Message from UNV Executive Coordinator Richard Dictus on the occasion of International Women’s Day 2016

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is celebrating International Women's Day with our support for UN Women and their theme for 2016: "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality". Volunteerism is an opportunity for everyone to have their voice heard and their actions recognized. UNV promotes volunteerism, among women and men, to engage people in change.

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Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and their theme for 2016: Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental principles that underpin the work of UNV.

Volunteerism is an opportunity for everyone to have their voice heard and their actions recognized. UNV promotes volunteerism, among women and men, to engage people in change. Within the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, a stand-alone gender goal underlining the necessity for structural and attitude changes, UNV focuses on ending violence against women, expanding women's choices and capabilities, and giving women a voice within households and in public and private decision-making spheres.

UNV has a strong track record of contributing towards ending violence against women through advocacy activities and collective dialogue. We enhance ownership of problems by involving, through volunteering, both women and men. Rizwan Latif, a national UN Volunteer in Pakistan, helps men and boys participate in Partners for Prevention aimed at ending violence against women. Men, like Rizwan, are challenging misconceptions embedded within communities, contributing to transforming gender roles, and enabling behavioural and socio-cultural change at the grassroots levels.

At UNV, we advocate for the right of women to make choices for themselves, and to have access to education. Josseline Cohoun, an international UN Volunteer assigned to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), coordinates activities against sexual violence and monitors empowerment activities. Josseline helps a community in Orientale Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to create their own coping mechanisms. Through her engagement, Josseline has shown that women can expand their roles in decision making, develop their skills for better employability, and build capacities in their communities.

Women are volunteering to improve their status in society through actively participating in their communities and taking on leadership roles. Shahd El-Swerki, a national UN Volunteer with UNDP contributes to increasing access to information about community development projects in the Gaza Strip. Working with and alongside her community, Shahd personifies UNV's inspiration in action, and says: Volunteerism is a path I have chosen to shape the development of my community and my own self-confidence.

On International Women's Day 2016, the first since the adoption of the SDGs, we at UNV applaud all forms of volunteerism in the pursuit of gender
equality. A significant catalyst for change, volunteerism makes a real difference in women's lives and provides a pathway to advance sustainable development for all.

- International women's day • gender

Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 5: Gender equality**