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Sixty-sixth session

73rd plenary meeting

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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 10.10 a.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: If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the report of the Third Committee that is before it today.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Before we begin to take action on the recommendation contained in the report of the Third Committee, I should like to advise representatives that we are going to proceed to take a decision in the same manner as was done in the Committee, unless the Secretariat is notified otherwise in advance.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution recommended by the Third Committee in paragraph 10 of its report. The draft resolution is

entitled “Tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers”. The Third Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 66/67).

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now convene, in accordance with Assembly resolution 63/153 of 18 December 2008 and resolution 66/67, which was just adopted, two plenary meetings devoted to the follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers and the commemoration of its tenth anniversary, under sub-item (b) of agenda item 27, “Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family”.

Statement by the President

The Acting President: In my capacity as Acting President, I shall now read out a statement by His Excellency the President of the General Assembly:

“Today we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers. We come together to pay tribute to the millions of volunteers around the world — men and women who show that every citizen makes a difference and that volunteerism matters. Volunteerism matters in reaching United Nations targets, such as the Millennium Development Goals, humanitarian response, poverty reduction and sustainability. Volunteerism involves overcoming

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social exclusion and discrimination, strengthens values based on collaboration and partnership, and helps to build a better world.

“Today the global community faces a myriad of challenges — from environmental disasters, conflicts, humanitarian emergencies and the financial crisis, to political transitions. All of these have the power to destabilize communities and undermine the hard-earned gains of the past decade. We must therefore realize that common challenges require common responses for our common future.

“Rising to these challenges demands solidarity, creativity, engagement and partnership from all segments of our society. With the world population now at 7 billion, it is important to leverage resources in ever better and more effective ways. Volunteering is the people-centred approach to peace, humanitarian response and sustainable development. It strengthens trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens. It empowers change from the grass-roots level up, especially when enabled by strong partnerships at every level.

“The United Nations Volunteers programme, established 40 years ago, deploys about 8,000 volunteers every year. Through United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, peacekeeping and special political missions, United Nations Volunteers contribute to the global agenda of the United Nations and support national development efforts.

“The contribution of volunteers has not, however, been sufficiently recognized to date, and we must change that. Let us join together to support volunteer action as a vast and powerful resource of social engagement and transformation.

“Commemorating the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers provides us with the opportunity to reinvigorate the spirit of volunteerism through collaborative action among Governments, the United Nations system, civil society and the private sector, in order to share ideas, expertise and experiences. By acknowledging the value of volunteerism to societies, we can facilitate volunteering at the

local, national, regional and global levels through the development of more conducive policies.

“In this respect, I look forward to the launch of the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* and to its suggestions on how to take volunteerism forward and move it into a new era. Together, let us commit to promoting and supporting volunteerism as an important factor to the achievement of international peace and development.

“In closing, I would like to thank our unsung heroes — all volunteers worldwide — for contributing their time, talent, knowledge, and energy to the promotion of a better world. We salute their tireless efforts and honour them today.”

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General, Her Excellency Ms. Asha-Rose Migiros.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I am delighted to join participants at this morning's event and to pay tribute to one of our most valued assets — United Nations Volunteers. Allow me to read a message on behalf of the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, who is currently travelling but sends his best wishes:

“Beginning with the words ‘We the peoples’, the United Nations Charter reminds us that crafting solutions to global challenges is a job not only for Governments but for people, communities and civil society.

“On International Volunteer Day, we recognize the dedication of Volunteers, their admirable spirit of service and their wide-ranging efforts to promote the goals of the United Nations.

“With the world population having surpassed 7 billion this year, we must tap every person's potential to help others. Everyone can make a difference; volunteering matters.

“All over the globe, millions of volunteers are helping to advance sustainable development and peace. That engagement takes many forms: volunteering organizations, individuals working on their own in their communities, and service with us and our partners as United Nations Volunteers.

“This year’s first-ever *State of the World’s Volunteerism Report* showcases the impact that volunteers have made. I congratulate the United Nations Volunteers programme and commend the many millions of volunteers working in connection with sustainable development, humanitarian assistance, environmental preservation and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. With passion and commitment, they are helping to show how volunteering can change the world.

“As we mark International Volunteer Day, I encourage policymakers to do even more to support and welcome volunteerism, and I urge everyone to consider what they can do to join the movement.”

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Sefue (United Republic of Tanzania): I am grateful to the President for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the African Group at this event marking the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers.

When, in November 1997, the General Assembly proclaimed 2001 the International Year of Volunteers (resolution 52/17), it did so based on the universal realization of the important role that voluntary service played in addressing a wide array of global challenges, including those relating to social, economic, cultural, developmental, humanitarian and peace. That is why the resolution was sponsored by 123 countries, including many in Africa. It provided a valuable framework and favourable environment for the growth and strategic use of volunteer contributions. It led to the greater recognition of, promotion and facilitation of volunteer work, and provided space and motivation for networking and sharing best practices in volunteerism. Those were the original objectives, and we are pleased that considerable progress has been made in all of them.

The African Group notes with appreciation the first *State of the World’s Volunteerism Report* by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, which will be launched later today. We hope that the *Report* will further enhance the goals of recognizing,

facilitating, networking and promoting volunteerism worldwide. We also believe that it will increase recognition of UNV’s critical role as an organization that determines core values and sets standards in volunteerism, in the United Nations system and globally.

Volunteerism is woven into the fabric of African philosophy and culture. As the final declaration of the Southern Africa Conference on Volunteer Action for Development in Johannesburg, issued on 19 October, stated:

“Volunteering is universal, inclusive and embraces free will, solidarity, dignity and trust ... strong traditions of volunteering are an expression of Ubuntu, the African philosophy and way of life, which connects individuals and communities through reciprocity and provides a powerful basis for unity, common humanity, peace and development.”

As Africans, therefore, we associate ourselves fully with, and encourage, the renewed spirit of volunteerism, and want to gratefully pay tribute to all the volunteers who have worked and continue to work hard in all corners of our continent in many sectors, including those of education, health, water, entrepreneurship and business development, famine relief, post-conflict reconstruction, sustainable development, sport, natural disasters and other emergencies, and many others.

On this day, we especially remember and pay tribute to the 8,000 United Nations Volunteers working in peacekeeping missions, as well as agencies and partners across the world. They and others are helping African and other developing countries in their national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We pay tribute to all the volunteers who have lost their lives or been injured while serving others in Africa and elsewhere.

