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## **UN-NGO forum to focus on sustainable development and volunteerism**



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The annual joint conference of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which begins next week in Bonn, Germany, will focus on sustainable development, volunteerism and the power of individuals to effect change and transform communities.

The three-day [64th annual conference of the UN and NGOs](#), organized by the Department of Public Information (DPI), in partnership with the DPI/NGO Executive Committee, Germany and the UN Volunteers (UNV) programme, will be attended by nearly 2,000 representatives from 100 countries and territories, a record level of participation.

“The conference will examine best practices and how to change consumption and production patterns; the links between the green economy and poverty eradication; the role of civic engagement and voluntary action in the achievement of sustainable development,” said Kiyo Akasaka, the Under-Secretary for Communications and Public Information, at a news conference in New York.

The conference, whose theme is “Sustainable Societies; Responsive Citizens,” will start on 3 September and offer NGOs and civil society a chance to interact as they prepare for next year’s UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Brazil.

“It is also an opportunity to recognize the enormous value of volunteering, giving back, and being responsive citizens in this, the 10th anniversary year of the International Year of Volunteers,” said Mr. Akasaka.

Ambassador Miguel Berger, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the UN, pointed out that the current global challenges cannot be tackled governments alone, adding that sustainable development is also more than an industrial strategy.

“The active support and the commitment of NGOs are absolutely essential to advance the cause of sustainability,” said Mr. Berger.

Donna Keher, the Chief of Partnerships and Communications Division of UNV, stressed that development has to be sustainable for the next generations to benefit from it.

“Sustainable societies need responsive citizens, people who rise to the challenge, who take action of their own free will and work towards a better and brighter future for all,” said Ms. Keher. “This conference then is a golden opportunity to forge long-term partnerships that build sustainable development through civic engagement. The spirit of volunteerism inspires a sense of responsibility and a thirst for change.”

Mankind faces huge challenges as it continues to consume resources beyond the planet’s carrying capacity, said Felix Dodds, the chair of the DPI/NGO conference.

“Governments must give the UN the mandate, the resources and the institutional capacity to deal with the emerging challenges,” said Mr. Dodds.

He drew parallels between the world’s ecological problems and the recent global financial crisis.

“The banks and financial institutions privatized the gains and socialized the losses. We are doing the same with the planet’s natural capital. Our present lifestyles are drawing down the ecological capital from other parts of the world and from future generations.

“We are increasingly becoming the most irresponsible generation this planet has ever seen. The principal goal of our economies should be to improve the lives of all of the world’s people, free them from want and ignorance, without compromising the planet itself,” said Mr. Dodds.

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