



# General Assembly

Sixty-sixth session

**74<sup>th</sup>** plenary meeting

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New York

Official Records

*President:* Mr. Al-Nasser ..... (Qatar)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Körösi (Hungary), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

## Agenda item 27 (continued)

### Social development

- (b) **Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family**

#### **Report of the Third Committee (A/66/454 (Part I))**

#### **Follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers and the commemoration of its tenth anniversary**

**The Acting President:** I give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

**Mr. Vrailas** (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Iceland; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

The momentum created by the International Year of Volunteers in 2001 has continued to strengthen the focus of the international community on voluntary

work and its essential contribution to our societies. During the 10 years that have passed, important improvements have been made with regard to the facilitation, promotion and networking of volunteer-based action. Such advances can be attributed to, inter alia, the development and innovative use of new technologies, national and local volunteering initiatives, civil society efforts and the removal of legislative and other obstacles.

Voluntary work takes many different forms in a variety of different contexts. Volunteer work takes place at the community level, at the national level and across borders and continents. It impacts upon many different areas of global interest, including the promotion of human rights and democracy, tackling poverty, the advancement of women, encouraging sustainable development, promoting health, the empowerment of youth and overcoming social exclusion and discrimination. However, beyond its diverse forms and contexts, volunteer work is an important conduit for universal values and for strengthening the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, development and human rights.

As a very concrete example, I would like to mention the fundamental role of volunteer work in disaster recovery and reconciliation efforts. It was most recently demonstrated in the aftermath of natural catastrophes in various parts of the world, such as the devastating earthquake that struck Japan in March and the recent floods in Thailand. On an individual level, volunteering can create opportunities for learning, personal development and the acquisition of new skills.

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It can strengthen the sense of belonging to society, and it can be a catalyst for social change.

Yet Governments, when drawing on voluntary work, must recognize and respect the voluntary and independent nature of these contributions. They can be of significant economic value for national economies, yet the responsibility taken and the economic value of voluntary activity can never, and should never, replace the responsibility of Governments towards their citizens.

I am proud to say that 2011 is the European Year of Volunteering — a celebration of the valuable commitment, dedication and contribution which volunteers make to our societies. Throughout the year, across all the countries of the EU and beyond, conferences, exhibitions and other activities have been taking place to put the spotlight on the important work done by the 100 million Europeans who volunteer across the European Union. Significant progress has been made, and we are working to ensure that the European Year leaves a lasting and meaningful legacy for the future.

On 3 October 2011, the EU Council of Ministers pronounced itself on the role of voluntary activities in social policy. That is evidence of the strong political support at all levels for the promotion and enabling of voluntary activities. These joint conclusions followed on from extensive activities within the EU aimed at outlining ways of supporting the volunteering sector and improving the recognition and promotion of volunteering in the future.

However, more remains to be done in order to further enable volunteerism. Barriers limiting voluntary activities and the full use of their potential still exist. In order to consolidate the successes achieved over the past decade, the challenge we are facing today is to remove these limitations and effectively harness the positive momentum we are currently witnessing.

Access to information on voluntary activities, their value, possibilities and importance for individuals and society must be improved. Furthermore, the true worth of voluntary work must be valued and recognized, as should the competences and skills gained through volunteering as non-formal learning experiences. In that context, we believe that the promotion of e-volunteering is an innovative form and

a positive aspect of the virtual activity of Internet users.

A further opening of volunteering schemes to cross-border involvement should be encouraged, and the newly adopted International Labour Organization Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work should be drawn upon.

Finally, allow me to congratulate the United Nations Volunteers for making the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers a success. In the context of the European Year of Volunteering, we have been delighted to seek synergies with the United Nations Volunteers to help maximize the impact of each other's work.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all United Nations Volunteers for their work in often difficult conditions and circumstances. The positive work of Volunteers worldwide deserves recognition, for such altruistic actions are one of the greatest illustrations of humanity at its finest and a core value of the United Nations.

**Mr. Berger** (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statement just made by the European Union.

It is my pleasure to be able to speak here today and convey to the Assembly the congratulations of the German Government as we commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers.

First of all, let me congratulate the United Nations Volunteers programme and its Executive Coordinator, Flavia Pansieri, for the success of the International Year and on the publication of the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*. She and her staff have shown extraordinary dedication to making this year a success. I would also like to thank the more than 7,800 United Nations Volunteers (UNVs), representing 158 countries, who are working in 130 countries and in many peacekeeping operations. Let me also congratulate all of the Volunteers worldwide for their invaluable contributions in various spheres of life. To quote from the Secretary-General's message earlier today for International Volunteer Day, "Everyone can make a difference; volunteering matters." (see A/66/PV.73)

