

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

5 December 2007

The challenges facing our world are vast and complex -- from resolving conflicts and building peace, to alleviating poverty and reaching the other Millennium Development Goals. Tackling these challenges requires all of us to work together -- Governments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society in its broadest sense. Volunteers play an indispensable role in these efforts. Yet, the remarkable contribution of voluntary action around the world is not sufficiently recognized.

Volunteerism is a feature of all cultures and societies. It is a fundamental source of community strength, resilience, solidarity and social cohesion. It can help effect positive social change by fostering inclusive societies that respect diversity, equality and the participation of all. Such contributions are vital to the three pillars of the United Nations' work -- promoting peace and security, advancing development, and protecting human rights and human dignity. That is why every UN agency draws on the spirit of volunteerism, including through the United Nations Volunteers programme, to expand the reach of its activities.

Voluntary action is also essential in our global effort to address climate change, which poses a serious threat to our ability to reach the Millennium Development Goals. Today, the world's Governments are meeting in Bali, Indonesia, at the landmark UN Climate Change Conference. They hope to negotiate a way forward to save our planet from the effects of global warming. But even Governments cannot hope to do so alone. Instead, we need people everywhere to volunteer for this challenge, and to help communities mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. Voluntary action is also critical to build domestic solutions for sustainable economic growth, and to develop capacities to prepare for and respond to natural disasters.

On this International Volunteer Day, let us recognize the power of volunteerism to promote peace and development around the world. Let us also pay tribute to the many millions of citizens all over the world who, every day -- in ways small and large -- volunteer their time, ingenuity, solidarity and creativity to help build a better, more sustainable future.