IVD 2021 in Asia: a time of appreciation and inspiration for the future of volunteerism

Creativity was the hallmark of events and celebrations organized to mark International Volunteer Day (IVD) 2021 across Asia and the Pacific. Together with partners, donors and influencers, field units of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme celebrated the contribution of volunteers and volunteerism to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We share some of the events that brought people together both virtually and in person to showcase the spirit of innovation in volunteering for our common future.

In Thailand, the UNV Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific marked IVD 2021 together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Volunteers and partners shared their reflections on the
main theme of the commemoration, as well as means of leveraging volunteering for the SDGs, community engagement, inclusion, climate change, volunteerism and a resilient future. Video messages were delivered by Ms Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Ms Gita Sabharwal, UN Resident Coordinator, Mr Zhang Zhaoxu, Vice President and Secretary-General of the China Young Volunteers Association (CYVA).

In Afghanistan, UNV Executive Coordinator Toily Kurbanov joined IVD celebrations in Kabul along with UN Volunteers, UN staff and partners. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan, UNV Executive Coordinator, and Resident Representative of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) expressed their utmost appreciation to UN Volunteers who have been serving with much dedication during challenging times. In 2021, over 130 UN Volunteers served in Afghanistan as frontline responders to the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to operate during challenging political developments.

In Pakistan, 11 events and a radio show were held, together with the main event in Quetta. These included events organized by the UNV Volunteer Alumni Network in the country, as well as Afghan refugees in Peshawar.

In Multan, the transgender community organized an IVD event in which the UNV Country Coordinator participated virtually. Alisha Shirazi, a transgender social worker, spoke about importance of volunteering.

Farah Ismail, a UN Volunteer Associate Protection Officer serving with the UN Refugee
Agency (UNHCR) became the **10,000th UN Volunteer** mobilized by UNV. A **live chat** was held with her to celebrate this milestone.

In **Bangladesh**, 40 volunteers were acknowledged for their work towards community development through the **IVD Bangladesh Volunteer** and UNV 50 country awards. Celebrations of the day were organized jointly with the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and WaterAid Bangladesh in Dhaka.

Volunteering for community development was also the topic of a **webinar**, **TV talk show** and two live radio shows (broadcast on **1 Dec.** and **6 Dec.**). Key speakers included Mr Md. Tazul Islam, Honorable Minister, and Mr Helal Uddin Ahmed, Senior Secretary, Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives; Md. Mohsin, Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief; Ms Hasin Jahan, Country Director, WaterAid Bangladesh and Ms Tahmina Binte Shiraj, 2nd prize winner, IVD Bangladesh Volunteer Award 2021.

IVD celebrations in **China** reached a staggering one million people through 10 online and onsite activities. To highlight the contribution of volunteers, several high-level speakers delivered video messages and speeches as part of the dedicated events, including Toily Kurbanov, Executive Coordinator, Shalina Miah, Regional Manager, Mr Zhang Weidong, UNDP Assistant Resident Representative, together with Mr Guo Xinbao, Director General of the China Soong Ching Ling Foundation (SCLSCC) and Ms Chen Aimin, Director General, Department of International Cooperation and Communications at SCLSCC. The UN Resident Coordinator in China, Mr Siddharth Chatterjee, also joined the IVD 2021 social media campaign, together with other UN agencies.

Chinese astronauts shared a video message from space to recognize volunteer contributions, which was aired on national TV on 5 December.

UNV jointly organized IVD 2021 celebrations in **India** with the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, UNDP and other UN partners. Throughout the celebrations, enthusiastic youth and V-Force volunteers shared uplifting messages and engaged people in disability-inclusive activities.

The event was held virtually and attended by Ms Usha Sharma, Secretary (Youth Affairs), Mr Nitesh Mishra, Joint Secretary (Youth Affairs), Mr Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator and Ms Nadia Rasheed, Deputy Resident Representative. Honourable Minister of State Mr Nisith Pramanik shared a special message dedicated to young volunteers.

Initiated by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) and UNV, IVD celebrations in **Indonesia** were held in partnership with five Indonesian volunteer-involving organizations: Indorelawan, Relawan Nusantara, IDVolunteering, TurunTangan and Campaign ID.

