Volunteers act first, saving lives and livelihoods

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Wherever there is suffering, volunteers act to save lives and restore human dignity. In times of crisis, volunteers don't hesitate to risk their own lives for others.

The number of people affected by humanitarian crises is unprecedented. In the past decade, over 1.5 billion people have been affected by natural disasters, and more than 65 million have been forcibly displaced – internally in their own countries or seeking shelter across borders. Worldwide, one in nine people go to bed on an empty stomach every night, and one in three suffer from some form of malnutrition.

Crises will unfortunately continue, but there is hope in the action of volunteers. All over the world volunteers help people and communities survive and thrive.

Olivier Adam, Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, states,

"Often members of affected communities themselves, volunteers respond to people's immediate needs and help them rebuild their lives after a tragic event. Through their ongoing support, volunteers help communities to bounce back and be better prepared to face uncertainty in the future."

In many regions affected by conflict there is persistent insecurity and violence against volunteers and aid workers, but they continue to provide assistance – food, water, shelter and medicine – in a commitment to human dignity.

Today, on International Volunteer Day 2017, we commend volunteers responding selflessly to people's needs in a wide range of crisis situations around the world.

Join us in recognizing volunteers worldwide through our social media campaign **#VolunteersActFirst. Here. Everywhere**, and visit our website https://www.unv.org/internationalvolunteerday2017

Stories of Volunteers Acting First Worldwide

In the Philippines, volunteers are braving sniper fire and rocket strikes to rescue civilians trapped in a city torn apart by fighting.

Hundreds of highly-experienced UN Volunteers are serving in countries neighbouring Syria, improving the efficiency of the overall humanitarian effort and providing education to refugee children in host countries.

During the 2017 General Elections in Kenya, 12 UN Volunteer peace coordinators with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were on the ground alongside a team of more than 200 peace and cohesion monitors across the country to prevent electoral conflict and violence.

In Sri Lanka, volunteers mobilized to curtail a severe outbreak of dengue, providing medical assistance to the most vulnerable across the country. After the 2015 Earthquake in Nepal, 107 UN Volunteers delivered crucial services to earthquake victims.

In Vietnam, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) jointly with the Vietnam Red Cross Society volunteers provided emergency assistance to families affected by the flash floods in August 2017. Similarly in Bangladesh, 1,200 volunteers were deployed to provide critical health services and relief items to flood survivors.

In Mexico, a group of women are giving out food and water to hundreds of Central American migrants every day. Off the coast of Libya, volunteers are rescuing migrants from their perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea.

In Somalia, where the situation is desperate for more than half the country's population, volunteers from the Somali Red Crescent Society together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are responding to the basic needs of drought-affected communities.

In northern Nigeria, where millions are suffering from food insecurity, the World Health Organization (WHO) in partnership with the local government has been able to deploy 14,000 volunteers to vaccinate 1.9 million children against polio.

After cyclone Winston swept through Fiji, members of All Hands Volunteers supported community efforts to rebuild safe homes. In Ukraine, UN Volunteers from UNDP's Recovery

and Peacebuilding Programme are planting seeds for peaceful dialogue in communities struck by long-term conflict.

In recent years, West Africa has experienced the largest outbreak of Ebola in history. In 2014, 255 UN Volunteers served with several UN agencies in West Africa to support the medical response and efforts to contain the transmission of the disease. Over 300 UN Online Volunteers also supported the response to the Ebola outbreak, producing or updating maps of relevant areas in Sierra Leone and Liberia to facilitate the work of humanitarian responders.

EDITORS' NOTES:

International Volunteer Day (IVD) is celebrated every year on 5 December to recognize and celebrate the contributions of volunteers worldwide to peace and development.

This year's theme is Volunteers Act First. Here. Everywhere. The objective of this year's campaign is to showcase the crucial role played by volunteers in times of crisis all over the world, despite the security risks they often face, and to increase global recognition of their contributions.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development worldwide. UNV contributes to peace and development by mobilizing volunteers, advocating for volunteerism globally and encouraging partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming.

UNV's vision is a world where volunteerism is recognized, within societies, as a way for all people and countries to achieve peace and development through the simultaneous eradication of poverty and significant reduction of inequalities and exclusion.

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