Germany has supported the active participation of civil society in a number of ways during the International Year of Volunteers, both nationally and internationally. To cite but one example, in September 2011 the sixty-

fourth Annual Conference of the Department of Public Information for Non-Governmental Organizations was held in Bonn. That event was organized in cooperation between the Department of Public Information, the United Nations Volunteers programme, the German Government and the city of Bonn. Its theme, “Sustainable societies — responsive citizens”, shows the close link between solutions to global challenges and the active involvement of civil society at the local level. It was my great pleasure to introduce the concrete ideas raised at that conference to the President of the General Assembly this fall as an important input for the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

Germany is honoured to be the host State for United Nations Volunteers. The UNV headquarters, which is on the United Nations campus on the banks of the river Rhine, has been located in Bonn since 1996. Its staff has grown considerably — to more than 150 today. UNV was also the first United Nations organization that chose to take up the invitation of the German Government to move to Bonn. The handing over of the new office premises to UNV in 2006 was a special pleasure. My Government sees UNV as being uniquely placed to continue to stimulate the debate on volunteerism and to lead international advocacy efforts as reflected in the volunteerism report that was launched today.

The German Government gladly supported the International Year, including five regional consultation meetings and the translation of the *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* into German. We also welcome the many projects that UNV is implementing together with volunteers worldwide, which broaden opportunities and contribute to United Nations development activities, bringing to life the spirit of volunteerism.

This year we have a special double focus on volunteering: both the United Nations and, as we heard earlier from the observer of the European Union, the European Union has made 2011 a Year of Volunteers. In Germany, too, thousands of people volunteer both domestically as well as in the field of development policy.

Civic engagement in Germany is manifest in the fact that more than 30 per cent of our population, or 27 million Germans, are members of volunteer services or civil society organizations.

International volunteering has been and will continue to be a focus of the German Government. For example, more than 4,000 young people are taking part in German development volunteer services such as Weltwärts and the international cultural volunteer service, Kulturweit. By working in a partner organization in one of more than 70 countries, they contribute actively to our development policy, learn about those countries and their cultures, and gather experiences that motivate many of them to participate actively in development cooperation.

As a national contribution to the International Year, the German Government is providing more than €600 million for civil society engagement directly related to development. This is an increase of almost 10 per cent.

Our ambitious goal for the next few years is to double the number of German citizens who are active volunteers in development cooperation — from about 1 million people to 2 million.

Volunteerism needs the support of national Governments and the international community. In this regard, the German Government recognizes the importance of the UNV Special Voluntary Fund, which is enabling UNV to pioneer innovative and pilot initiatives to demonstrate the added value of volunteerism for development. My Government will continue to provide its strong support to the Fund and will encourage Member States to follow our example. We are convinced that voluntary action can make a significant contribution towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals, and we are certain that UNV, with the support of its Volunteers, will continue to contribute to that end.

Let me conclude by extending an invitation to all members, on behalf of Executive Coordinator Flavia Pansieri, to join us this evening at a reception at 6.15 p.m. in the Public Lobby of the Secretariat on the occasion of the official opening of a photo exhibition on volunteers of the world.

**Mr. Fuks** (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): It gives my delegation great pleasure to participate in this meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers. Previously, Argentina had submitted the White Helmets Initiative to the Assembly, which prioritized volunteer work as a tool in humanitarian assistance and in combating hunger and poverty.

Since that time, Argentina has established a close working relationship with the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV). We have worked with UNV not only in 2001, but also later in supporting their efforts in the training and deployment of Volunteers and through joint missions that have taken us from Rwanda to Paraguay, from Palestine to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, from India to Lebanon and to the hurricane disasters in Central America and the Caribbean, the earthquake disasters in Haiti and in Pisco, Peru, and the crisis in the Gaza Strip and on the border between Tunisia and Libya — to provide but a few examples of that very fruitful relationship.

We must not forget to refer to the mutual support between the UNV and the White Helmets in conducting activities such as the Latin American regional consultation on the *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, held in Buenos Aires, and the regional consultation on Latin America to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, held in Quito, both of which were held in 2011, as well as the events that are held in Argentina every year on 5 December.

We would like to stress our high regard for United Nations Volunteers and its effort to promote and support the work of Volunteers throughout the world. Volunteerism has been shown to be an effective tool in the efforts of peoples, working in solidarity, to achieve an equitably developed world. The work of volunteers is often the most effective link between Government and society.

Our country had the bitter experience of a profound social, political and economic crisis during the early days of the century. At that time, the response of volunteers working together was essential in ensuring the survival of large groups in society that were living below the poverty line. At that time, however, it was also recognized that volunteers had to be organized and trained in order to be truly effective. With that objective in mind, the White Helmets held annual meetings of young, dedicated leaders, with the committed support of United Nations Volunteers.

Today, many of those young people who were trained and organized at that time are working as volunteers in various regions of the world, including in my country in the context of various United Nations programmes, governmental programmes and programmes conducted by non-governmental organizations and other

institutions. Therefore, commemorating the International Year of Volunteers and celebrating all volunteers is not only our inescapable obligation, but also an example of justice and a source of great satisfaction and pride.