The African Group appreciates and commends the work of United Nations Volunteers in supporting Member States and other stakeholders in coordinating the planning of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, including by co-hosting regional consultations and global volunteer conferences. Going forward, we wish UNV continued success in its important work. We hope that it will rise to emerging challenges, not only as an agency for volunteer recruitment and management but also one

that sets standards in furthering volunteerism, supports and promotes national volunteer efforts, provides the framework for sharing best practices and increasingly harnesses the power of technological advances in doing so. It is also important that volunteerism remains driven by nothing other than the ideals of service and human solidarity.

In conclusion, on behalf of the African Group, I would like to once again convey our appreciation to all the volunteers who are currently working in different communities across the continent. We believe that their work not only helps to improve, and in some cases even transform, the situation of the communities and people they aid but also that, as volunteers, they are themselves being transformed by the experience. All that contributes to global mutual understanding, respect and empathy and, ultimately to peace and development. Nelson Mandela has said that “a different world cannot be built by indifferent people”. By definition, volunteers are not indifferent to the pain and needs of others. Working with us and driven by their ideals of service and solidarity, a different world is possible.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States.

Mr. Schaper (Netherlands): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States.

Today we commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, an excellent occasion for honouring the work of all those who voluntarily dedicate their time and efforts to making the world a better place. We strongly believe that it is important to promote greater participation and involvement on the part of citizens in today's world. This is a win-win situation for all: it is rewarding for the volunteers and for those who benefit from volunteer work.

Volunteers care about society. They spend their free time working without being paid and demonstrate solidarity every day. Hundreds of millions of people are active as volunteers worldwide. They work in schools, hospitals and sports clubs, protect the environment, provide social services, help people in other countries — and therefore make a difference to our lives. Volunteering builds social capital and promotes social cohesion, and therefore contributes to

the very idea of the United Nations. We, the peoples of the United Nations, promote universal human values and build a better future for all.

I would like to thank United Nations Volunteers and its Executive Coordinator, Flavia Pansieri, for making the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers a success. Every year, more than 7,700 United Nations Volunteers work in 130 countries worldwide, with 80 per cent coming from developing countries and more than 30 per cent volunteering within their own countries. United Nations Volunteers support a large number of peacekeeping and humanitarian projects and comprise one third of all international civilians working in United Nations peacekeeping operations. That is a huge achievement, and we would like to express our sincere recognition and gratitude to all United Nations Volunteers for their work, often in difficult conditions and circumstances.

Today we look back on 10 years of advancing the agenda of voluntarism. When, 10 years ago, the international community first decided to celebrate an International Year of Volunteers, it focused on four key aspects for action, namely, recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion. We believe that the International Year of Volunteers has been a success story in all four of those aspects. The momentum it has created has convinced more people to engage in volunteer work and has promoted the idea of volunteerism worldwide. Since the declaration of the International Year of Volunteers, more than 70 countries have adopted or introduced new laws or policies on volunteerism, and a large number of countries have developed or expanded their national volunteer services.

In addition to the United Nations International Year of Volunteers, other countries and regional groups have raised awareness of the idea of volunteer work. As an example, I would like to mention that 2011 is also the European Year of Volunteering. We also look forward to welcoming the official partnering of the Voluntary Service Overseas of the United Kingdom with the United States Peace Corps when they sign a memorandum of understanding this afternoon.

Facilitating volunteerism aims to ensure that the maximum number of people from the broadest range of backgrounds have access to volunteer opportunities. To give one example, due to ageing demographics, especially in developed countries, the contribution of

the elderly through volunteerism is growing every day. That is a great opportunity that can be supported by tailor-made volunteer programmes.

This commemorative event and the side events that will take place today serve as powerful illustrations of successful networking among volunteers and national and international volunteer organizations. Those efforts should be continued to strengthen networking opportunities among volunteer organizations and among the volunteers themselves. In that regard, we very much welcome the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, which will be presented later today. It is an important contribution in our discussion on how volunteerism can be taken forward and how we can enhance the impact of volunteerism worldwide. We look forward to the presentation of the *Report* and to the side events on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Korček (Slovakia): On behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, it is a distinct honour for me to join in today's worldwide celebration of the spirit of volunteerism as we observe the International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development and commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers.

On this occasion, we welcome the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, which is being launched today. We trust that this first focused and systematic study will further enhance awareness of the important role played by volunteers in all areas of social and economic development.

We are grateful for the support that the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme makes as the focal point for the tenth anniversary of the International Year, including by co-hosting regional consultations and conferences such as the one held in Budapest in September together with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Volunteering is one of the clearest expressions of solidarity in action. Each contribution, no matter how small, makes a huge difference. The impressive growth in the number of volunteers of all ages and cultures over the past decade illustrates the significance of their

remarkable contributions to the economic and social development of all of our societies. Volunteers, as invaluable partners, stand at the heart of our efforts.

Today our need for volunteers is greater than ever. To continue making meaningful contributions in today's world, including towards the Millennium Development Goals, we must help volunteers to help us by further recognizing and fostering the efforts of volunteers at all levels — local, regional, national and global — and by all partners, including Government, civil society and the business sector.

Today, let us pay special tribute to the millions of volunteers who selflessly and with enthusiasm dedicate their time and skills to advancing human development, social and economic growth and sustainable peace.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Dominican Republic, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Alcántara Mejía (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The phenomenon of volunteering is not old in Latin America and the Caribbean, but it has become a powerful movement. In most of our countries, volunteerism began to manifest itself in two ways: first, through certain leaders of civil society who tackled social work aimed at sectors they had identified where States were ineffective or had even neglected to take them into account. For example, in my country, the Dominican Republic, that was the case with the Association for Rehabilitation, which has provided dignity to the lives of thousands of disabled people and helped us to be declared free of polio. The second manifestation of volunteerism in our region has been the way in which we have dealt with humanitarian assistance in natural disasters. Not too long ago, for example, the huge disaster created by the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti led to a generous aid movement composed mostly of volunteer organizations.

In every country of the region that I represent here at the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, there are hundreds of groups doing volunteer work on behalf of their fellow citizens. It is also important to point out that, early in 2009, the Latin American University Volunteer Network was established, under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation and the United

Nations Volunteers programme itself. The Network has fostered a dramatic change in both the perception of volunteer work in our region and the social role played by universities and youth.

It is worth pointing out here in the Hall the role played by volunteerism in the world, including the impact it is having on the lives of the less fortunate. We must acknowledge that volunteering appeals to the better angels of our nature. It also serves to significantly augment the contributions made by social capital to enable change in our societies.

