



United Nations Volunteers

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First group of UNITEs Volunteers fielded in developing countries to help bridge the digital divide

"UNITEs will train groups in developing countries in the uses and opportunities of information technology, and stimulate the creation of additional digital corps in the North and South. We are currently exploring external sources of funding to support UNITEs. ... I encourage Member States to review their policies and arrangements in this area, to make sure that they are not denying their people the opportunities offered by the digital revolution." -- *UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his Millennium Report*

Six months after UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced his vision for a high tech volunteer corps in the UN's Millennium Report, the initiative has hit the ground running. Twenty-three professionals have now taken up assignments as UNITEs Volunteers in developing countries.

The project, carried out through the work of volunteers, aims to bridge the digital divide by helping people in developing countries make practical use of information and communications technology (ICT). The United Nations Volunteers programme is the facilitating and coordinating agency for UNITEs, the United Nations Information Technology Service. Prior to the start of the 6-8 September UN Millennium Summit in New York -- the largest-ever gathering of world leaders -- 11 international and 12 national UNITEs Volunteers started sharing their skills in 10 countries.

These initial volunteers serving through UNITEs are posted in Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Ecuador, India, Jordan, Namibia, South Africa and Tanzania. Six additional posts are in the pipeline for Bhutan, Jordan and Mongolia. Many of these UNITEs Volunteers come from the South, either working at home or abroad. The programme encourages nationals of developing countries to become volunteers.

The first UNITEs Volunteer post, filled by an Indian national, began on 1 August. In collaboration with the Orissa state government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a new project was launched in the state to use ICT to bolster rehabilitation efforts in the wake of last year's devastating Super Cyclone. A technical specialist will work with seven national ICT facilitators in setting up small information units along the coastline, where agencies carrying out rehabilitation activities can benefit from information on the Internet and local networks.

A number of online volunteering assignments have also been targeted under the UNITEs umbrella. These are provided via the Netaid.org Online Volunteering service (<http://app.netaid.org/OV>), which is managed by UNV.

Institutions from both the South and the North expressing interest in helping develop the UNITEs initiative include governments, civil society, the private sector, development agencies and academia. Read about the institutions already contributing to the development of UNITEs at: <http://www.unites.org/misc/links.html>.

Read more detailed information about the first UNITEs assignments at: <http://www.unites.org/assign/index.html>.

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In FACT: Humanitarian Relief

United Nations Volunteer specialists work in humanitarian relief and with refugees to help bring about sustainable, post-crisis development. UN Volunteers assist local populations during crises and in humanitarian situations, actively promote peace-building and post-crisis reconstruction and work directly with and for the people as human rights monitors.

UN Volunteers take up a variety of functions under the umbrella of humanitarian assistance. They work as food aid monitors, field officers, civilian camp officers, logisticians, procurement specialists, storekeepers, warehouse managers, material management specialists, emergency administrative assistants, transport coordinators and radio technicians. Recently, UN Volunteers have supported humanitarian activities in war-torn countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Kosovo, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, Timor (East and West), Uganda and the former Yugoslavia. A good example illustrating UNVs in action is Kosovo.

Kosovo (1999-present)

Following drawn-out civil strife and weeks of air strikes in mid-1999, Kosovars faced the difficult task of rebuilding their lives. Many had lost loved ones and everything else they cherished. Institutions, law and order and basic infrastructure were left in shambles. UN Volunteers accompanied the people on their first steps down a long road to recovery. Attached to the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which requested the support of 200 international specialists, they issued identity papers and rebuilt houses. Mobilizing with the people, UNVs helped to have rubbish removed from streets, roads repaired and trees planted. Through these EU-funded activities, 45,000 Kosovars have found a job. For the thousands without shelter who had to start from scratch as refugees, UNVs organized tents, food and medical care. This assistance in the camps set up by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was part of the UNV's work with a number of humanitarian agencies in Kosovo. Some 700 UN Volunteers worked in Kosovo during 2000 in the areas of reconstruction and registration of the population.

Partner Agencies

The main agencies in which UN Volunteers have been deployed in the context of emergency humanitarian assistance activities are: United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Funding

Funding sources include: UN Agencies, full funding from governments (e.g. Belgium, Finland and Spain), financial contributions from the Governments of Japan and Germany and Argentina's support for the UNV/White Helmet Volunteers, who work in rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. Special funding modalities include the UNV/WFP Rapid Deployment Facility for effective, timely use of resources in emergency situations.

