

Speech by Valentin Alexandru, External Relations Group
United Nations Volunteers
on the occasion of
International Volunteer Day and Presentation of Awards to Local
Volunteers, Basildon (London),
5 December 2002

Mr. Chairman of Basildon District Council,

Mr. Chairman of Essex County Council,

dear volunteers, and all of you distinguished friends,

Let me say what a pleasure it is for me to be here with you today on this very special occasion. May I also on behalf of the United Nations Volunteers convey to you greetings and best wishes for a successful run. I would like to thank the Council for Voluntary Services/Volunteer Bureau and its planning committee especially for organizing this event to mark the International Volunteer Day and give recognition to the outstanding work of local volunteers.

My name is Valentin Alexandru and I am from the External Relations Group at United Nations Volunteers programme in Bonn.

In this world of online communication I have certainly not missed the opportunity of peeping into the home page of BBCVS, VB. Now I know that the CVS promotes voluntary action in the Basildon District. It is the local co-ordinating body for voluntary organisations, community groups and statutory agencies. It is an independent organisation and a Registered Charity, governed by a board of trustees.

One of its core functions is to promote volunteering and the Volunteer Bureau performs this function.

The more I read the more I felt at home in your home page finding that - beyond the inevitable maze of acronyms – BBCVS and UNV were using a good deal of common language.

To illustrate this, I will - with your permission - tell you a few words about UNV

What is UNV and what does it stand for?

Founded by the General Assembly in 1970 the United Nations Volunteers is the UN organization that supports sustainable human development globally through the promotion of volunteerism, including the mobilization of volunteers. It serves the causes of peace and development through enhancing opportunities for participation by all peoples. It is universal, inclusive and embraces volunteer action in all its diversity. It values free will, commitment, engagement and solidarity, which are the foundations of volunteerism.

UN Volunteers are involved in and support the programmes of the United Nations itself and almost all United Nations Funds, Programmes and Specialized Agencies in areas such as (i) enabling development; (ii) reducing poverty; (iii) humanitarian relief and peace efforts; and (iv) gender and environment. Maximum efficiency is being sought through the speedy deployment of competent and motivated UN Volunteers in situations where flexibility and dedication are crucial to the success of the operations. UNV with a track record of identifying and deploying UN Volunteer specialists at very short notice is therefore in a position to provide strategic support to current UN operations in Afghanistan.

Rendering assistance to development, UNV places emphasis on the cooperation with community-based initiatives. UN Volunteers are closely involved in the communities they serve, working in direct contact with the people in a range of activities from democratization efforts to combating the spread of HIV/AIDS in the world.

Developing new areas of activity, UNV has ventured into information and communication technology. The United Nations Information Technology Service -- UNITEs, www.unites.org -- manages an international corps of high-tech volunteers to help bridge the divide

between countries of the North and the South in the use of information technology.

In terms of numbers, in 2001 there were more than 5,400 UN Volunteer assignments. Together the UN Volunteers represented 159 nationalities and worked in 140 countries. UNV does not offer career opportunities as such: the main motivation of a UN Volunteer is to be of service, in keeping with the spirit of volunteerism.

Some 40 per cent of all UN Volunteers work in African countries; 25 per cent in Asia and the Pacific; 16 per cent in Europe and the CIS, while the other UN Volunteers serve in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Arab States. As two-thirds of all UNVs come from developing countries, and one-third come from the industrialized world, UNV actively supports South-South cooperation. UNV initiatives also provide advisers to promote private and public enterprise and to enable expatriate nationals to assist in their countries of origin on a short-term basis.

As focal point for the International Year of Volunteers 2001, UNV actively supported initiatives at local, national and global levels. The year was important in that it recognized the value of volunteerism, its economic contributions to society and its role in building social cohesion by providing opportunities for people to engage in acts of global solidarity. On 5 December 2001, **126 member** states co-sponsored the General Assembly resolution 56/38 in support of volunteering and, I am thrilled to announce, that, on 26 November 2002 the General Assembly passed a resolution following up on the International Year, which entrusts UNV to include promotion of volunteerism as part of social development into its mandate. This resolution was passed by many more countries: **142!**

The contribution of volunteers is enormous – society would not work the way it does without volunteer contributions.

