

UN Volunteers Reception

24 June 2014

Geneva

UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board President, Ambassador Peter Thomson's Remarks

Good evening Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you to the Executive Coordinator, Richard Dictus, for the kind introduction and for volunteering to host us all this evening. It is indeed a pleasure to be alive, looking out over Lac Lemman on a Swiss summer evening, and we should pause to give thanks. One of the homilies my father frequently gave to his seven sons was "count your blessings", and tonight there are too many blessings for me to list. It is sufficient to merely look out the window at this magnificent vista.

After counting our blessings, we should turn our thoughts to the conditions of hardship that so many of our brothers and sisters in humanity are confronting today. I was on the phone to Baghdad this afternoon, where the Fijian military provides the UN guard, to receive a report on the latest security conditions. It is clear that there is a major humanitarian crisis evolving and our thoughts and prayers go out to the people of Iraq for a speedy end to conflict and further suffering.

When the words ‘humanitarian crisis’ are mentioned, we think of the people who do the good work of the international community, sweating through the hard yards at the front line of our work. As an Ambassador whose national police and military serve as peacekeepers in half a dozen of the world’s troubled hotspots, it has been my privilege to meet the people out there at the front line. It is always a humbling and inspiring experience, for they are true champions of the United Nations credo.

Prominent among them are UN Volunteers. I remember visiting the United Nations Mission in Liberia four years ago, where I met a young lady from the same small northern town in Fiji from which I originate. I found she had made herself indispensable in the UN field hospital in Monrovia. I asked her how she came to be in Liberia and she said she was a UN Volunteer and was loving the experience. The more I heard of her story, the more inspiring I found it: rising above challenges of gender and opportunity back home, here she was on the other side of the world in a post-conflict environment being of warmly-appreciated service to humanity.

These are the UN Volunteers, people who look for something beyond the norms of self-interest, people who put their energy and skills to work for the betterment of the world, who recognize that service to others is the highest calling.

The admiration in which we hold the service of UN Volunteers came through very clearly in the response of the Executive Board to the report of the Executive Coordinator of UN Volunteers this morning. As the Associate Administrator remarked after Board Members had

spoken, there was nothing more to say but thanks, for it is clear we all have nothing but praise for our volunteers.

Two months ago, the Executive Board visited the two multi-country offices of the Pacific Islands, a region the Executive Coordinator is very familiar with from his previous role as the UN Resident Coordinator. From this widespread region we heard how UN Volunteers are greatly valued and we learned that some countries such as my own, send more volunteers than they receive. This was gratifying news.

There are some 6500 UN volunteers currently at work around the globe and we as an Executive Board wish to sincerely express our appreciation to all of them for their service.

I ask you now to join me in a toast of appreciation for their service. Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, 'To the Volunteers!'