An online panel discussion was held on 3 December, opened by Vallerie Julliand, UN Resident Coordinator and Shalina Miah, Regional Manager of UNV in Asia and the Pacific, and moderated by Bayu Gawtama, a senior volunteer advisor. This explored the contributions of volunteers to COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, drawing from reporting of academia, the private sector, the indigenous community and youth.
The series of activities held for IVD in **Lao PDR** included an essay competition titled "Innovative ideas on how volunteers can contribute to COVID-19 prevention measures" and a photo contest of volunteers in action advancing progress towards the SDGs. Additionally, a video contest and a workshop on imagining volunteerism for our common future were held.

To this end, UNV partnered with the Lao Youth Union, UNRCO, Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UNFPA, UNDP, Australian Volunteer Programme (AVP), Canada Fund for Local Initiatives and U.S Embassy, as well as other partners. Some 250 participants joined the event, the majority of these online. Speakers included UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Sara Sekkenes and the Deputy Secretary General of Lao Youth Union, Mr Bounta Thepphavong.

In **Malaysia**, the day was marked with a Volunteer Leadership Development Programme, organized by the Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (Student Volunteers Foundation). UN Community Volunteer Regina Lim has been serving for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), working on a border survey. She spoke about her volunteering experience, what it mean to her and the communities she worked with and the power of volunteerism to deliver change.

In **Myanmar**, IVD celebrations were held with the participation of UN Volunteers and in partnership with various international volunteer-involving organizations, including AVP, Peace Corps, KOICA and VSO. The event included volunteering story sessions from each partner organization and UNDP Resident Representative Mr Titon Mitra delivered the opening remarks. A photo contest recognized and celebrated the work of volunteers in 2021 through the lens of 16 participants.

In **Nepal**, IVD celebrations were held with a hybrid event comprising a "Volunteer Mela" (carnival). Volunteers and partners came together to celebrate the spirit of volunteerism through infotainment methods, such as role plays, theatre art, flash mobs, debate sessions and Pecha Kucha presentations. UNV50 Country Awards were also held in line with the celebration, attending by over 1,000 people via livestream.

Dignitaries who joined the event online and onsite included the Honourable Mr Maheswar Gahatraj Athak, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Dr Damodar Regmi, Secretary at the Ministry, Mr Micheal Croft, UNESCO Country Representative, Mr Babu Ram Dhungana, Administration Chief, National Youth Council and Ms. Kaajal Pradhan, Hub Director at Restless Development.

The National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency and national and international volunteering organizations in the **Philippines** collaborated on an IVD 2021 event. UNV's Regional Manager for Asia and the Pacific delivered a keynote speech on volunteering for the SDGs. Over 400 participants joined the event online.
In Sri Lanka, UNV celebrated its Golden Anniversary through the UNV 50 country awards on 7 December, recognizing organizations and individuals who have advocated, integrated and promoted volunteerism in the country. It also commemorated the 10th Anniversary of the V-Awards and the V-Force launched by UNV in Sri Lanka. Participants included the Minister of Youth and Sports, UN Resident Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative and representatives of UN entities and the World Bank.

UNV also launched the e-version of the UNV at 50 photo book, highlighting milestones of the volunteer journey in Sri Lanka. In addition, UNV Sri Lanka provided live coverage of the UNV50 Country Awards through a global UNV Instagram takeover and live tweets.

In Dili, Timor-Leste, IVD celebrations were held in partnership with UNDP, the RCO, volunteer-involving organizations and the Secretary of State for Youth and Sports. Activities to mark the day included roadshows at six local universities, media activities, a community service activity to distribute school materials to under-privileged school children. Furthermore, two national UN Volunteers representing the IVD organizing committee participated in a talk show.

The highlight of IVD activities was the UNV 50 Country Awards ceremony held on 4 December. Over 400 participants from volunteer organizations, heads of UN entities, representatives of diplomatic corps came together, along with guest of honour Mr Jose
Ramos Horta, Goodwill Ambassador for National Volunteers. Eight volunteer organizations and two individual volunteers received the national awards.

In Viet Nam, the Central Committee of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union organized the National Volunteer Day and National Volunteer 2021 Award on 5 December. UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, Mr Patrick Haverman, joined the celebrations and delivered remarks valuing the impact of volunteerism on development.

Further events took place across the region to recognize and advocate for volunteerism to help create a better future.

*This article was prepared with the kind assistance of Online Volunteer Helen Maccan.*

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