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## **Volunteers are powerful force for peace and development – UN report**



**International Year of Volunteers**  
10th anniversary  
2011

5 December 2011 –

Stressing that volunteerism contributes to the well-being of individuals, communities and society, a new United Nations report released today urges countries not to forget this largely untapped asset.

The [\*State of the World's Volunteerism Report\*](#) by UN Volunteers (UNV) presents for the first time empirical evidence of the importance and contribution of volunteerism on a global scale.

It was released today on the occasion of International Volunteer Day, which is observed annually on 5 December and which this year also marks the 10th Anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers.

“Since the International Year of Volunteers in 2001, we’ve had greater recognition of the achievements of volunteerism, but it has not been enough,” said Robert Leigh, senior writer of the report.

“We hope through this report that everyone will recognize volunteerism as an essential and as yet under-utilized sustainable, renewable asset for making all our lives better ones,” he told a special meeting held at UN Headquarters to mark the Day.

The report gives recognition to the millions, perhaps billions, who are volunteering their time and energy for the well-being of their communities, said Mr. Leigh, noting that many are doing crucial peace and development work in disaster, environmental or in humanitarian situations.

“The report challenges perceptions which obscure the true dimensions and impact of volunteerism,” he said. “Volunteering does not only occur through formal, structured civil society organizations in developed countries, by well-off, educated, unskilled older women.”

The report documents volunteerism through local community groups in income poor communities around the world. National volunteer studies identify almost equal numbers of men and women volunteers, involvement of the public and private sector in volunteering, as well as strong civic participation by young people.

“We cannot ignore this wealth anymore,” stated Mr. Leigh. “We cannot ignore this largely untapped asset that can be a powerful force for the future of development.”

UNV Executive Coordinator Flavia Pansieri told the meeting that it is only fair to recognize the contributions of volunteers to peace, development and global well-being. “It is equally important to commit continued support to these people who, through their volunteerism, light up our world with their commitment to these values,” she said.

Established 40 years ago, UNV deploys nearly 8,000 volunteers every year. Through UN agencies, funds and programmes, peacekeeping and special political missions, these unsung heroes have worked in about 130 countries, contributing to the UN’s global agenda and supporting national development efforts.

“With the world population having surpassed seven billion this year, we must tap every person’s potential to help others. Everyone can make a difference,” said Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiros, reading a [message](#) from [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon.

“All over the globe, millions of volunteers are helping to advance sustainable development and peace,” she said, noting that this engagement takes many forms, including volunteering organizations, individuals working on their own in their communities, and service with the UN and its partners as UN Volunteers.

General Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser stated that volunteerism matters in reaching the UN anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), as well as in humanitarian responses, poverty reduction, and sustainability.

It also involves overcoming social exclusion and discrimination, strengthens values based on collaboration and partnership, and helps to build a better world, he added in his [remarks](#), which were read out to the meeting by Assembly Vice President and Ambassador of Hungary Csaba Körösi.

“Volunteering is the people-centred approach to peace, humanitarian response, and sustainable development. It strengthens trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens. It empowers change from the grassroots up, especially when enabled by strong partnerships at every level,” he added.

UNV has organized a series of events to showcase the work of volunteers as part of celebrations for the Day, including a multimedia exhibition entitled “Volunteers of the World” that is on display at UN Headquarters in New York. The exhibition aims to demonstrate the universality of the volunteer ethic in people of all walks of life.

The final mosaic of *Light up our world*, a three-month UNV photographic project that illustrates the power of volunteer action across the planet, will also be on display.

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