In a continent such as ours, characterized by poverty, inequality and States whose institutions are still fragile, the social debt continues to be enormous and there is still a lack of resources to meet it before we are swallowed up by despair. Viewed through that perspective, it is clear that ours is a region suitable for volunteer work. We are a continent in which the work of volunteers, along with a socially responsible State, can make a great difference. That is why we wish to recognize the delegations of Brazil and Japan for their excellent work during the negotiations in the Third Committee on resolution 66/67, entitled "Tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers".

Over the years, the International Volunteer Day has mobilized the focus, energy and the strategies of many countries towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and has led to excellent opportunities for individuals, communities and organizations to contribute to development at local, national and international levels. International Volunteer Day highlights the service capacity of human beings and in that way combines forces aimed at tackling major problems such as poverty reduction, sustainable development, climate change, health, disaster prevention and social integration and management.

Volunteering and civil society awareness should be integrated into the education system. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States recognizes that it is through education that we can build an altruistic impulse and noble and selfless attitude — values that we must pursue as an investment in the future of our communities and of our peoples.

For the people of Latin America and the Caribbean, what excites us about volunteering is that it is not motivated by monetary interest; those who practise it do not seek material gain, or medals or

awards. What excites us about volunteering is that it is driven by the powerful impetus provided by enthusiasm and by a moral commitment capable of moving mountains. What excites us about volunteering in Latin America and the Caribbean is its ability to produce responsible citizens.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan, who will speak on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group of States.

Mr. Nishida (Japan): On behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, I am honoured and pleased to address the General Assembly on the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers. We greatly appreciate the participation today of Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro, as well as that of Ms. Helen Clark, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, and Ms. Flavia Pansieri, Executive Coordinator of United Nations Volunteers.

Brazil and Japan submitted a draft resolution to the Third Committee at this session, entitled "Tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers" (resolution 66/67), which emphasized the importance of volunteerism and encouraged further volunteering. The resolution was adopted by consensus both in the Third Committee and, today, in the General Assembly with the support of 97 sponsors. We expect today's meeting to follow up on the progress made since the launch of the International Year in 2001 and to further the promotion of volunteerism.

The aim of the International Year of Volunteers, proposed by Japan in 2001, was for Governments, the United Nations system and civil society to collaborate and identify ways of enhancing the recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion of volunteer activities. Ten years have passed since the first International Year of Volunteers. Volunteerism has certainly grown and developed among us. We reaffirm that many volunteers have played a very active role in areas such as poverty reduction, health, sustainable development and disaster prevention and recovery around the world.

The resolution adopted by the General Assembly today commends the contributions from national and international volunteers for their role in disaster prevention and recovery in many parts of the world, such as the mass landslides and floods in south-eastern

Brazil and the devastating earthquake that struck eastern Japan.

In the Asia-Pacific region, volunteerism is recognized as one of the most important pursuits of society. Governments have made efforts to encourage volunteering and to support every person's access to volunteer activities. The private sector promotes those goals by providing employees with opportunities for volunteering.

We welcome the work of United Nations Volunteers (UNV), which has engaged in the promotion of volunteering, in collaboration with Member States, and served as the focal point for the International Year in 2001 and during the tenth anniversary. In that regard, we appreciate UNV's efforts in co-hosting regional consultations and the global volunteer conferences for the tenth anniversary this year. We expect that UNV will contribute to the further promotion of volunteering. At the same time, we welcome the launch here today by UNV of the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*.

Volunteerism is an important activity in strengthening people-to-people relations. Participation in volunteer activities and the generous spirit inherent to volunteerism can create solidarity within society. Such activities should be promoted by the international community within a framework of social integration. It is also important to create a supportive environment for volunteers and to enhance their security and protection.

Finally, we would like at this meeting to stress the importance of discussion in the coming decade and beyond. In that regard, it is crucial to exchange views on ways in which volunteers can contribute towards peace and development, especially in the fields of peacebuilding and disaster prevention and management. Moreover, we should discuss promoting youth engagement in volunteering and leadership in such areas. We expect such discussions to be included among the recommendations of a report to be submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Mr. Meek (United States of America): Let me begin by thanking all volunteers worldwide for their service. In particular, United Nations Volunteers

(UNV) deserves our gratitude and recognition as one of the few international organizations that sends volunteers to work in some of the most dangerous situations in the world.

Today, as host country, the United States pays special tribute to those United Nations Volunteers who have lost their lives while helping others. They have touched many lives and made them better.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my Government's gratitude to American volunteers, who exemplify the quintessential American idea that, when we work together, we can change things, make things better and solve problems. Today, Americans are volunteering in great numbers, as we always have throughout the history of our nation. In 2010, more than 62 million American adults volunteered, donating more than 8 billion hours to serve those in need. I thank them for their hard work.

Today, the United States is not only the largest provider of development assistance dollars, but also the largest donor of voluntary development services through both citizen organizations and governmental agencies. We are proud to say that in September we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the United States Peace Corps, which has sent more than 200,000 Americans to 139 countries. Peace Corps volunteers have provided a wide range of development services and have forged lasting bonds with people in those countries.

The United States is grateful to all volunteers, now and in the past, who have given their time and energy to improve the world. We are a far better world community today because of their selfless service.

The Acting President: In accordance with resolution 66/67, of 5 December 2011, I now give the floor to the Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers programme, Ms. Flavia Pansieri.

Ms. Pansieri (United Nations Volunteers): At this very moment, as I have the honour of addressing the General Assembly and welcoming the volunteers in attendance today at this meeting commemorating the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, somewhere around the world a person with a disability is working on a computer to remotely assist a non-governmental organization (NGO) in a developing country to improve the content and presentation of its website; a young woman is carefully

sifting through, cleaning, cataloguing and compiling photos and other mementos carried away in the mud during the tsunami in Japan last March, to give them back to people who have lost everything but who can in that way maintain their memories; and a young man from Brazil is contributing to improving educational achievement in El Salvador, in a real example of South-South cooperation, to promote the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Over the past few weeks, countless individuals have facilitated citizen participation in their countries' elections by promoting civic education and the conduct of free and fair elections in various countries, some of which have only recently emerged from conflict.

Those individuals are all volunteers. They all engage, in their different areas of competence, in peace, humanitarian and development activities, often far away from their countries of origin and, at times, even in contexts of personal hardship and danger. Why do they do that? It is because they believe in human solidarity, personal commitment and the necessity to do all they can to make a positive difference in the world we live in.

