

UNV IN ACTION



**UN**

**Volunteers**

inspiration in action

# Peace Building

**The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme** is the UN organization that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development and its benefits to both society at large and the individual volunteer. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for volunteerism globally, encouraging partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing volunteers. These beliefs inform the concept of **volunteerism for peace and development**, which is at the core of UNV's mission.

The difference UNV makes is by demonstrating peace and development results and impact through volunteerism. UNV's comparative advantage is the ability and knowledge to bring about transformational change through volunteerism, community voluntary action and civic engagement through active partnerships with civil society, volunteer involving organizations, UN agencies and Governments. This is inspiration in action.

*Front Cover: On 16 April 2009, Remesha Association launched a book of Burundian proverbs, which they had produced with the support of UN Volunteers and the Women Peace Center. With the book, REMESHA wanted to spread the Burundian culture as well as the culture of peace, and thus strengthen their community, Kanyosha. (Sylvain Liechti/UNV/BINUB, 2009)*



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## GENERAL BACKGROUND

In 1992, the term peace building came into widespread use after then UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali published his '*Agenda for Peace*'<sup>1</sup>, which developed a strategy that included post-conflict peace building as "an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict". The strategy attempts to address the root causes and effects of conflict on the social fabric, the political system and the economic sector, through activities including reconciliation, institution-building, and political and economic transformation.

Peace Building therefore, is a process shaped by the Peace Agreement brokered by parties previously in conflict. It is the implementation of that agreement and is a long-term process that can overlap peace making and peacekeeping, but will always extend beyond those two mediation activities to enable durable peace and prevent the recurrence of violence.

The UN Secretary-General's 2009 *Report on peace building in the immediate aftermath of conflict*<sup>2</sup> stresses the importance of delivering peace dividends during the immediate post-conflict window of opportunity. This includes provision of basic security, increased confidence in the political process and a strengthened core national capacity to lead peace building efforts. The report commended UNV for offering "valuable support to the provision of civilian capacities in post-conflict environments in a broad range of occupational areas" and encouraged the deployment of UN Volunteers with relevant expertise and experience for short-term assignments as peace building volunteers.

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1. An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping, 17 June 1992 (A/47/277 - S/241111).

2. Report of the Secretary-General on peace building in the immediate aftermath of conflict, Distr. 11 June 2009 (A/63/881 – S/2009/304)

Following the Secretary-General's recommendations, UNV has established peace building as one of its programmatic priority areas, and at present 2,261 UN Volunteers are deployed across 14 different Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and Department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO) UN Missions. Part of this support includes assistance to the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) that

has supported more than 40 UN Missions and 50 national electoral processes worldwide.

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Peace building relies on the concept of voluntary action and active civic engagement. UN Volunteers can be the ideal interlocutor to deliver constructive

messages about participatory processes, build trust and promote dialogue. In addition, many often perceive UN Volunteers as politically and socially impartial and non-threatening, making them effective actors among different stakeholders in the peace building processes, especially as they come from the communities that the UN supports. UNV participation in UN Missions ensures provision of ad hoc skills or functions that are not normally available in UN Secretariat Departments, for example, large-scale logistics exercises, involving the movement of tonnes of equipment or deploying engineers familiar with construction in environments with rapid requirement change. Often these volunteers come from a military background and therefore their skills are not easy to replicate and find in fragile states. UNV also aims to open up UN Missions to non-traditional staffing, adding to the diversity of civilian staff components by engaging interested citizens with a global consciousness, eager to share some of their time and expertise with others.

## KOSOVO: Facilitating the Return and Reintegration of Internally Displaced Persons

UN Volunteers have played an integral role within the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) following the armed conflict that overtook the country in the late 1990s. The key focus of UNV work in Kosovo has been providing support to the massive displaced population. The mandate of UNMIK focused on advancing regional stability in the western Balkans, and central to this goal is ensuring conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants, including the tens of thousands of displaced people.

UN Volunteers have engaged in a wide range of roles to assist the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDPs), spanning the entire process from their identification, return to their reintegration into their original communities, with prominent, vital inputs at all stages including information, administration, mediation and advocacy. UN Volunteers have established and operated an IDP Information Centre (in Zvecan) and Community Information Centres in all five regions of Kosovo, all of which produce newsletters and information bulletins updating IDPs about the current situation in their place of origin. Due to their isolated circumstances, IDPs are often victim to gossip and misinformation, therefore this flow of information (including frequently asked questions concerning the return process) has proven vital in securing their trust and willingness to return.



*Elisabetta Lurcev, UNV External Relations Officer working with UNHCR, teaches children from the Roma community of Plementina, Kosovo. (UNV, 2011)*

Dealing with such large numbers of displaced people, UN Volunteers have assisted the Regional Returns Units in carrying out the crucial tasks of municipal mapping, collecting all returns-related data to monitor the progress made as well as identifying areas where greater assistance is required.

UN Volunteers have also assisted with returns cases referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and NGOs, carrying out assessments, helping with the completion of

*UNV Local Community Officers work throughout Kosovo to protect the interests of such groups, integrating representatives of the minority communities within the municipal structure, and encouraging different groups to cooperate with each other.*

paperwork and providing assistance where needed as well as teaching IDPs about their rights and how to claim them.

Once IDPs have returned to their place of origin, UNV Field Officers are dedicated to ensuring that their needs are met, including the provision of basic food and

shelter. Field Officers also help secure assistance from the Government and local institutions, and advocate for the protection and needs of IDPs.

Furthermore, UNV Local Community Officers work throughout Kosovo to protect the interests of such groups, integrating representatives of the minority communities within the municipal structure, and encouraging different groups to cooperate with each other. This includes paying field visits to returnee families to ensure that they are receiving the assistance to which they are entitled, and mediating any disputes between parties.