And yet, enormous though this contribution may be, its very nature is such that it remains largely uncountable particularly at a global scale.

How much easier it is for the business world - where performance is countable at every step – to provide countables.

Various attempts have been made at quantifying the work done by volunteers, at measuring the impact of volunteer action. The following is a sampling of statistics from existing national surveys that show motives and social and economic benefits derived by the community from volunteerism.

A survey in **Brazil** shows that 50 per cent of volunteers take up voluntary activity because they enjoy helping others.

In the **United States**, the number of individuals who volunteer has reached almost 56 per cent , that is more than half the population.

Canadian volunteers contribute an average of 191 hours per year. This time is equivalent to 578,000 full-time jobs.

Nineteen per cent of adults surveyed in **France** said they volunteer their time

About one of every three adults in **Germany** -- 34 per cent -- currently volunteer an average of 15 hours a month within associations, initiatives, projects and self-help groups

About 33 per cent of the adults in **Ireland** are currently volunteers.

In the **UK** a country with a long tradition of voluntary service to the community – where almost half of all adults take part in some form of organised voluntary work in the course of a year - the figures I quote may be stale news to you. However, they are the only ones I have. (Grateful for any feedback on the latest) A survey carried out on behalf of the Institute for Volunteering Research in 1997 found that

- The level of volunteering has dipped slightly over the period 1991 -1997 down from 51% of the adult population in 1991 to 48% in 1997.

- The good news is that existing volunteers are putting more time into their volunteering, up from 2.7 hours a week in 1991 to 4 hours a week in 1997

We have to be careful with statistics and make allowance, of course, for inaccuracy going along with any such surveys (Just think of all people who donate their time but do not necessarily see themselves as volunteers).

Ladies and gentlemen, surveys, statistics give a general picture of volunteering, countable though it may be. But no statistics in the world, no measuring, no counting can show the face, the person behind the voluntary action: the individual volunteer. We call them volunteers, "free-willers" (translation of German term) because they have chosen to give of their own time to help others and so make volunteering happen. They deserve our full support and recognition.

And so we are here today to celebrate the achievements of local volunteers, thank and recognize them. Let me conclude by saying one more thing:

Some 25 years ago a research team at Harvard University were studying the behaviour of top athletes trying to identify and measure the main psychological factors that went into the making of a champion. They found what they called "the self-motivated urge to achieve" to be the major psychological factor in a champion's make-up. Dear volunteers, with your "self-motivated urge to achieve and help others", your dedicated will to share your time you not only perfectly qualify for champions ... you are our real champions .

I thank you.

Let's now move on to the presentation of the Awards.

All local voluntary agencies have been invited to nominate volunteers in 5 categories: Volunteering through Adversity, Young Volunteer, Most Enthusiastic Volunteer, Longest Serving Volunteer and Most Cheerful Volunteer. In all the categories it was almost impossible for the judges to choose a winner. Every volunteer is valuable and all of you who have not emerged as direct winners today, will – I'm convinced - stand the best chance tomorrow. The judges spent a long time carefully going through each nomination but expressed that there was a very exceptional voluntary sector working within the Basildon District. Many of the nominations left a strong impression on them and they were amazed at how many people gave so much of their time and had such remarkable stories behind their volunteering experiences.

In the category **Volunteering through Adversity** there were nine nominations – Dave Davey from the Basildon District Volunteer Carers; Edward Fortune and James Harris from Basildon Citizens Advice Bureau; Jan MacIntosh from Rethink; Peter Barry from the Adventure Playground for People with Special Needs; Colin Tarn from Pathfinders; Sandi Cooper from Basildon Crown Court Witness Service; Joyce Barker from DIAL and Maria Kimmings from Arthritis Care Basildon and District Branch.

