



UN

Volunteers

Statement of the Executive Coordinator , United Nations Volunteers on International Volunteer Day, 5 December 2007

The UN General Assembly established International Volunteer Day (IVD) in 1985 to make visible the vast contributions of volunteers to economic and social development globally. IVD is celebrated worldwide on December 5 and is a wonderful opportunity to recognize the contribution of volunteers worldwide.

Everywhere we look we see those extraordinary contributions, from responding to disasters, to efforts to tackle major development challenges such as climate change, peace, human health, as well as the encouragement and engagement in society of youth and marginalized groups.

Over the years, IVD celebrations have been characterized by increasing diversity and creativity. They have ranged from the adoption of national volunteer legislation, to a countrywide biking tour by a single volunteer in Vietnam to promote the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Italy launched an 'Oscar for Volunteering', and the UNV Online Volunteering Service created annual awards to draw attention to the extraordinary contribution of thousands of people around the world to development projects - delivered over the internet. Rallies, parades, community volunteering projects, conferences and advocacy campaigns all feature prominently in IVD celebrations

Since the International Year of Volunteers (IYV 2001) there has been growing recognition of the power of volunteerism to build social capital and cohesion and contribute to human development. Many countries have established and refined policies and legal frameworks to encourage volunteerism and to harness the contribution of volunteers towards specific development objectives. This is a welcome trend, which facilitates participation by, encouraging and inspiring people to volunteer for development, particularly in their own communities. It is also helping to build capacity in people and in institutions that support development, in civil society, in the public and private sectors and in the UN system.

But more still needs to be done. In 2008, the General Assembly of the United Nations will again review the progress since IYV 2001. The Member Countries of the UN will consider the degree of improvement in the support and encouragement that volunteerism receives around the world, and the significant contribution that volunteerism continues to make to human development. This provides another exciting opportunity to keep volunteerism high on the agenda of member states.

I take the opportunity of IVD 2007 to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to the millions of women and men, including the thousands of UNV volunteers, who continue to volunteer their skills and talents on a daily basis. Regardless at what level they act, internationally, nationally or locally, all belong to an extraordinary group of global citizens who make an essential difference in building a better world for all.

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