Do we ever stop to consider how a world without volunteers would look? It would certainly be much poorer — because volunteers contribute with their activities to a country's gross domestic product, even if their contributions do not generally show up in national accounts. Yet their economic contribution is by no means the main one that volunteers make. Volunteers contribute to peace and social cohesion and to participation and social inclusion. More generally, they contribute to the well-being of a society by proving with their actions that there are other values driving human beings than simple self-interest — a desire to contribute to the common good, a commitment to fairness and justice and the recognition that their engagement is not a condescending act of charity but, rather, the expression of a relation of reciprocity, where both parties at the same time are recipients and providers of shared benefits.

It is only fair, therefore, to recognize those contributions to peace, development and global well-being, as this important commemorative meeting is now doing. It is equally important to commit continued support to people who, through their volunteering, light up our world with their commitment to those values, which are in fact values intrinsically enshrined in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter.

The year 2011, during which we marked the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, has been an important opportunity to underline and disseminate the values and results of volunteer work throughout the world. Allow me therefore very briefly to spend a few minutes, first, on the aim and objectives of the year; secondly, on the process followed to achieve broad-based participation; and, thirdly, on the way forward as we move towards what should become a decade of volunteerism during which this vital expression of humanity becomes an integral and well-recognized element of all forms of economic, social and environmental activity.

The primary goal of the tenth anniversary activities has been to shift the debate on volunteerism from it being perceived as a marginal factor to being recognized as a mainstream asset empowering all people to play a part in achieving the MDGs and promoting peace. As we planned our work in the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) in support of the tenth anniversary, our first consideration was to look at what we had learned since the International Year in 2001. As has been mentioned, the celebrations were then structured around the four pillars of recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion. Considerable progress has been recorded in all those fields since 2001; in fact, they have been reported and reflected in a number of General Assembly resolutions.

Yet a lot remains to be done. In particular, while there is an acknowledgement of the importance of volunteerism as a form of citizen engagement, its impact on peace and development as an intentional component of nationally owned capacity development programmes has still to be fully recognized. As a result, volunteer engagement becomes at times a welcome add-on to peace and development programmes, but an add-on nonetheless. Activities during the year have therefore been geared largely towards building the strong partnerships that we need, spanning beyond volunteers organizations, by bringing in key peace and development partners.

Let me now say a few words about the process that we follow. Acting as the focal point for the year, as UNV was mandated to do by resolution 63/153, UNV proceeded to consult and meet with the broadest possible range of partners from Governments, United Nations agencies, NGOs, including volunteer organizations, the private sector, academia and others.

We convened a first stakeholder consultation in October 2009, and a follow-up meeting in October 2010. In preparation for this year, we shared experiences and arrived at a common vision, drawing up a joint action plan and agreeing on task distribution. The vision statement and call to action developed in those consultations are available in the Hall today.

We also recognized that the more that the tenth anniversary was recognized and celebrated at the national level, the greater and longer term its impact would be. For that reason, and to support our partners, we established about 40 United Nations Volunteers positions to help coordinate the celebrations. We would like to thank our donors, who made that possible. But the most important source of inspiration for action remains learning from one another. That is why we organized a series of consultations of both global and regional character.

This year also marks the first European Year of Volunteers. It is for that reason that, with the support of the European Commission, we held a consultation in Bonn where European volunteer organizations and volunteer organizations from the South came together in a beautiful exchange that was not just North-South but also South-North.

Then we held five regional consultations — for Latin America and the Caribbean, in Ecuador; for the Arab States, transition countries in Europe and Central Asia, in Turkey; for Asia and the Pacific, in the Philippines; and finally, for both French- and English-speaking Africa, in Senegal. I can personally attest to the extremely engaged participation of all representatives of Governments, voluntary organizations, non-governmental organizations and so forth in all those meetings.

At the end of each consultation, we were eager to have concrete results. We came up with a series of recommendations on how to successfully promote volunteerism, which in turn were brought to the Global Volunteering Conference, which UNV organized in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The theme was “Volunteering for a sustainable future”. It looked at ways to mainstream volunteerism in peace, humanitarian and development programmes.

This year, like every year, the United Nations Department of Public Information organized its annual global conference of non-governmental organizations.

This year, the conference was hosted by Germany in Bonn under the theme “Sustainable societies; responsive citizens”. That dual theme allowed us to connect the dots between citizen participation and sustainable development — an agenda in which we are all heavily engaged in the lead-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012.

These activities were geared towards positioning volunteerism as an invaluable asset that can be used to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the MDGs and the goals beyond them. Recommendations that have been issued after all the consultations are also available outside this Hall in the orange folders.

But we also felt that, in addition to the consultations, it would have been important — indeed, essential — to stop and consider what we had learned so far and what we still need to work on for the future. That is why UNV engaged in the preparation of the first-ever *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, about which the Assembly will hear more in a few minutes, so I will not dwell on it.

We also have organized a multimedia exhibition in the lobby of the Secretariat building, entitled “Volunteers of the World”. I hope that participants here today will find the time this evening to come and see the faces and hear the voices of volunteers from all walks of life, telling about the difference they make in people's lives and the difference that volunteering makes in their own lives.

Now let me say a few words about the way forward. The year 2011 is already drawing to a close. There is much to celebrate this year in terms of achievements by the volunteer community, but we know that the hardest part still lies ahead. The guidance that the Assembly has provided through various resolutions, including the newly adopted resolution 66/67, now needs to be put into practice. The priorities are clear. We need to document what volunteers do and the results they produce; we need to do it better and more convincingly. We need to find new ways to measure the impact volunteering makes, not solely in monetary terms, but in terms of social cohesion and human values as well. We also need to be much more intentional in sharing that information with others so that we all can build on successful ideas and practices.

More importantly, and as also highlighted only last week at the International Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Republic of Korea, truly lasting development results can be achieved only through broad-based partnerships, not just between traditional development actors, but including all those who have a stake in progress and development. That primarily involves the people for whom development is intended and by whom development can be achieved. This year has shown us how much we can achieve together; how indispensable it is to encourage and support individuals to become actors in their own development; and ultimately, how much our individual destinies are all interlinked and dependent on the engagement of each one of us.

Please allow me also to note that this year is also UNV's fortieth birthday. We can see no better way to celebrate this milestone for UNV than to see volunteerism recognized as a real, sustainable and effective force for development. Ultimately, recognizing volunteerism — and the values of free will, engagement and solidarity that inspire it — will be the best confirmation for us that our efforts over these 40 years have borne fruit.

