

Side Event at the 2026 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)

organized by the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia and
the Saudi Green Building Forum and partners

**Celebrating Volunteer Impact:
Youth Leadership and Advancing the
Sustainable Development Goals by Climate Action**

Monday, 6 July 2026, 11:30-12:45 | United Nations Headquarters

*Statement by Naoual Driouich,
Head of the New York Office of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV)*

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Dear volunteers,

I am honored to speak on behalf of the Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers programme, Mr. Toily Kurbanov, who regrets that he cannot join you in person today. Let me thank the Saudi Green Building Forum and its partners for placing youth and volunteers at the center of this conversation on climate action and the Goals.

We meet in a year that belongs to volunteers. By proclaiming 2026 the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development, United Nations Member States affirmed something that is essential: that the Sustainable Development Goals are delivered by people, in communities, one commitment at a time. And Young people are at the front of that effort.

Our panel asks how youth leadership can advance the Goals through climate action.

The answer begins with recognizing that volunteerism is a powerful enabler of sustainable development. It brings ambition to life, scales action and connects institutions to youth and communities. Young volunteers bring exactly what climate action needs: new ideas, digital skills, and a direct stake in the future. They are already organizing communities, testing solutions, and turning ideas into results on the ground. In climate action, they are not waiting to lead. They are leading now.

But youth energy alone does not sustain change. It has to be anchored. This is the power of volunteer networks. When young people are connected to institutions, to experienced volunteers, and to one another, their ideas outlast a single event or grant. The drive of the young meets the continuity of those who came before. That is how a good idea becomes a lasting result.

So, the question is how we empower these networks. Three things matter:

First, recognition. Volunteers, especially young volunteers, must be treated as partners in delivery, not as an afterthought. Our 2026 State of the World's Volunteerism Report shows that around 2.1 billion people volunteer every month, yet most of that contribution goes unrecorded. When we recognize it, we can invest in it.

Second, partnership. Durable results come when governments, academia, the private sector, and volunteer organizations work together. Climate action succeeds when these partnerships connect policy ambition with community leadership.

And third, support. Young volunteers need well-being, mentoring, and a real path to stay engaged. Today's volunteer should be tomorrow's leader.

Saudi Arabia is well placed to show what this looks like. The Kingdom is among the Member States leading the International Year, through the National Center for the Non-Profit Sector. Guided by Vision 2030, it is investing in young volunteers at scale. According to the 2025 National Volunteer Work Indicators, 19% of its population aged 15 and above take part in volunteer activities. That is a significant scale of participation, and a growing culture of volunteering across the Kingdom.

Let me close with a line drawn from today's own theme. Volunteerism scales action, and youth secures the future. Our shared task is to empower the networks that connect the two.

Every contribution matters. Together, let us make 2026 a year that belongs to volunteers, and to the young people driving the SDGs forward.

Thank you.