My country is pleased to participate in this meeting and greatly appreciates the invitation to this celebration. Argentina congratulates United Nations Volunteers for the progress achieved in the past 10 years and reaffirms its commitment to them and to all Volunteers who wish to organize in order to contribute to resolving the problems of communities.

**Mr. Quintaes** (Brazil): Brazil welcomes this meeting devoted to the follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers and the commemoration of its tenth anniversary.

We associate ourselves with the statement made at the earlier meeting by the representative of the Dominican Republic on behalf of the Member States of Latin America and the Caribbean.

We also pay tribute to Ms. Flavia Pansieri, Executive Coordinator of United Nations Volunteers, for her endeavours. We are also very grateful to Ms. Asha-Rose Mtengeti Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General, for her participation in this meeting, as well as to Ms. Helen Clark, United Nations Development Programme Administrator, for her support.

Allow me at the outset to commend United Nations Volunteers (UNV) for all of their efforts in presenting the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, which we hope will provide us with guidance both as a benchmark and as a blueprint for future action in the field. We would also like to thank in particular the Permanent Mission of Japan for its cooperation and facilitation, which resulted in the formulation and adoption of the resolution entitled “Tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers” (resolution 66/67). We extend our thanks to all Member States that, either by sponsoring the resolution or by acknowledging the importance of the cause, have engaged in the promotion of the virtues and benefits of volunteerism.

Brazil recognizes the importance of the contributions of volunteers and volunteer organizations to communities and individuals. We regard every volunteer as a potential agent of transformation, whose motivation can through combined efforts lead to

positive changes and enhance, by means of good practices, the sense of citizenship.

Brazil also acknowledges volunteerism as a potential integral component of any strategy aimed at fostering action in fields such as poverty reduction, health care, sustainable development, youth empowerment, climate change, disaster prevention and management, social integration, humanitarian action and peacebuilding. For Brazil, recognition of the value of volunteers as an asset in the design of national policies and programmes is of the essence. We firmly believe that the integration of volunteerism into national development policies, strategies and plans will yield effective results.

Furthermore, volunteer work and the participation of individuals and communities through a bottom-up approach can play an important role, not only in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals but also in the global sustainable development agenda beyond 2015.

The coming 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development is expected to result in new grounds for action that would require the involvement of volunteers and volunteer organizations. In that case, we would need to adjust our efforts to promote all forms of volunteerism by considering the idea that volunteerism should engage and benefit all segments of society, including women, children, young persons, the elderly, persons with disabilities, minorities, migrants and all of those who remain excluded for social or economic reasons. To that end, the participation of civil society organizations is of the utmost importance in supporting volunteerism and strengthening dialogue and interaction among civil society, Member States and United Nations agencies as part of the combined effort to disseminate the principles of volunteerism worldwide.

Brazil is committed to working for effective policies and legislative frameworks aimed at consolidating the spirit and intention of both traditional and informal practices of volunteering. In that regard, the adoption of an international convention or instrument on volunteering would help to facilitate and enable a conducive environment for volunteers. Policies could also be designed to underscore the essence of volunteering by building on its traditional forms and on others such as community volunteering,

international volunteering, diaspora volunteering and private-sector volunteering.

We would like to underline Brazil's support for UNV's activities. The United Nations Volunteers programme in our country was created in 1998. Since then, many people have engaged as Volunteers in public works, private organizations and social projects with a view to improving living conditions and the common good. Organizations such as Rio Voluntários and Parceiros Voluntários currently mobilize hundreds of thousands of individuals, as well as a whole set of public entities and private companies throughout the country.

We believe that this special meeting held to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers will reinforce international support for that essential modality of cooperation. The recognition of its invaluable role in the improvement of social and economic conditions will result in a more just and equitable global society.

**Mr. Díaz Reynoso (Mexico)** (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico commends the holding of this event to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers and reiterates its commitment to promoting and strengthening a culture of global solidarity. My country recognizes voluntary work as being a catalyst for necessary positive change and an essential factor in strengthening citizenship, social cohesion and community participation.

For Mexico, the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers is a unique opportunity for Governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, humanitarian institutions and academia to take a moment to reflect on and take stock of volunteering activity at the national and international levels and, in particular, to consider the report that was introduced today, which is an essential tool to accomplish those ends.