The winner has MS and finds it difficult to walk, but somehow manages to give a lot of his time to the playground. Over the years he has been very supportive of staff and other volunteers and has been a great asset to the playground. He also helps fundraise and has done parachute jumps, bunjy jumps and been up in a bi-plane. Without his support over the years it would have been difficult to maintain a safe environment for the children. He will never take any payment for his work even his busfare. He deserves to be recognised for his work.

And the winner is Peter Barry from Allshades ... VIDEO CLIP ... Peter is presented award.

In the category **Young Volunteer** there were two nominees: Jeremy Sutton from Allshades and Faye Kadesh from The Volunteer Bureau. The judges found it very difficult to choose between them.

They eventually decided on a young lady who is 13 years old, currently attending Woodlands School supports paid staff within the afterschool setting. She is able to organise her personal and school programme and remain on target with school work. She uses her initiative on projects, her consistency and reliability plus genuine care to the afterschool children is excellent. She is keen to develop new skills, her suggestions are always well thought out.

And the winner is Jeremy Sutton from Allshades ... VIDEO CLIP ... Jeremy is presented the award.

In the category **Most Enthusiastic Volunteer** there were 14 nominees and the judges found it extremely difficult to choose and finally chose two winners. The nominees were Mark Hansford at the Basildon, Billericay and Wickford CVS; Bernie Hamilton from Basildon Citizens Advice Bureau; Ron Searle from Basildon and District Volunteer Carers; Doreen Buckley from Basildon Crown Court Witness Service; Ricky Bollons from DIAL; Amy Dowd from The Pavis Foundation; Peter Hathaway from SOVA; Ann O'Brien from Allshades; Lynne Bamber and Pamela Andrews from Basildon Adult Community College; Gordon Retter from Age Concern Basildon; Stacey Novak from Transliving International; Lorraine Knight from Cruse and Rosemary Patston from The Essex Horse and Pony Protection Society.

The *first winner* has added so much to the voluntary group she works with, without her, the organization might not be able to carry on with the valuable and worthwhile causes that are provided to all members and clients. She spends most of her time in the centre or in meetings trying to gain help, support, information and funding. She has proved to be popular with everyone.

The *second winner* was matched to an offender identified as requiring long term support to enable him to move into independent living. This was to involve various agencies. The work that he did with the offender was so successful that the offender's probation officer made

an application for an early discharge from the probation order as the offender was living independently for the first time in his life. Our winner has worked with numerous other offenders and families and dedicates 2 – 3 days per week to assisting offenders, their families and other volunteers. He is a very enthusiastic volunteer showing commitment, intelligence, energy and hardwork.

Let's have a look at both of them. The winners are Amy Dowd from the Pavis Foundation and Peter Hathaway from SOVA ... VIDEO CLIP ... present awards.

In the category **Longest Serving Volunteer** there were seven nominees: Jennifer Kent from Basildon Citizens Advice Bureau; Len Hill from Cruse; Even Oliver from Basildon District Volunteer Carers; Beryl Knell from DIAL; Sister Safina from the Basildon Islamic Centre; George Beach from the Hamelin Trust and Christine Bunkhorne from Basildon Crown Court Witness Service.

The winner has been a volunteer with her organization for 25 years. She has opened the doors of her home to others, and always gives a warm, friendly welcoming. She gives her services unquestionably and unconditionally and is highly thought of throughout Essex.

And the winner is Sister Safina ... VIDEO CLIP ...presentation of award.

And the final category is **Most Cheerful Volunteer**. There were four nominations: Marjorie Hughes from Basildon Citizen's Advice Bureau; Christine Taylor from Basildon District Volunteer Carers, Doreen Stanes from Basildon Crown Court Witness Service, Edith Nelson from DIAL Basildon.

The winner is a retired teacher. She has a wonderful reputation for her cheerfulness and enthusiasm. Her clients ask for her again and again. The older clients find her empathetic and easy to talk to. She always looks happy.

And the winner is Marjorie Hughes ... VIDEO CLIP ...Presentation of award.

Congratulations to both the winners and the nominees ... and do rest assured: You have all been winners in this championship of the hearts!