and nation-building.

Volunteerism is a positive means of bringing together communities including ethnic minorities. For example, following previous success, the European Commission is now conducting a second project which brings together Roma and non-Roma youth in voluntary service activities in EU, central and eastern Europe communities. The regional Youth Ambassadors for Peace volunteer programme of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) focuses on post-conflict building of peace, national recovery, and reconciliation.

Capacity building initiatives, focused on the development of skills at international, regional, national and local levels, have opened the way for excluded persons to volunteer in leadership roles resulting in enhanced participation and inclusion. Volunteering enables young people to acquire skills and experience that facilitate their entry into the job market, while older persons continue to be actively involved in their communities and live healthier and more rewarding lives.

UNV's partnership with UNAIDS in the Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV (GIPA) projects in Africa, the Caribbean, and southeast Asia have demonstrated the truth of these premises, as has the joint UNIFEM/UNV/UNDP gender budgeting project in Latin America where nearly 5,000 social leaders were sensitized, informed and trained. The evaluation of the Latin America initiative, validated the project's success with implementing inclusion mechanisms in the targeted communities.

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Advances in communication technology are extending volunteerism's reach. Online volunteer networks and databases facilitate linkages between volunteers and opportunities to volunteer across the globe. Mobile phones are providing even further access. For example, Brazil's '0800' - Youth Network employs text messaging to reach young people informing them of volunteer service opportunities. Mobile telephones extend outreach to youth who do not have computer access.

Online volunteering, which is volunteering done through the medium of communications technology, is providing greater opportunities for inclusion for people with limited means or availability for on-site volunteering. This includes disabled persons, seniors, children, and primary care givers. Online volunteering also allows efficient and effective north-south and south-south contributions to development. For example, since 2001, UNV's Online Volunteering service has mobilized more than 13,000 volunteers from 182 countries. Of these, over 60% have been women and 46% have come from developing countries.

Innovative use of communications technology was instrumental in the success of the Teach India Campaign initiative, backed by the *Times of India* and UNV, to spread literacy and quality education in underserved areas of urban India. By December 2008, 150,000 people had expressed the desire to participate across more than 11 cities in India and a total of 76,000 volunteers had been mobilized. "Teach India" brought together students from middle-class and wealthy backgrounds, as well as private sector executives, to work often for the first time, with poor and underserved primary school age children in the slums and poor communities.

I have mentioned increasing research in the area of volunteerism. It is a point picked up in Resolution 63/153, where governments are urged to provide support in this area. In this regard, I wish, in particular, to acknowledge UNDESA 's substantive engagement with UNV in exploring ways to translate research findings into concrete programmes . In November 2007, UNDESA and UNV co-sponsored an "Expert Group Workshop to Examine Methods for Promoting Participation, Engagement including Volunteerism, and Inclusion in National Development Initiatives."¹ The experts recognized that existing civic engagement initiatives might not be sufficiently inclusive. In fact some have proven to be exclusionary, favoring the privileged or other "in" groups, while reinforcing inequalities in society. Engagement, in and of itself, is no guarantee of inclusion. Among the lessons learnt, which were validated by the Workshop, was the role of government in removing impediments to participation, and which could be accomplished through their pro-actively creating an enabling environment for civic engagement. The importance of supporting and promoting volunteerism was highlighted by the experts who pointed to the benefits that accrue to all of society, to the immediate beneficiaries as well as to the volunteers themselves. Among its recommendations, the Expert Group called for establishing goals for social inclusion, civic engagement and volunteerism, and for research in order to fully reflect the impact of engagement, and volunteerism's contribution to these processes.

In recent years there has been growing recognition of the economic contribution made by volunteers. An increasing number of countries are involved in efforts to include this contribution in the system of national accounts and to add questions on volunteering to labour force surveys. Volunteering helps build trust, solidarity, and social capital; and is often a factor in lowering tensions. It is part of the basic fabric of well functioning societies; and can make a significant contribution to promoting social inclusion.

May I take this opportunity to acknowledge the important role that the Commission has taken as an advocate for building social inclusion through volunteerism. In the resolution adopted by the 24th Special Session of the General Assembly in 2000 (Copenhagen +5), among the further commitments in implementing the World Summit for Social Development, Commitment #4 specifically includes action to "promote the contribution that voluntarism can make to the creation of caring societies as an additional mechanism in the promotion of social integration."

¹ UNDESA/UNV, Methods for Promoting Participation, Engagement, including Volunteerism, and Inclusion in National Development Initiatives, UN Headquarters, New York, 27-28 November 2007

Mr. Chairman, we in UNV are committed to continuing this partnership with the Commission and in such an important area, as social integration. We believe that the opportunity offered by the upcoming 10th commemoration of IYV will allow us to collaborate in various ways.

I would like to conclude by sharing with you some of our thinking on moving the collaboration forward between the Commission and UNV in support of the priority theme of social integration and, hopefully, beyond that to the 10th anniversary commemoration of IYV in 2011. The General Assembly has decided to devote a full day, on or around 5 December, traditionally observed as the International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development (IVD) at its 66th session to IYV follow-up and commemoration of its 10th anniversary. We propose to keep the Commission fully informed of the plans for 2011, through:

Reporting to the 48th session;

Organizing a parallel event at on "Volunteerism and Social Integration" next year

Briefing the CSD on the UNV initiative to commission a global report on the state of volunteerism.

Providing an update on the plans and arrangements for the GA plenary sessions on the IYV in 2011.

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We have passed the midpoint between the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the 2015 target date, and the the collective record of progress is mixed. If current trends continue, it is likely that for many millions of people the promises made every government, enshrined in the Millennium Declaration, will not be realized. The current global crises in the financial markets and food insecurity raise even more urgent questions about reaching the MDGs, even as they underline the urgency of realizing them for the world's poor and vulnerable.

There is now acceptance of the links between achieving the MDGs and empowerment, popular participation and social capital. People contribute in a myriad of ways to the well-being of their communities and to society at large. One such way is through the giving of time, without coercion and with no expectation of financial gain. Volunteerism is a form of social behavior whose origins go back to the beginning of civilization. It takes many forms, including mutual aid and self-help, philanthropy and service, advocacy and campaigning. When recognized and adequately supported, it can make a significant contribution to enhancing equity, dignity and

empowerment of excluded sectors of society. Indeed, if properly harnessed, volunteerism can be a powerful force for breaking down barriers that help to maintain and foster exclusion. Volunteerism is a positive means of bringing together communities, of expanding social inclusion, building social capital and contributing to the UN's peace and development agenda towards that just "society for all".

I look forward to discussing with you joint actions to further enhance the understanding of and support for the contribution volunteerism can make to enhancing social integration both in the contexts of the Commission sessions and the marking of the International Year of the Volunteer plus 10 in 2011. Madame. Chairperson, I thank you and Commission for your continued support and for your recognition of the significance of volunteerism.

Thank you for your attention.