Mexico is a country with a long tradition of solidarity and has witnessed major advances in the design and management of increasingly structured programmes promoted by civil society organizations, academia and private enterprise. One example showing that Mexicans are proud of their tradition was the successful participation of civil organizations and volunteers in the meetings on climate change held in Cancún last year. It is increasingly evident that the participation of civil society is an essential element in

the effort to slow the phenomenon of climate change. In that regard, we must promote and facilitate the participation of volunteers in the meetings of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

My country has remained abreast of the conclusions of regional consultations held by the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV), as well as of the outcomes of the Global Volunteering Conference held in Budapest in September. On that occasion, the Government of Mexico reiterated its commitment to building a culture of volunteerism. On the basis of that commitment, the Government of Mexico has promoted spaces for reflection and dialogue between the Government, various civil society stakeholders and the relevant international entities in this field. We also encourage the exchange of best practices at the local, national and regional levels and promote training and capacity-building. With the support of First Lady Margarita Zavala, such groups have met on several occasions to address the challenges and opportunities for volunteerism in Mexico. Participants identified courses of action and a common agenda, which were presented at the National Forum of Reflection on Volunteerism, held in October with the participation and advisory services of UNV and Executive Coordinator Flavia Pansieri.

Similarly, the federal Government annually awards a national prize for solidarity and volunteerism, with a view to acknowledging and raising the profile of the humanitarian work done by civil society organizations and individual persons for the benefit of the social development of their communities. We are aware that challenges remain to be tackled in the effort to achieve an enabling environment to encourage volunteerism. One of them is the need to achieve greater flexibility in normative frameworks and to diversify sources of financing. Another is the need to promote and raise the visibility of volunteer efforts, including through digital media and social networks. It is also important to expand knowledge and research on the volunteer sector, create spaces appropriate for solidarity at an early age — an effort in which the education sector is a central stakeholder — and take advantage of the potential of young university students.

Taking into account the importance of this subject on the international agenda and the responsibility shared by Governments and civil society, the National Forum of Reflection on Volunteerism established some

areas where work could be done to strengthen the culture of volunteerism. During the Forum, we highlighted the importance of dialogue in ensuring continued responsible participation by citizens and in forging alliances and a common front to strengthen volunteerism in Mexico. The role of the media in that regard is essential. In that task, as on many other fronts, the support provided by the United Nations Volunteers programme will be of crucial importance.

Mexico recognizes the contribution of volunteerism in moving forward towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. We therefore encourage recognition of those endeavours by Governments. Thousands of volunteers work throughout the world every day to promote the well-being of communities. It is up to States to create an enabling environment to ensure the development of those activities and provide for their security.

We welcome the efforts made by the international community to implement the General Assembly resolutions to support, promote and advocate in favour of volunteer work. We congratulate UNV for preparing the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, which will be very useful.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating that Mexico considers volunteerism to be a demonstration of the nature of citizenship in the twenty-first century, which, through solidarity, expresses its disinterested commitment to serve the community.

**Mr. Kodama** (Japan): It gives me great pleasure to address the General Assembly on the occasion of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers. We have received significant input from two United Nations Volunteers at this commemorative meeting. The first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, which sums up past volunteer activities, was launched today. A Volunteer from Japan participated in today's side event, and experiences from around the world were shared for the benefit of everyone. It is our earnest hope that volunteering will be further promoted through those meetings.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon travelled to Japan in August and visited Fukushima, one of the areas devastated by the great earthquake in eastern Japan. His meeting with volunteers there was a great encouragement for them and contributed to enhancing

the sense of cooperation between the United Nations and Volunteers.

We appreciate the efforts by the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) as the focal point for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers. We also appreciate the recent visit to Japan by Ms. Flavia Pansieri, Executive Coordinator of UNV, including her visit to the areas devastated by the great earthquake in eastern Japan and her participation in the national volunteer festival held in Tokyo. Japan strongly supports the work of UNV and hopes it will continue to play a coordinating role, including by promoting volunteer activities, mobilizing volunteers and developing networking.

Brazil and Japan submitted a draft resolution entitled “Tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers” to the Third Committee last month. We are very pleased that today the General Assembly adopted it by consensus as resolution 66/67, with the support of 97 sponsors. I take this opportunity to express Japan’s appreciation for Member States’ unanimous support.

While we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, my delegation would like to stress the following four points.

First, observance of the International Year of Volunteers was initiated by Japan in 2001, thanks to an idea of Mr. Takehito Nakata, who served as Honorary Ambassador for UNV for 15 years. He took up the position after the tragic death of his son Atsuhito, who was killed during his work as a United Nations Volunteer in Cambodia as a district election supervisor with the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia in 1993. We would like to remember here the volunteer spirit of the young man who sacrificed his life for the sake of peace in Cambodia and the international community.

Secondly, many Volunteers have contributed to recovery and reconstruction after the great earthquake that ravaged eastern Japan in March. We would like to express our gratitude to the Volunteers who supported those who suffered in the disaster and responded to their needs. The warm spirit of the volunteers, national and international, who helped in the troubled areas truly lifted our spirits greatly, and we have learned the importance of people-to-people relations. It is our hope that the discussion of the role of volunteers in the field of disaster prevention and management will be further deepened as a result of to these experiences.