## LIBERIA: Empowering Marginalized Youth to Contribute to National Development

UNV helped initiate the **Liberian National Youth Volunteer Service (NYVS)** in collaboration with the Government of Liberia in 2007. The key objective was to promote awareness among youth on the role of volunteerism in peace building and development. The country's 15 years of civil war disproportionately affected its young people. Often forced to perpetrate violence, there were many traumatised young people. This had a marginalizing effect. Engaging youth in peace building and development initiatives was therefore essential to Liberia's continued progress. NYVS strongly emphasizes the reintegration and increased participation of young people in Liberian society.

Since 2007, 314 youth volunteers have been deployed by the NYVS to work in public elementary schools, clinics and agriculture projects under the coordination of the national UN Volunteers and NYVS Project Officers.

These volunteers have also initiated a number of activities and awareness campaigns, including a focus on gender advocacy and the role of sports in promoting peace.



*In Liberia, the National Youth Volunteer Service Programme was launched as a pilot project in February 2007 under the framework of UNV initiatives at the local level led by UNDP. (UNV, 2008)*

They have gained valuable experience working with existing development structures and applying the practical experience that they have picked up during their assignments. Thirty-nine communities have benefited from the services of the NVVS in the education and health sectors.

One of the central aims of the NYVS is to provide Liberian youth with an opportunity to improve their professional skills and acquire work experience even as they help support the country's development.

According to a 2008 UNV progress report for Liberia, 91% of youth volunteers acknowledged significant skills improvements in areas such as leadership, mobilization and conflict management, and 40% were offered positions within the Government and UN Agencies<sup>3</sup>.

Although youth volunteers in Liberia have made a noticeable impact in the arenas of education, health and community integration, perhaps the most significant outcome of their volunteerism has been to themselves. For instance, by getting involved in peace building,

*By getting involved in peace building, many youth volunteers have become role models and leaders in communities that had previously shunned them in the immediate aftermath of the conflict.*

many have become role models and leaders in communities that had previously shunned them in the immediate aftermath of the conflict.

Furthermore, the commitment, energy, openness and creativity of

young people combined with an exposure to the depth and reality of the problems facing their country is sure to inspire them and others to bring about greater positive change in Liberia.

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3. Source: Liberian National Youth Volunteer Service Project Mid-term Review Report (June/July 2008)



## BURUNDI: Engaging Grassroots Community Groups in the Promotion of Peace

**Years of civil conflict and political instability have contributed to Burundi's low development status<sup>4</sup>, with half the population living below the poverty line.** However, in May 2008 with the help of international mediation and support, the government and the last active rebel group signed a ceasefire that seems to have ushered in a new era of stability. The global objective of Burundi's United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) is the consolidation of peace and community recovery, with strategic priorities placed upon planning and coordination, democratic governance, community recovery, national reconciliation, and the promotion and protection of human rights.

*From informal schemes to the presence of local NGOs, there is a wide-ranging commitment to peace building and sustainable development in Burundi.*

Although most indicators reflect the significant challenges facing Burundi's development<sup>5</sup>, UNV has instead targeted the country's rich tradition of voluntary action and social solidarity. From informal schemes to the presence of local NGOs, there is a wide-ranging commitment to peace building and sustainable development in Burundi.

Since June 2007, UNV has been supporting the Remesha Association, a collective of 44 displaced and mostly widowed elderly women from different ethnic backgrounds in Bujumbura.

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4. Burundi ranked 166th out of 169 countries with comparable data in the Human Development Index 2010

5. Source available from [www.bi.undp.org](http://www.bi.undp.org)



*Remesha women reading their books to spread the Burundian culture as well as the culture of peace, and thus strengthen their community, Kanyosha. (Sylvain Liechti/UNV, 2009).*

The Women's Peace Centre, a leading NGO in Burundi, brought the Remesha Association to the attention of UNV upon requesting technical and financial assistance for their initiatives.

One of the most inspirational activities of the Remesha

Association has been the production of a book of proverbs that highlights Burundi's common heritage. It promotes a vision of peace in the aftermath of the decade-long ethnic conflict, and passes down essential notions of peace and unity to young people.

This UNV-supported initiative represents a valuable tool in promoting the spirit of peace building and collective action in the community. UN Volunteers helped the Remesha Association secure funding to produce and print the books, identified local and international partners and markets for its wider distribution, solicited illustrations from children for the book, and facilitated the book's translation from Kirundi to Kiswahili, French and English to broaden its reach.

The book's impact has been far-reaching and layered. Monetary proceeds from book sales have helped the Ramesha Association launch new community activities and small business ventures, and provide microcredit financing to the community. Of equal importance, the book's inspirational messages have helped to bridge the divide between ethnic groups across generations, thereby preserving traditional culture and promoting peace.

## At the national & community levels, UN Volunteers can:

**Encourage** civil society to participate in campaigns to raise awareness of the positive aspects of peace;

**Monitor** community security and respect for human rights and the rule of law, in order to reduce the incidence of violence;

**Support** the reintegration of former combatants and engage with youth daily, persuading them to contribute to social reconstruction, hence providing them opportunities for leadership building;

**Support** the recognition and participation of women in peace building activities;

**Support** the establishment of common awareness and understanding of crises among key stakeholders, including local authorities and local communities;

**Assist** grassroots organizations broaden the reach and impact of their work by offering the benefits of UNV programming and peace building expertise, access to financing opportunities, and links to networks of wider support.

**UNV engages volunteers to work within a wide range of thematic areas linked to peace building. For example, to mitigate the effects of crisis and address the root causes, UNV works at both national and community levels to encourage and support inclusive and coherent national disaster prevention and risk reduction strategies.**

## NOTES

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UNV is administered by the  
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