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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
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priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social
development in the contemporary world**

Statement submitted by ANO “Organization” “Vector of Friendship”, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Volunteering — effective tool for public diplomacy

This year, 2015, marks the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the beginning of a new development agenda. The proposed sustainable development goals are built on the principles of universality and transformation, aimed at leaving no one behind. Achieving the ambitions that are envisaged will demand the mobilization of all available resources and the adoption of an approach to implementation that is truly centred on people. At the same time, public diplomacy is becoming acknowledged as an important tool for efficient positioning of foreign policy interests of each country in the context of globalizing world political, economic and social processes.

Volunteering is becoming one of the most efficient tools of international public diplomacy since strategies for sustainable development are not possible without civic participation.

Certainly, as governments continue implementation of the sustainable development goals, their efforts must be complemented by leveraging people's capacities, expertise and skills in an unprecedented and coordinated way.

Volunteerism can play the leading role in efficient management of knowledge, experience and networks that are needed for forming successful public diplomacy and international partnership.

Due to the above mentioned and unprecedented volunteer networking, volunteerism and citizen and community engagement were identified as important components of the post- 2015 development agenda in national consultation reports of multiple member-states. Volunteerism is a strategically viable global mechanism through which, if scaled up, the post-2015 development agenda including the sustainable development goals can advance, and a wider range of people can contribute to the planning for global partnership.

Associations, networks and platforms for volunteerism have continued to expand and strengthen, nationally, regionally and globally. That enables cooperation across sectors, communities and countries for scaling up volunteering structures, exchanging good volunteer management and training practices, sharing data and research and promoting joint volunteerism for development.

Thus in order to reduce inequality level among countries it is necessary to keep on developing international volunteer exchanges programs. Different social groups should be included in volunteer activities. Uniting with the purpose of sustainable development lets erase the boundaries among all social groups of different countries.

Considering the fact that the young proportion of the population is at its highest rate throughout history, and that youth is the majority of population in many countries (especially in developing countries), governments place a priority on youth volunteering. The youth volunteering movement not only inspires personal advancement and broadens perspectives for employment but also involves a high percentage of the population to productive activities that promote peace and international relations development.

Youth community-focused and volunteer organizations participate actively in the process for improving public diplomacy in Russia.

In our opinion, active and effective inclusion of youth in the life of society and in the processes of making key decisions not only at local but on global level is a key point for sustainable development of our planet in the future.

Thus, it is obvious that inclusion of socially responsible youth in the issues of planning and building our future through international dialogue is necessary for more effective development of global community in all spheres of life.

Nowadays, a lot of attention is paid to forming active civic position starting at school age, which includes involving children and youth in volunteer activity. School and university volunteering motivates people to be an active volunteer during the entire life. A program for developing social initiatives of children and youth called “Copybook of Friendship” (implemented in 43 regions of the Russian Federation) is an effective example.

It is also important to recognize active community-focused youth organizations that function as significant structures for building partnership among young people at international level; for improving and increasing effectiveness of such partnership on issues related to peace, security and sustainable development.

Nowadays, the following areas of work for developing youth public diplomacy exist in Russia:

- Providing youth with the access to necessary information for more effective use of their potential in processes of decision making.
- Informing youth about their rights and duties; assisting in process of inclusion in volunteering (ecological, social and other issues).
- Supporting and recognizing youth volunteer associations, which operate at an international level, through programs of financial, educational and technical support.
- Object valuing of youth investments in creating, implementing and developing national strategies and plans devoted to youth interests. Volunteering assists in counting interests of youth while implementing new agenda for sustainable development.
- Finding young leaders of civic society.

The benefits which accrue back to them are empowerment, leadership skills, employability and a commitment to civic engagement.

Ideas and energy of youth lead global community to innovations and improve the quality of life.

However, the challenge remains that volunteering — international or national, specialist or grass-roots, involving seniors or youth, in the corporate or public sectors, in situ or online, formal or informal — remains underutilized as an important resource for peace, sustainable development and human well-being. Progress will only be made with stronger evidence as to how volunteerism enables the engagement of individuals and progress towards achieving peace and sustainable development.

There are two large events that underline the importance of recognizing volunteering as a tool for effective public diplomacy. The international forum “Volunteer of Russia” and the conference “Volunteerism — Avenue for social transformation” are events for building international networks based on partnership and respect.

We would like to suggest these two events as forums for discussing important issues of the United Nations agenda with active participation of the UN structures to be supported.