Thirdly, in June the Promotion Committee for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers — IYV+10 — was launched in Japan by representatives of civil society, the private sector and the Government to help ensure the success of the tenth anniversary. The Committee is tasked with raising awareness of volunteering, providing opportunities for people to volunteer and promoting networking among various stakeholders in Japan. We believe it important that such activities be linked worldwide through global networking.

Fourthly, my Government launched Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers about half a century ago. Since then, 30,000 volunteers have been dispatched to more than 80 countries around the world, to help developing nations become masters of their destiny by empowering their people through human resource development, assisted by these young Japanese volunteers. We have now reviewed and revamped its programme, creating a new policy for overseas volunteering called “Better collaboration and the bonds of friendship”, bearing in mind the need to further strengthen the ties between volunteers in Japan and the rest of the world.

Volunteerism embodies one of the loftiest expressions of compassion and transcends borders and nationalities. We are confident that this spirit of volunteerism is steadily growing all over the world. In Japan, volunteering is encouraged, especially for youth and older people, since it can play a catalytic role in promoting integration in society.

In conclusion, Japan would like to stress the relevance of volunteerism in any discussion of the common challenges facing humanity and our mutual efforts in the coming decade and beyond. For example, it would be helpful to ask where and how volunteering in the fields of peacebuilding and disaster prevention and management could be encouraged. It is also important that we discuss engagement in volunteering and the leadership of youth in such areas. We hope that such perspectives will be discussed and included as recommendations in a report to be submitted by the Secretary-General at the Assembly’s sixty-seventh session.

**Mr. Haniff** (Malaysia): Malaysia welcomes the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers and is honoured to be one of the sponsors of resolution 66/67.

We associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Japan on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group.

There are positive signs that we are entering a new age of volunteerism. Volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges worldwide and embracing the concept of universality and inclusivity by supporting each other in fostering the participation of people from varied backgrounds. Volunteerism strengthens trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens and the world community. What is significant is that it appeals to different people at different times, providing them with a wide range of opportunities to get involved in activities that can contribute to positive social change and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups.

Malaysia encourages and fully supports the work of voluntary and non-profit organizations focusing on providing medical relief and sustainable health-related development for vulnerable communities in crisis and non-crisis situations, nationally and internationally. In 2010, non-profit organizations in Malaysia joined the international community in raising funds in response to, among others, emergencies in Haiti, Palestine, Somalia, Pakistan, Indonesia and Chile, and participated in humanitarian relief work in some of those countries.

At the same time, in order to help ensure continued sustainable efforts in non-crisis spheres, especially those related to health and risk reduction programmes, Malaysia is encouraging growing efforts on the part of local non-profit organizations to collaborate with international volunteer organizations in providing health-related aid, such as vaccination and disaster preparedness programmes, for selected communities in Malaysia. To inculcate early awareness among the younger generation of the virtues of volunteerism, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia has collaborated with local non-profit organizations to conduct a nationwide school preparedness programme, emphasizing the importance of civic education for young students.

Understanding the culture, customs and norms of a society is vital for all volunteers. Culturally sensitive volunteering requires a willingness to learn and directly engage with the targeted groups, taking into consideration the sensitivities of the recipient countries, especially in the areas of gender, age,

ethnicity, culture and religion. The ability to understand and respect other cultures and local sensitivities is key to reinforcing volunteers' engagement and solidarity, which help build local communities' trust in and acceptance of their noble work.

We recognize that this tenth anniversary has provided the opportunity and impetus for an unprecedented level of collaboration among Governments, the United Nations system and civil society in joining hands to further efforts to achieve the goals of the International Year of Volunteers. Let us welcome with open arms the emergence of a renewed phase of cooperation in the dignified spirit of volunteerism across the globe to bring positive change to our world.

**Mr. Alwafi** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): In all civil societies there are individuals and institutions that have the concerns and interests of their country at heart, working tirelessly to meet people's needs and bridge gaps so as to promote human capabilities in the service of development. In so doing, they are working for the benefit of their societies. Volunteerism is a shining symbol of solidarity and cooperation among the members of society. Moreover, it is closely linked to all conceptions of the good and of right action in any society. It represents the practice of humanitarianism at its height.

Volunteerism in Saudi Arabia is born of the principles and teachings of the Muslim religion. The State supports and encourages volunteerism, joining Government and civil efforts to promote social action as part of State development programmes that focus on the Saudi citizen as both the means and goal of development.

Saudi Arabia supports such activities by having instituted a general administrative office for social development and a general directorate of civil society organizations and institutions. Those two entities seek to organize the efforts of groups and individuals and to steer them into joint action in harmony with government programmes to meet needs, resolve problems and benefit from their capabilities. We focus on the social and economic needs of local communities, social integration and galvanizing the work of civilian volunteer organizations to spur socio-economic development.