The Acting President: The Assembly has heard the last speaker for this meeting in accordance with resolution 66/67 of 5 December 2011.

We will now proceed to the launch of the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*. In accordance with resolution 66/67 of 5 December 2011, I now give the floor to the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Ms. Helen Clark.

Ms. Clark (United Nations Development Programme): I thank the President of the General Assembly for enabling us to launch the 2011 *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* here at the Assembly. Published by United Nations Volunteers (UNV), an associated programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Assembly will find that the *Report* is a comprehensive overview of volunteerism's many forms, revealing that volunteerism is universal in nature. The *Report's* messages are relevant for Member States and for all who seek to overcome global challenges, empower people to live better lives and achieve sustainable human development.

In the International Year of Volunteers in 2001, the General Assembly called on Governments to

recognize the potential of volunteerism to contribute to achieving sustainable development. It is timely to be reminded of that call now as we now prepare for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at Rio de Janeiro next year and as we approach the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and seek to sustain the progress made towards them.

This new *Report* from United Nations Volunteers asserts that the strong links between volunteerism and peace and human development are still not adequately recognized. Volunteerism, it says, is “one of the missing components of a development paradigm that still has economic growth at its core”. Conversely, we can say that the pursuit of human development and indeed of overall well-being will be enhanced by the contribution of volunteerism.

Its expression may vary from country to country or between one language and another, but the values that drive it are universal. Volunteers share the desire and motivation to contribute to the common good out of free will and in a spirit of solidarity, without expectation of material reward. The power that potential volunteers have to make a difference is remarkable.

As the new *Report* states, “[v]olunteerism in developed countries is the subject of extensive research, discussion and writing” and “is increasingly a part of the discourse on the kind of societies that we seek”. Yet the *Report* suggests that the same phenomenon in many developing countries has yet to be factored into strategic thinking about development and that doing so has the potential to enhance development.

The *Report* exposes a number of misperceptions about volunteerism, revealing that much of it takes place through small local groups and associations, and not through formal, structured, non-governmental organizations. It also reveals that volunteering happens across a wide range of sectors, not only in the narrow civil society sector. It involves rich and poor alike and harnesses the energy of the skilled and the unskilled. The *Report* reveals that men and women volunteer for around the same number of hours; that young people do volunteer — they are engaged; and that volunteering is now done online as well as face to face.

The *Report* provides many examples of volunteerism, and they are, without exception,

inspiring. Consider, for example, that since 1998, 20 million mostly local volunteers have been recruited under the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, and that together they have helped to immunize more than 2.5 billion children worldwide against polio; that volunteers from the Japanese Red Cross played an indispensable role in the aftermath of the terrible earthquake and tsunami earlier this year; that United Nations Volunteers make up a significant proportion of the staff of United Nations peacekeeping missions, representing as many as one third of the international civilian staff in the missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and elsewhere.

Fifty thousand women volunteers in Nepal have helped improve maternal health by 40 per cent over the past 17 years. I met representatives of these lady health volunteer workers there in the past two weeks, and know how much they do to improve the life of the mother and the prospects of the child. Then there is the initiative of a group of young people in Chile building houses for families living in slums. That has spread to 19 countries and led to a programme that mobilizes more than 50,000 young people every year to volunteer for that purpose.

At Johns Hopkins University, it is estimated that bringing together all the people who volunteered through voluntary organizations between 1995 and 2000, in only 36 countries, would total a number equivalent to that of the world's ninth most populated country, and that figure includes only those who chose to volunteer through organizations. The full scope of volunteerism is much larger and quite impossible to gauge at this point.

The motivation of volunteers everywhere is to do good. People act on their values and beliefs, and on their sense of community and solidarity. The universality of volunteering is an expression of our shared values and our common humanity. Leaders of countries and societies can and should choose to validate those contributions by recognizing them more visibly and more often, and by facilitating them.

As we strive now to accelerate progress to reach the Millennium Development Goals, the contributions of volunteers must be factored into the strategies, plans and debates that will influence and shape development priorities. Volunteerism should become an integral part of the way we do development. Where citizens are engaged and working to overcome their own

challenges, development and peace will be more enduring. The people closest to the problems are most likely to provide the solutions. People living with challenges best understand the specific circumstances surrounding them and can readily help identify ways to overcome them. By engaging and mobilizing individual citizens and civic groups, development efforts can be made more responsive and have greater impact.

For that to happen, Governments and local leaders should open up more space for volunteerism and establish channels that enable and encourage people to contribute. UNV and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are supporting countries' efforts to do that around the world. UNV itself has helped more than 20 countries to develop laws that promote volunteerism and uphold the rights of volunteers.

Volunteerism can help turn national strategies and development policies into meaningful and long-term change in communities and in the lives of people. Employing new and old technologies can help. In Rwanda, for example, the Government has significantly reduced maternal deaths in rural districts by equipping volunteers working with expectant mothers with mobile phones, enabling them to communicate with health-care professionals and seek assistance when it is needed. Rwanda is now considering extending this successful concept to agriculture and education.

The Internet is also increasingly being used to recruit new volunteers and match people with projects and organizations that need their support. Engineers Without Borders in Cameroon, for example, has brought together online volunteers to help explain complex techniques in user-friendly language accessible to local farmers.

Volunteerism, of course, should not and cannot replace the State's responsibility for seeing to it that reliable services are delivered, that investment is made in human development, and that responsive and accountable governance systems are established. These are also basic requirements for sustainable development. But volunteerism's impact can be complementary; it can make development efforts more effective, empower citizens, build their capabilities and strengthen social trust and cohesion. The *Report* comments on the impact that volunteering has on

individual well-being. By enhancing fulfilment, self-worth and dignity, it empowers people to use their knowledge and apply their talents.

The role of volunteerism in strengthening social cohesion cannot be overstated, as it can help troubled communities find a way back from the brink. One of many possible examples we have seen of this is in the Papua New Guinea highlands, where the women came together from across warring villages to learn from one another and work to improve local health and agricultural practices. By building trust between them and the sense of a common cause, they were then able to convince the men who were fighting that the women wanted peace, and thus helped to stop fighting between villages. This is one of countless known examples of the contributions of women to peace processes.

This tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers is a very good opportunity to be thinking about the contributions volunteers make to all our communities and the potential they have to do so much more for development. We need to understand better and acknowledge more the contributions made by volunteers, and facilitate their efforts. We in UNDP and our associated programme, United Nations Volunteers, look forward to working together with Member States in these endeavours. With these few words I am pleased to launch the 2011 *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*.

The Acting President: In accordance with resolution 66/67 of 5 December 2011, I now give the floor to the chief author of the *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, Mr. Robert Leigh.

Mr. Leigh: It was a little over a year and half ago that I was invited by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme to be the senior writer on the first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*. It has been a truly gargantuan effort to produce a document that captures, in barely 90 pages, the extraordinary phenomenon of voluntarism that makes such a vital contribution to virtually all areas of work of the United Nations, and that is found in almost every corner of the world. I would like to begin, if I may, by underlining that the *Report* would not have been possible without the generosity of large numbers of contributors from every region and every walk of life, many of whom volunteered their time in the cause.

So why do we need the *Report*, and why now? As we heard this morning on behalf of the President of the

General Assembly in his opening remarks, and just now from the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the significance of volunteerism has not yet been fully understood and articulated in the development debate, particularly in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. That is the case despite the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at the end of the International Year of Volunteers, in 2001, and in subsequent years, which encourage Governments, the United Nations system and other stakeholders to move forward with the volunteerism agenda.

That is not to deny that considerable progress has been made in many countries in the North and the South, but an enormous effort is still needed to realize the full potential of the many, many millions of people who every day volunteer to address key issues in the field of peace and development. The *Report* highlights the following general consideration set forth in General Assembly resolution 56/38 of 2001:

“Neglecting to factor volunteering into the design and implementation of policies could entail the risk of overlooking a valuable asset and undermine traditions of cooperation that bind communities together” (*resolution 56/38, annex, para. 6*).

So why now? On the one hand, at no point in history have we seen such massive social upheavals affecting most of the planet. On the other, never has the potential been greater for people to be primary actors rather than passive bystanders in their communities, as well as nationally and globally. Increasingly, people are able to affect the course of events that shape their destiny. Volunteerism is a primary way in which people get involved. There is an urgent need to recognize, nurture and promote it as a way to engender a global community living in harmony and characterized by justice, peace and well-being.

Before delving into the *Report*, I would like to underline two basic points. First, the *Report* focuses on connecting volunteerism with the peace and development work of the United Nations system. There are other aspects of volunteerism that the *Report* does not cover in any depth, or at all. It was felt, however, that the *Report* should be an integral part of the process started back in 1997, when the General Assembly proclaimed the International Year of Volunteers to promote awareness about the contribution of

volunteerism to economic and social development (resolution 52/17).

Secondly, while there are plenty of illustrative anecdotal stories — we have heard a few from the Administrator of UNDP this morning — the *Report* is based on robust empirical evidence. It draws on all of the research material available, with a high level of direct involvement of researchers and academics. That has been a real challenge since, as the *Report* stresses, volunteerism often goes unrecognized and therefore is under-researched, especially in the developing world. However, with the judicious use of proxy terms — such as community action, self-help initiatives, local mutual aid groups, social activism and so on — we believe that we have been able to capture the essence of the nature and power of volunteerism in its diverse forms.

Turning now to some of the significant features of the *Report*, we start by underlining that volunteerism is a very old tradition. It is a basic expression of human relationships that are deeply rooted in long-standing beliefs and community practices in every region. It is about people's desire to participate in their societies and to feel that they matter to others. It is about motivation that goes beyond self-interest. In Africa, it is *harambee* and *ubuntu*; in Latin America it is *minga* and *mutirão*; in Asia it is *shramadana*, *gotong royong* and *bayanihan*; in the Arab region it is *tatawa'a* and *naffir*; in the United States it is neighbouring and barn-raising; and in the United Kingdom, it is active citizenship. The act of volunteering is well-known throughout the world, even if the word as such is not. While ancient in origin, with its central values of solidarity and feelings of connectedness with others, the message that we want to convey in the *Report* is that volunteerism in its many forms is as vibrant and as contemporary as ever.

The *Report* begins by examining the values that underpin volunteerism. We look at the various ways volunteerism is manifested, and we address the often challenging task of measurement. We also examine some of the new opportunities to volunteer that have emerged in recent times.

Technological developments are opening up spaces for people to volunteer that have no parallel in history. People can relate to one another globally and more rapidly than ever before. The interest of the private sector in supporting volunteerism in the

workforce is a growing feature of corporate social responsibility. We are seeing the diversification of forms of international volunteering associated with expanded opportunities for travel, combined with more leisure time for some, as well as the growth of volunteering by diaspora communities.

Four core chapters of the *Report* focus on how volunteerism contributes to areas of key concern to the United Nations. We first look at the ways people engage in volunteerism to achieve sustainable livelihoods. We then consider how volunteerism serves as a pathway to inclusion for those members of the population that feel excluded on the grounds of, for example, age, gender and disability. We go on to consider how, through volunteer action, people exposed to disasters are able to manage the risks associated with such events, not only at the response stage but also in the preparation, preparedness and recovery stages. Finally, we look at the diverse ways in which local populations engage in volunteerism to prevent and recover from violent conflict.

What is clear from the studies quoted and the examples provided is that local people make a vital contribution through volunteer action in each of those fields, and that the common threads running through such actions are such values as solidarity and cooperation. What also comes through clearly is the reciprocal nature of the volunteer act, with both the giver and receiver benefiting, as Flavia Pansieri pointed out in her statement this morning. This flies in the face of the oft-encountered stereotypical view of volunteerism as being only a gift from those who are better off to those who are worse off.

The *Report* argues for a move away from treating volunteerism as a charitable act based purely on altruism and towards a position that accepts a mix of motivations. Those include a desire to participate, to contribute to meeting the needs of others or a cause and to derive some benefit oneself in the process. Making that conceptual leap from a gift relationship to a reciprocal relationship is the first step in gaining a true understanding of the dynamics of volunteer action, and therefore being able to develop meaningful and supportive strategies.

The *Report* also offers a word of warning. Volunteerism is not a panacea. It should not absolve Governments and other actors of their responsibilities. Moreover, supporting volunteer action is not free of

cost. Budgets are needed to provide infrastructure, which may include research, training, transportation, efforts to build management capacity and the introduction of legal and fiscal provisions. While sympathetic to the notion that too much intervention can destroy the very motivations that drive people to volunteer, the *Report* does not subscribe to the purist view that Governments should adopt a hands-off approach. Governments and other stakeholders have important roles to play in ensuring an environment conducive for volunteerism to flourish.

