

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

5 December 2008

This International Volunteer Day comes near the end of a difficult year marked by rising food and fuel prices, accelerating climate change and turmoil in world financial markets.

There have been many calls for resources to combat these problems. Rarely, however, is volunteerism fully recognized as a potentially vast and powerful resource to engage people in the pursuit of peace and development. Yet the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme deploys 7,500 volunteers every year to support national development efforts, and many millions more contribute their time and energy in their own way.

Recently I learned of a 70-year old woman who travelled halfway around the world from New Zealand to volunteer in Liberia with the United Nations peacekeeping mission and join local people in supporting the Government's new national youth volunteer scheme.

As this one example shows, every day, people across the world contribute their knowledge and energy as volunteers. Through facilities such as the UNV Online Volunteering service, everybody can volunteer for peace and development without being limited by time or physical constraints.

The cultural form and definition of a volunteer may change depending on circumstances, but the underlying principle never wavers: every individual can make a difference in society.

Beyond helping to promote the greater good, volunteers enrich their own lives. As one volunteer recently put it: "I feel as though I am able to make a difference in the world and use my skills. It allows me to genuinely feel as though I am part of the world community."

The altruistic spirit of volunteerism is immense and renewable. On this International Volunteer Day, I urge all members of our global community to tap this great reserve of energy and initiative.