The goal is to effect positive changes in rural and urban society by taking advantage of both material and human capacities. Associations and institutions carry out numerous activities and implement various programmes to assist those in need. The assistance includes programmes in training, rehabilitation, culture, free housing, youth centres, home improvement, health care, programmes for various kinds of social assistance and programmes for prisoners.

Our world faces major and complex challenges, both in societies in conflict and in post-conflict peacebuilding. We face poverty and the struggle to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Volunteerism is a natural extension of effective positive citizenship contributing to sustainable societal development and a better future.

**Mrs. Hrdá** (Czech Republic): It is my honour and pleasure to address this meeting on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers and to warmly welcome the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, which has been launched today. We consider it an important contribution to the global discussion and a good way to reach the general public and enhance its understanding of voluntary work and its benefits.

The Czech Republic greatly appreciates the activities of United Nations Volunteers in promoting world peace and sustainable development. We have cooperated with the programme since 1995, and in these years more than 250 Czech nationals have volunteered in various United Nations activities and missions around the globe. Of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, we are one that contributes financially to the programme on a very regular basis, and we also cover the full cost of the National Contact Point in Prague. As a result of that fruitful cooperation, and thanks to the active engagement of the civil society sector and general public in my country, young people in particular are well aware what volunteerism means and what its possibilities are.

United Nations Volunteers play an important role in promoting the concept of volunteerism and community engagement, which is especially important. For that and for all its valuable work the programme deserves our great appreciation and ongoing support. We fully endorse the national and global efforts to mark the tenth anniversary of the International Year of

Volunteers and to catalyse action in support of its four pillars.

**Mr. Zimonyi** (Hungary): Hungary aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union earlier this afternoon.

The tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers provides us with an opportunity to evaluate the achievements of the unique activities of the volunteering movement at the national and international levels. Volunteering is a variety of complex activities that is based on the solidarity and altruism of local communities and civil society. It constitutes a potential backup for Governments in addressing challenges. Furthermore, its flexible network enables us to rapidly provide assistance for people in need. Its contribution to social and economic development cannot be overestimated.

The countries that provide the world with the majority of Volunteers are currently undergoing a deep financial crisis. But volunteering itself, together with other factors, helps those societies to mitigate the consequences of the crisis. We therefore commend all those who in this time of hardship offer their time and commitment for the benefit of others.

We also strongly believe that the United Nations has a major role in promoting volunteering around the globe. We therefore welcome the launch of the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* earlier today.

Allow me to highlight the Global Volunteer Conference that was jointly organized by the United Nations Volunteers programme and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, held from 15 to 17 September in Budapest. The theme of the Conference was "Volunteering for a Sustainable Future", aimed at examining ways to mainstream volunteerism in peace, humanitarian and development work. The Conference brought together high-level leaders and decision makers from humanitarian and development organizations, Governments, civil society, academia, the United Nations system and the corporate sector. It addressed volunteering as a cross-cutting force that brings together a broad spectrum of peace and development activities that strive for the eradication of poverty and the betterment of the human condition.

In conclusion, allow me to turn briefly to volunteering in Hungarian society. Volunteering in

Hungary is regarded as an activity that brings major social benefits to the country and increases one's sense of responsibility and commitment to the local community. Voluntary activities have a long tradition in the country, dating back to the fourteenth century. The Communist regime put a halt to the development of the voluntary sector, but after 1989 voluntary organizations began once again playing a crucial role in the overall development of the country. Since 1989, we have seen a rapid increase in the number of voluntary organizations. The latest figures indicate that 400,000 people volunteer every year in Hungary through various organizations.

**Mr. Hasdemir** (Turkey): I am honoured to address the General Assembly. Turkey attaches great importance to volunteerism and appreciates the efforts of all countries that are trying to bring volunteerism to the forefront of the development agenda.

Turkey is one of the countries that consider volunteerism as an integral part of its development and European Union (EU) process. We have volunteer programmes and projects in Turkey within the EU education and youth programmes scheme which benefit both volunteers and society. Turkey ranks first in the number of volunteers among the 33 European countries within this programme. We strongly believe that every person's potential to help others should be put to good use.

To disseminate this vision and understanding, we allocated funds to the celebration of the European Year of Volunteering and translated into Turkish the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* on United Nations Volunteers. The report has now been launched in Turkey with the participation of various stakeholders, including civil society organizations and volunteers themselves. There have also been some nice coincidences that symbolize the importance we attach to volunteerism: the *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* project coordinator is a Turkish national; the first consultation meeting on the report was held in Istanbul; and Turkey is the only country that voluntarily translated the report into its language.

We are pleased to see that for the first time, with the *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, the impact that Volunteers have made has been documented. I thank Ms. Helen Clark for introducing the report, and I thank and congratulate the United Nations Volunteers programme. I also salute the

millions of Volunteers working for sustainable development, humanitarian assistance, environmental preservation and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

Turkey is committed to making progress in connection with the targets of volunteerism forward. Hence, we support the resolution that has been adopted, which will pave the way for a better understanding of volunteerism, in the understanding that it will make an enormous contribution to the efforts of Volunteers across the globe.