As the *Report* was evolving, it became clear that there were important spin-offs from volunteerism that were not captured by focusing only on traditional development categories. We were seeing studies pointing to volunteerism's significant impact on the well-being of individuals and their communities. Interest in well-being as a part of the development equation is not new. There is a quote in the *Report* of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld back in 1975 that refers to development being a value-loaded, cultural process that encompasses well-being.

But there does now appear to be real interest and intent in many developed and developing countries about quality-of-life issues. That is relevant in the context of poverty. The *Report* stresses that the income-poor are not defined by their poverty alone. They strive to achieve well-being, in the sense of "feeling good and doing well both physically and emotionally" for themselves and for their communities.

Evidence is growing that income-poor people have notions of well-being that are as vivid and valid as those living in better economic circumstances. Bhutan showed leadership in its adoption some time ago of gross national happiness as a fundamental goal. Bolivia and Ecuador have placed at the centre of their constitutions the notion of "*buen vivir*" or "living well", in the sense of harmonious coexistence among their populations and with the environment. China, Thailand, Canada, the United Kingdom and other countries are experimenting with well-being and happiness indexes. Well-being is central to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development global project on measuring the progress of societies.

Underlying these and other initiatives is the sense that gross domestic product alone fails to capture many factors that contribute to human well-being and

societal progress. That is the message of the influential 2009 Stiglitz Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress quoted in the *Report*. It argues that what we measure shapes what we collectively strive to pursue, and that what we collectively strive to pursue determines what we measure.

Where does volunteerism come in? In the *Report*, we discuss one ground-breaking multi-stakeholder study aimed at improving understanding of well-being in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand. Some of the key areas identified by people as impacting on their well-being were the scope to participate and to take effective actions, make positive social connections, and have a sense of self-worth. In Bangladesh, being benevolent and altruistic led to well-being. In Ethiopia, it was giving advice and resolving disputes. In Peru and Thailand, it was about helping one another.

We demonstrate in the *Report* the ways in which volunteerism is one important channel for people to interact, to engage and to feel the sense of belonging that is at the core of well-being. It is not only at the level of the individual that volunteer action impacts on well-being. We report that communities with high levels of volunteerism are better able to build up collective resilience to withstand the shocks and stresses to which the income-poor are particularly exposed.

In our conclusions, we state that while recognition of volunteerism has been growing in recent times, especially since the International Year of Volunteers in 2001, the phenomenon is still misconstrued and undervalued. Misperceptions about the nature and contribution of volunteerism abound, despite contradictory evidence from empirical studies cited in the *Report*. We describe aspects of the paradigm shift that is needed if the true role of volunteerism is to be properly appreciated.

Elements of what the *Report* refers to as a "dominant paradigm" include, for example, the notion that most volunteering takes place through formal non-governmental organizations, usually in the developed world. In fact, people also engage in volunteerism through public and private-sector organizations, as well as informally through local groups. They also volunteer spontaneously outside any formal or informal structure. Volunteerism, as I

mentioned, thrives in the developing world, even if the terminologies may not be familiar everywhere.

Another misperception highlighted in the *Report* is that volunteerism is the preserve of the well-off and educated. Yet research points clearly to the fact that people at all levels volunteer. Indeed, volunteer action is a vital resource in poor communities. Women are often perceived as making up the bulk of volunteers, yet empirical studies point to there being a fairly balanced female/male participation in volunteerism, although with some pronounced gender bias as regards the different areas in which women and men volunteer.

Yet another misperception raised in the *Report* relates to the view that young people are increasingly disaffected from volunteering and are turning to more materialistic and self-centred activities. In fact, there is ample evidence that young people the world over are today very much engaged, but they are increasingly choosing less formal channels to volunteer, often related to new technologies.

The *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* aims to dispel those and other misperceptions and to raise levels of awareness as to what volunteerism is and what it contributes. That is critical, we argue, to bringing volunteer action to the fore as a powerful and universal renewable asset that needs urgently to be incorporated into current mainstream policies and programmes for peace, and into the emerging development architecture that takes well-being into account. The *Report* complements the extensive list of recommendations included in successive General Assembly resolutions since 2001 with respect to the actions that Governments, the United Nations system and other stakeholders can take to enhance the environment within which volunteerism can flourish.

In its concluding chapter, the *Report* argues for urgent and focused action to bring volunteerism into the mainstream. The end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) cycle is approaching and considerable effort is needed to sustain progress where it is being achieved, and to overcome obstacles where they have been identified. Support for volunteerism can help get the MDGs on track. We also reflect on discussions taking place in various forums as regards options for the development architecture in the post-2015 period, building on what has been achieved so far.

The *Report* is optimistic that volunteerism will assume a higher profile as societal cohesion and quality of life issues come closer to centre stage. The concluding words of the *Report* are that the moment has come to ensure that volunteerism is an integral part of any new development consensus. We very much hope that with the publication of the *Report*, one of our planet's most universal assets, the generosity of its people, will be properly recognized and drawn upon to help meet the challenges.

I would like to end by recognizing the vision and the courage of UNV's Executive Coordinator, Flavia Pansieri, in taking up the challenge of commissioning the *Report* in the first place. I would also like to extend my appreciation to UNV for having provided me the opportunity to lead the writing process, and to the entire *Report* team and many UNV and other colleagues, including many volunteers, whose hard work and dedication ensured that the *Report* came together in the way it has, and on time.

The Acting President: In accordance with resolution 66/67 of 5 December 2011, I now give the floor to the United Nations Volunteer in Timor-Leste.

Ms. Fujita: First of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to everyone who gave me this great opportunity to speak before the General Assembly for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers. My name is Shoko Fujita and I work as a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) Child Protection Officer with UNICEF Timor-Leste.

About six months ago, I left Japan for Timor-Leste. Since then, every moment has brought me new surprises and discoveries, particularly when I have travelled to districts and met with children there. At the same time, I have continued asking myself what I can do to make a difference to children's lives in Timor-Leste. Working as a Volunteer has given me the chance to learn and grow every day.

Before coming to Timor-Leste, I worked with the Japan Committee for UNICEF for almost five years. Every time I read and heard about the story of children who were victimized by sexual abuse and exploitation in developing countries, it gave me a sense of urgency to do something to protect them from such violence. Thus, I decided to pursue the opportunity to make use of my knowledge and to work much closer to children on the ground.

