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UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator Toily Kurbanov (back, third from left) celebrates volunteers and volunteerism with members of the National Volunteering Committee in Istanbul, Turkey. (UNV, 2016)

Celebrating International Volunteer Day in Turkey

On the occasion of International Volunteer Day, we applaud volunteers and volunteer organizations from Turkey for making a difference to peace and development every day -- here and all over the world. And we are also looking forward to Turkey effectively promoting volunteerism in order to achieve sustainable development in the years ahead.

By Toily Kurbanov, UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, Management Services

On Monday, 5 December the world will celebrate International Volunteer Day, designated by the United Nations in 1985 to applaud the inspiration of millions of volunteers throughout the world and their contributions to peace and development.

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Volunteerism is an expression of civic engagement and solidarity and a truly global phenomenon that transcends boundaries, religions and cultures. Volunteerism is the backbone of civil society organizations and a powerful force in the public sector as well as, increasingly, for business. This is true around the world and in Turkey, where many organizations and individuals respond to development challenges through volunteerism, and where multi-stakeholder partnerships are key for volunteering to flourish to its full potential. Take a few examples.

Türkiye Eğitim Gönüllüleri Vakfı (Educational Volunteers Foundation of Turkey, TEGV) implements educational programmes and extracurricular activities for children aged 7 to 16. TEGV volunteers directly support children's education and help the kids to gain self-confidence and openness. TEGV's data shows that while volunteer-led activities positively impact children's happiness and success at school, at the same time the satisfaction of volunteers derived from volunteering increases, as do their levels of happiness, empathy and social responsibility.

Mahalle Afet Gönüllüleri (Neighbourhood Disaster Volunteers, MAG) Foundation ensures that as many lives as possible can be saved in natural disasters. Their network of community volunteers serves as first responders, provides assistance to the injured and performs critical search and rescue activities. Since the earthquake that struck the Marmara region in 1999, MAG Foundation has trained and equipped more than 5,500 volunteers in 120 neighbourhoods in Istanbul, Kocaeli, Yalova, Izmir and Bursa provinces. Thanks to them, communities throughout Turkey are better informed about disaster preparedness and risk mitigation.

Türkiye Erozyonla Mücadele Ağaçlandırma ve Doğal Varlıkları Koruma Vakfı (Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats, TEMA) is the largest environmental NGO in Turkey. TEMA's motto "Save Turkey from becoming a desert" resonates within society and, in the last 20 years, its 477,000 volunteers have planted 11,500,000 trees and conducted 182 projects on rural development, biodiversity, and forestation. In 2012, TEMA received the Land of Life award from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme have a long history of promoting volunteerism in 130 countries around the world, including Turkey. We are proud of our partnership with Turkish volunteers and Turkish volunteer organizations who contribute to national and global development priorities.

In recent years 22 UN Volunteers from Turkey serving under various UN

programmes have supported peace and development in countries like Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Thailand. In addition, 36 Turkish and 12 international UN Volunteers are currently serving in Turkey: some support asylum seekers through assignments with UNCHR while others work with UNDP to help address environmental concerns. Even more UN Volunteers are about to join a dedicated project, “Strengthening social and economic integration of Syrian women in Southeast Anatolia through community volunteer-based solutions” which will help increase employability of Syrian women and contribute to harmonious relations with Turkish host communities. Last but not least, UNV continues to work with multi-stakeholder partnerships, for example the National Volunteering Committee established in 2013 in order to recognize and strengthen volunteerism in Turkey and to contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities across the country.

Turkey has achieved significant progress on its national development priorities and has also partnered with many countries around the world as an emerging and active provider of development and humanitarian assistance. It has solidified its position as a global leader by hosting a series of key international events, including the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

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