



UN

Volunteers

In FACT: UN Volunteers and Human Rights

The trust and confidence that volunteers inspire in others, including through their association with the United Nations, is an important source of strength to the work of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme in the area of governance and human rights. Collaborating with local groups, NGOs, governments, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other UN agencies, UN Volunteers are raising awareness of rights issues and fostering respect for human rights in national policies and programmes. Their activities also contribute to ensuring that efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are not derailed by human rights abuses.

Examples of UNV's work in promoting and protecting human rights include:

- Through the Human Rights Strengthening (HURIST) programme, a joint initiative of UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a global network of UN Volunteers is helping to mainstream human rights in the development programming of UN agencies in a range of countries including Armenia, Benin, Brazil, Cape Verde, Fiji, Kazakhstan and Yemen. Working with their partners, UN Volunteers are active in many areas including promoting dialogue on human rights to supporting human rights commissions and ombudsmen offices. Reaching out to all citizens, they work with vulnerable groups to help strengthen managerial and leadership skills of human rights groups, so they can better serve their communities. And in partnership with the media and local institutions, UN Volunteers raise awareness of human rights issues at the community, regional and national levels.
- In Haiti, UN Volunteers worked alongside local court officials to make the judiciary and prison system more efficient and responsive to the needs of the community. By supporting national institutions, UNDP and civil organizations involved in the promotion and protection of human rights, UN Volunteers have contributed to the establishment of a database on different aspects of the penitentiary system. They also assisted in the reintegration of detainees.
- In Central America and the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico), the UNV programme partnered with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). UN Volunteers collaborated with many local groups offering counselling and legal support to young people at risk, including street youth and victims of abuse. They helped to coordinate music lessons and sports activities to strengthen community involvement. By teaming up with youth groups, churches, universities, radio stations and local volunteers, UN Volunteers increased awareness of children's rights through surveys, forums and campaigns. In addition, they trained and educated teachers, adolescents and parent associations on family well-being, hygiene, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and environmental protection. UN Volunteers also strengthened human and informational resources in host governmental and non-governmental agencies in the area of child rights. They offered advice to ministries in the promotion of human rights and helped to develop policies and national legislation based on the CRC and other international laws favourable to women, children and adolescents.
- In Uganda, teams of UN Volunteers work with the Human Rights Commission, the Ugandan Amnesty Commission and the Ministry of Local Government to help strengthen national capacities in the observation, monitoring and reporting of human rights violations at the community level. Spread over six districts in the country's post conflict regions, the UN Volunteers help organize workshops on mainstreaming human rights policies into development planning and conduct 'training of trainer' seminars for local government officials on the administration of human rights in the local court

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UN Volunteers is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)



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system. At the community level, they encourage district leaders to use Uganda's Amnesty Act as a tool to promote peace and reconciliation. And to ensure the country's Bill of Rights is accessible to all, UN Volunteers have simplified the terminology and language of documents for wider dissemination and understanding by the population at large.

- The UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) officially ended in December 2004 after a decade of verifying human rights and helping the country implement its peace accords. In all, 430 UN Volunteers have performed key tasks such as assessing human rights violations, facilitating the process of rights verification at the community level, and keeping the public informed about progress made. In his final report on MINUGUA, Secretary-General Kofi Annan lauded the 60 Guatemalan UN Volunteers, who, in the last year of the Mission, were tasked with preparing communities and partner organizations for the transition and departure of MINUGUA. Working closely with counterparts in government, civil society organizations and human rights institutions, these UN Volunteers have played a vital role in ensuring that acquired knowledge, including the value of volunteerism in protecting and promoting human rights, is retained and continues to serve the population.

UNV is the UN organization that supports the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals through the promotion of volunteerism, including the mobilization of volunteers. To this end, UNV provides the opportunity each year for more than 7,000 women and men - 75 per cent coming from developing countries - to support peace, relief and development initiatives in some 140 countries. In addition, it engages thousands of other individuals in the work of the United Nations through www.onlinevolunteering.org, and manages the WorldVolunteerWeb.org, a portal that serves as a knowledge resource base on volunteerism worldwide.

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