

## **01/11 - International Year of Volunteers: Message from the Commonwealth Secretary-General**

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The following is a message from Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon to mark the observance of the International Year of Volunteers.

Volunteers have always been one of the Commonwealth's greatest assets. In natural disasters, volunteers are often the first to provide relief and bring succour. By facilitating building of trust and consensus, they act as a vital bridge between governments and civil society. And in a world of scarce resources volunteers are a valuable resource for providing practical help where it matters - at the personal level. Volunteerism brings people together to learn and respect one another, across gender and generation.

The challenges of the coming decades lie in reducing poverty, breaking the silence on HIV/AIDS, meeting the human challenges of globalisation, promoting environmental sustainability, bridging the digital divide and reaching out to the disadvantaged. Given the crucial role to be played by volunteers in meeting these challenges, the United Nations has dedicated the year 2001, first year of the new millennium, as the International Year of Volunteers.

At Auckland, in 1995, Commonwealth Heads of Governments decided to launch a volunteer scheme, the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP), as a cost-effective mechanism for delivering development assistance. During the current year, we shall be taking further steps and initiatives to develop and strengthen the programme.

In addition we are consolidating links between young volunteers in different countries across the Commonwealth into a network. The 'Youth Across the Commonwealth' network; together with CSAP, will ensure that both energy and experience make an important contribution to the Commonwealth mission of promoting good governance, consensus building and providing practical help in sustainable development.

I convey my warm greetings to everyone celebrating the International Year of Volunteers.

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Note to Editors: The Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP) was launched to enable the Secretariat to meet the short-term technical assistance needs of member governments through the deployment of highly skilled volunteers. Under this programme, high achievers and young professionals offer their services as volunteers for practical projects in member countries.

The Youth Across the Commonwealth (YAC) network was established in October 2000, following discussions involving Commonwealth organisations and volunteer youth associations. The network seeks to promote the personal development and empowerment of young people, engage them in activities that benefit local communities across the Commonwealth, and raise awareness and understanding of the Commonwealth and its values.

01/11 14 February 2001

**Date Released:** 14/02/01

**Publication Date:** 14/02/01