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Toily Kurbanov, UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, Management Services. (Photo: Sam Rizk, Country Director UNDP Syria, 2017)

## Volunteer solutions for the post-agreement reconstruction of Syria

UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator Toily Kurbanov participated in the Helsinki Conference on Supporting Syrians and the Region. He offered valuable lessons learned for the post-agreement reconstruction of Syria, focusing on how local volunteers are the first to reach the most vulnerable in the wake of crisis and the role of UN Volunteers in building locally-owned development. The full transcript of his remarks is below.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is a global programme and a common service to the UN system administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). As we meet there are 4,200 UN Volunteers contributing to peace and development under various UN agency programmes around the world. This includes 350 volunteers in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt most of whom contribute to the regional response to the Syrian crisis.

By way of illustration, we have international volunteers who monitor cross-border humanitarian supplies on Turkish-Syrian border. We have Palestinian refugees helping to run schools in Lebanon for Palestinian refugee children fleeing the violence in Syria. And

we also have online volunteers who help UN agencies remotely by processing data or maps, or by translating reports into Arabic.

So the transfer of expertise from the diaspora might be already happening -albeit at a small scale and only online for now. We stand ready to scale up the volunteers solutions in partnership with UNDP and other UN agencies as soon as the right moment will arrive.

With that as a background, I would like to offer two lessons learned to the panel and to the audience.

First, global experience show that local volunteers are first to reach the scene of crisis and to provide assistance to victims. We saw this time and again after civil wars or even after natural disasters. The local volunteers know the local context, they exponentially expand outreach, and they make sure that any solutions are not imposed from outside but are community owned. What is also important, national volunteers are the ones who will stay behind to address residual needs after international support runs out. So volunteer solutions are essential both for local ownership and for sustainability of results.

Second, we spoke this morning that part of rebuilding resilience must be about reinvesting in local institutions. In many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America we found that engaging UN Volunteers acts as a catalyst for establishing local volunteer associations and even nationwide volunteer schemes. So, UN Volunteer's solutions not only help to address the issues of here and now, but also can leave behind a lasting, locally-owned institutional legacy. Where volunteer deployment is gender balanced so will the institutional results have strong gender lens.

These are just two lessons learned that I wanted to share. As UNDP Administrator Helen Clark spoke this morning, we can only suggest those lessons but, ultimately in Syria there must be Syrian solutions. Therefore we are keen not only to share these lessons but also to discuss how they may -or may not- resonate in Syrian context.

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*Toily Kurbanov is UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, Management Services. These remarks were given at the UNDP Side Event *Never too early to plan: lessons learned for the post-agreement reconstruction of Syria*, in the framework of the [Helsinki Conference on Supporting Syrians and the Region](#) held in Helsinki, Finland, on 23-24 January 2017.*

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