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In FACT: Peace Operations

More than 4,000 United Nations Volunteers recruited and fielded by the UNV programme have served in 19 different peacekeeping operations since 1992. They take up assignments in over 120 professional categories in support of activities of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). About 1,500 UN Volunteers have been assigned to new missions in East Timor, Kosovo and Sierra Leone in the last 18 months alone. They work in civil administration, electoral affairs, human rights and carry out administrative or support roles.

The average UN Volunteer attached to a UN peacekeeping mission is 37 years old with 10 years of work experience in respective professions. These UNVs represent 135 nationalities, and 60 per cent of them come from developing countries. Some 28 per cent are women. UN Volunteers have assisted peacekeeping missions in: Liberia, Somalia, Mozambique, South Africa, former-Yugoslavia (two missions) Guatemala, Rwanda, Haiti (three missions), Angola (two missions), Central African Republic, Iraq, East Timor (two missions), Kosovo, and most recently, Sierra Leone. UN Volunteers are active in the following ongoing peace operations:

East Timor (1999-present)

Within a six-week notice period, in June 1999, the UNV programme fielded 481 district electoral officers and 19 medical personnel to assist the United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) organize and implement the August 1999 popular consultation. Serving at the forefront, and as the largest category of civilian UN personnel, the volunteers performed the functions of voter registration for 451,000 people, observation of the campaign process, civic education, observation of the ballot and counting. Following the crisis in East Timor immediately after the popular consultation, all UN personnel, including the volunteers, were evacuated to Australia. In October 1999, approximately 70 of them returned to serve at the District level in the capacity of Civil Affairs Officers, bridging the gap between the transformation of UNAMET into UNTAET. More than 400 UN Volunteers are currently serving the UNTAET mission. UNV has been asked to field professionals to support 40 different components of the mission and serve in some 150 different substantive and technical support functions. An additional 328 UN Volunteers are currently planned and budgeted for 2001 to provide support to the civic registration and electoral processes.

Kosovo (1999-present)

In September 1999, the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) requested 200 UN Volunteers to serve as civil affairs officers with UNMIK's Department of Civil Affairs and Public Administration. An additional 100 UN Volunteers in the same category were requested in February 2000. Subsequently, another amendment was signed in March 2000 to bring an additional 400 UNV registration supervisors to organize, supervise and implement the entire Kosovo electoral registration process under a Joint Registration Task Force (JRT) of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Ahead of the registration exercise, which was completed in late July, UNV fielded more than 300 specially recruited volunteers from 80 different nationalities over a three-week period last April. Fifty-one UNVs worked as core supervisors and dissemination officers with OSCE to prepare the municipal elections in Kosovo on 29 October. An additional 12 former JRT enquiry officers are carrying out spot-checks on the voter's lists. Currently there are more than 400 serving UN Volunteers working to bring about reconstruction of Kosovo.

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In FACT: Peace Operations

Sierra Leone (2000-present)

UNV's latest contribution to DPKO field operations is its participation since earlier this year in the UN Observation Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL). A total of 72 UN Volunteers were deployed to complement the international staffing requirements in the areas of Civil Affairs and technical support. Due to recent events, most volunteers, like other international staff, were evacuated. As of mid May, all of them were back in Sierra Leone.

Guatemala (1994-present)

From the outset of the MINUGUA mission and its subsequent spin-off operations (e.g., the Truth Verification Commission), through to today, the UNV Programme has maintained more than 100 permanent UN Volunteers serving largely in substantive positions, such as human rights officers and legal affairs officers.

Haiti (1995-present)

Under the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) and currently United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti (MIPONUH), a total of 29 UN Volunteers served to support the administrative functions of the mission. The volunteers provided specialized services in communications, air operations and flight safety, engineering, logistics, etc. Under the International Civilian Mission to Haiti (MICIVIH), an additional 30 volunteers (Human Rights Observers) were fielded in early 1995. While most of them completed their assignments in February 1996, six Volunteers continue to serve with the new UN mission to Haiti, MICAH.

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