**Mr. Thomson** (Australia): I wish to thank President Al-Nasser for having convened this important meeting to mark the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers and to recognize the tremendous contribution made by Volunteers to international society. We also thank Japan and Brazil for their initiative in pursuing issues relevant to Volunteers throughout the United Nations. We are pleased to support their efforts.

Since the International Year of Volunteers in 2001 we have seen remarkable success and growth in the number of volunteers across the world. Volunteers make a substantial contribution to long-term development, cross-cultural exchange, community-building, social inclusion and poverty reduction. They bring unique expertise and perspectives to their host countries and communities and contribute directly to improving peoples' lives. The benefits are twofold: Volunteers gain a rich understanding of different perspectives and experiences, and they build effective personal and professional relationships with people from all walks of life.

My own country, Australia, has a long and proud record of volunteering both at home and abroad. Our strong sense of community spirit, good international citizenship and fairness — at home and abroad — is part of the national psyche, and it is the driving force behind so many Australians volunteering their time and skills to help others.

More than 6 million Australians are volunteers. The number of volunteers has doubled in the last 15 years; they volunteer more than 700 million hours of their time each year to assist others. Their contribution in financial terms is an estimated \$14 billion. Volunteers are therefore an essential part of our society and our economy.

In Australia's own recent experience, we were heartened to see the community spirit of Australians who rushed to lend a hand to those affected by flooding in Queensland and bush fires in Victoria. Those volunteers were coordinated by a number of organizations working in the community and assisted by the Government. We also witnessed the phenomenon of people rallying together through networks on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, to give support to one another and their communities. Indeed, since the International Year of Volunteers, in 2001, there has been an exponential growth of online volunteering, and the Australian Government is working with new technology to encourage and facilitate volunteering placements and projects.

Australia's new national volunteering strategy was recently launched as part of the International Year of Volunteers tenth anniversary celebrations in Australia. It sets out how volunteering will be encouraged, supported and recognized in Australia over the next 10 years. It is a reflection of the Australian Government's determination to continue with the successes of the past 10 years and build further momentum. The strategy will guide Government actions, including harnessing new technology and strengthening management and training. The Australian Government will work towards these goals with the volunteering sector as well as with other Governments and businesses.

Since the 1960s, Australia has supported more than 12,000 Australian volunteers in 33 countries in Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East and Africa. Volunteerism is an important part of Australia's aid programme and our support for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Australian Government is further increasing its contribution to volunteering overseas. This year we will invest \$55 million to support volunteer programmes overseas. We will engage more volunteers to work in developing countries and expand volunteer assignments to more locations across the world. Over the next year we will support 900 new volunteer assignments and will reach the Government's goal of 1,000 new volunteer assignments in 43 countries by early 2013. In addition, our pilot volunteer fund continues to enable small organizations to receive grant funding to support their own volunteer programmes in developing countries.

We are also working to make it easier for more Australians to volunteer their services in developing countries, in line with the priorities of the Australian Government's aid programme. We are proud to have launched Australia's new volunteer programme, Australian Volunteers for International Development, in May this year. This new programme builds on the firm partnership between the Australian Government Overseas Aid Programme, Australian Volunteers International, Austraining International and the Australian Red Cross.

Through that initiative, the Australian Government is seeking to make it easier for volunteers to access information on volunteering and volunteering organizations, and to streamline the processes for Volunteer assignments. We will also continue to support United Nations Volunteers for its important advocacy efforts and coordination role for more than 8,000 Volunteers in 134 countries.

We thank the Volunteers who have given their time, skills and resources to help make a difference throughout the world. The launch today of the first United Nations *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* marks a significant milestone in the recognition of volunteers' efforts worldwide and in ensuring that their potential is harnessed to achieve peace and development, including the Millennium Development Goals. We look forward to actions over the next 10 years to support and encourage volunteerism worldwide.

**Mr. Bernardini (Italy):** Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. We would like to make some additional remarks in our national capacity.

We are pleased to address the General Assembly on the day when we celebrate the work of millions of volunteers around the world. Volunteerism is one of the most powerful ways to engage people in the promotion of peace, development and human rights. Every day, volunteer organizations channel their energy, creativity and passion towards those ideals. They contribute to building a better society and a better world based on principles of solidarity and participation.

Today we also celebrate the work of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. I want to take this opportunity to recognize the excellent work done by the Executive Coordinator, Flavia Pansieri. UNV plays a key role in advocating for volunteerism

globally, integrating that dimension into development planning and mobilizing volunteers. Important progress has been made at the national and international levels in recognizing the contribution of volunteerism to the development of more just societies, mainly thanks to the efforts of UNV.