I joined UNV as part of the Hiroshima Peacebuilders Center Program for Human Resource Development in Asia for Peacebuilding, which is commissioned by the Japanese Ministry for Foreign Affairs to develop the human resources of civilian peacebuilders. There are 15 Japanese participants and 15 of other nationalities. Most of them are now actively working with different United Nations agencies in different countries. They have high aspirations and a strong will to work as volunteers, and having such colleagues is highly motivating and encouraging to me.

In Timor-Leste, the Government has a strong commitment to protecting and promoting children's rights at the national and district levels. For example, in every district there is a Vulnerable Persons Unit, under the National Police of Timor-Leste, to investigate specific cases involving child and female victims. In addition, with the support of UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Solidarity has placed Child Protection Officers in each district.

Despite such efforts, many children in Timor-Leste are still vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. As a UNV Child Protection Officer, I work first of all on reclassifying crimes based on the penal code and the development of common database tools to register cases involving children. That is to promote better coordination among child protection actors, including police and Child Protection Officers, by establishing a case-tracking system.

Secondly, to address the issue of violence against children, particularly sexual abuse, I have started preparing a nationwide advocacy campaign for next year. Sexually abused children often have difficulty talking about what has happened to them, due to its sensitive nature. I expect that the advocacy campaign to stop violence against children will not only raise awareness in communities but also promote awareness among children themselves in order to encourage child victims to report incidents to the police or child-protection actors and to let them know that they have the right to access social and legal services.

In conducting activities, I have learned that the most important thing is partnership with people and communities, which is really at the heart of volunteerism. One good example, which clearly illustrates the importance of community participation, was an event celebrating the World Day of Prayer and

Action for Children held on 20 November. The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children is a global initiative to mobilize religious communities to work together for the welfare of children. The event included a mass celebrated by the Bishop of the Diocese of Dili to deliver the message that violence against children must stop.

Many children in Timor-Leste experience violent disciplining at home, such as being beaten and slapped. We want to change those practices, and involving the Bishop of Dili and faith-based organizations has had a great impact, causing social and behavioural changes in communities. Also, through the friendly participation of the National Commission for the Rights of the Child and international and local non-governmental organizations, the event successfully brought together the President of Timor-Leste and 500 children and young people.

I was really impressed by the ability of the Timorese people to make things happen, and it made me realize that what I can do as a Volunteer is to facilitate people's participation in promoting the well-being of children in Timor-Leste. I am one of more than 200 Volunteers currently serving in Timor-Leste, addressing various development challenges through community-based activities. The spirit of volunteerism has suddenly spilled out into the communities of Timor-Leste.

Now at the halfway point of my assignment as a United Nations Volunteer, at the beginning of next year I am going to implement a pilot campaign in the Viqueque district to raise awareness about violence against children. I am looking forward to visiting and working with people in the communities.

Finally, I would like to express yet again my gratitude to the United Nations Volunteers programme, UNICEF, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Japan and the people and communities of Timor-Leste.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 66/67 of 5 December 2011, I now give the floor to Mr. Flavio Ribeiro, United Nations Volunteer in El Salvador.

Mr. Ribeiro: First of all, I would like to say that I am very pleased and glad to be here. My name is Flavio Lopes Ribeiro, and I am coordinating the Brazilian team of United Nations Volunteers in El Salvador. We are implementing a disaster risk

reduction and food security programme in a high-risk area, which will benefit three communities and directly help to improve the lives of more than 1,000 families. Together with the local Government and schools, we are involving the whole community and local non-governmental organizations in the production of knowledge products, schools, community gardens and climate change adaptations through volunteer actions.

The importance of our work became really evident one month after we arrived in El Salvador, when we watched tropical storm 12E devastate the country. At that time, President Mauricio Funes Cartagena had declared a state of emergency. Instead of just waiting for that chaotic moment to end, we decided to offer ourselves as volunteers to the Civil Protection Committee, as we have some expertise in disaster risk reduction and food security. We were accepted by the local emergency team and started to work with them.

Though we had other commitments elsewhere, we took the time to work as volunteers and help in whatever way was needed. We were a team of four volunteers. Our education expert worked on organizing the transformation of schools into temporary shelters. Our nutritionist worked making basic baskets for the sheltered families. Our disaster risk reduction specialist climbed the local volcano to analyse the risks of a landslide. I worked on the assessment of losses and damages in rural areas and helped the Committee with its final report to the Government. Our volunteer work was recognized in a public event last week, and we received a certificate of gratitude from the mayor of San Vicente, where we live.

But why do we do that? What are our motivations to be volunteers and work in high-risk areas? I cannot answer that question on behalf of all volunteers in the world, but I am pretty sure that some of them will recognize themselves in my words.

First of all, I have a deep commitment with myself to always follow my vocation and express my personal abilities, based on human values. That commitment keeps me from doing anything just for money, power or physical assets. What I do for a living must always be in line with what I am. Many people thought I was crazy and that I was going to be poor and unsuccessful in my life, but it turned out to be the

opposite, and here I am in the General Assembly of the United Nations. Here I am working to relieve human suffering, in close contact with people who are deprived of food, who suffer violence, prejudice and poverty. But when we are connected by spiritual and human values, a true adventure begins and the joy of being ourselves and using our ability to help other people always leads us to amazing experiences.

That is what volunteers do. We donate our energy and personal abilities as a small gift to the world, and what we receive back is beyond words. Unfortunately, I cannot describe the joy that fills my soul and motivates me even more to work in the relief of human suffering, but I can assure everyone that it is part of human nature, and everyone here knows what I am talking about, since all who are here today are volunteers on some level in their own lives.

Another reason to work as a volunteer is because I have an expansive concept of the home and family. In the same way as I work at home fixing and cleaning to make it a better place for me and my family to live without expecting money or any recognition in return, I work in the world. That is because I think of the whole world as my own home and all human beings as my family.

Even though I recognize the cultural and physical differences among us, I know that, deep inside, we have much more in common than those shallow and external differences. As human beings, we are able to make personal connections and forge bonds of love with all other human beings. It may be easier to make that personal connection with some and more difficult with others, but is not a family like that? We sometimes disagree because we want the same things or opposite things, but is that not how we learn to share with and respect our brothers?

In short, I am a volunteer because I want a better world, and I know that we can only achieve it together. A better world for me is not a mansion with fancy cars in the garage, but a world free of poverty, hunger and violence. I will keep working hard, with my brothers and sisters, until I reach that objective. I hope that inspiring people all around the world can help us to work together for a common good.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.