The launch of the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* is another step forward in that direction. The *Report* will serve as an instrument that will enable all stakeholders to understand and benefit from the various forms of volunteerism around the world. It will also help the international community to better identify the challenges that prevent volunteerism from developing its full potential. I welcome the UNV initiative Volunteering Matters, which showcases through images how volunteers can make a difference in everyday life.

Volunteerism is a major component of Italian society. We have a clear legislative framework that recognizes the social value and function of volunteerism, while ensuring its autonomy, pluralism and growth. Research shows that more than 3 million citizens have been involved in activities ranging from the provision of health and social assistance to cultural services. Their contributions correspond to the weekly hours of more than 80,000 workers.

Volunteerism has not only a positive economic impact; most importantly, it creates added value for society. It forges social cohesion and, when dealing with youth, creates the building blocks of active citizenship, which lies at the very heart of democratic life.

For all those reasons, Italy supports international volunteerism through its Development Cooperation programme. In that context, specific provisions have been adopted to encourage citizens to become volunteers abroad, especially in developing countries. Moreover, Italy's Development Cooperation has supported different projects to enhance the training of volunteers, including a master's degree in international cooperation.

The four pillars of the International Year of Volunteers are: recognition of the value of volunteerism to society and its connection with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the facilitation of peoples' access to volunteer opportunities, fostering of the exchange of experience and the strengthening of partnerships among different

volunteer organizations, and the promotion of inclusive volunteerism that is representative of the diverse groups of society.

Ten years after the International Year of Volunteers and four years before the 2015 target date for the achievement of the MDGs, we should firmly renew our collective commitment to achieving those Goals, not only because that is a smart way to tackle the great challenges of our times, but also because there are simple yet compelling reasons to campaign for volunteerism. As the internationally acclaimed singer and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Angélique Kidjo has said,

"Volunteering matters to me because it lights up our world. When people get involved, when they volunteer to improve their community or their society, hope becomes a reality and lives change for the better".

**The Acting President:** In accordance with resolution 49/2, of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

**Mr. Jilani** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) welcomes this debate on the occasion of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers. The IFRC further welcomes the adoption of resolution 66/67 on this item and the launch of the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*.

Worldwide, our 187 member National Societies are taking volunteering development more seriously than ever before, establishing good volunteer management systems and conducting research to better understand the value and needs of our volunteers. The IFRC would like to express its appreciation to United Nations Member States for acknowledging, in resolution 66/67, adopted this morning, the efforts of the IFRC to promote volunteerism throughout its global network.

The resolution also made reference to the Global Volunteer Conference held in Budapest in September. As one of the main highlights of this anniversary year, the Conference, co-hosted by United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and IFRC, brought together participants from civil society, from the Red Cross and

Red Crescent, from academia, from Governments and from the private sector to discuss and celebrate the value of volunteers. The final declaration from the Conference contains several action points, including calling on Governments to recognize the economic and social value of volunteering and to provide an enabling environment for volunteers. The declaration also calls on the research community to intensify study of the value and impact of volunteering.

The launch of the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* this morning is a welcome addition to the body of knowledge on volunteering. The *Report* also echoes many of the recommendations of the Global Volunteer Conference, such as the need to measure volunteering to better inform policy and practice.

During the tenth anniversary year, in 2011, the IFRC has added to the knowledge on volunteering by producing a report, in January, on the economic and social value of our volunteers. More recently, in November, we produced a report on the underresearched topic of volunteering in emergencies. Volunteers have been critical actors in many recent contexts, such as Haiti, Pakistan, Libya, Syria, Egypt, Japan and the Horn of Africa region.

But volunteers have also faced many dangers and obstacles. The report on volunteering in emergencies urges a number of actions to help protect, promote and recognize volunteers, such as ensuring that volunteers have appropriate training and equipment, providing insurance to volunteers who risk injury or their lives, providing safe access to all vulnerable groups, integrating volunteer capacity into domestic emergency response plans and reviewing existing laws and addressing gaps in legislation related to volunteers.

We know that volunteers boost community resilience, strengthen sustainable development and extend our reach to the most vulnerable in society. Over the past 10 years we have produced a clear picture of further actions needed to better protect, promote and recognize volunteers. Let us now focus on implementing those resolutions.

The IFRC reassures the Assembly of our commitment to fostering a culture of volunteerism in society. Working with their respective public authorities, our member National Societies will continue to create and maintain an enabling environment for volunteering and will work specifically to implement the resolution on volunteering development adopted at the thirty-first International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in Geneva just last week.

I would like to conclude with words of one volunteer of the Egyptian Red Crescent

“Volunteering gives me the confidence to make a change and to contribute to improving my community. It helps me get closer to the people and their needs ... Volunteering has taught me to freely express myself, to respect our differences and to build on communalities. It gives me the satisfaction that I seek in my life and the energy to sustain it.”

**The Acting President:** We have heard the last speaker for this meeting.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 27.

*The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.*