

## IYV 2001 and Its Impact on Inter-governmental Legislation

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In his report to the United Nations General Assembly on the outcome of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001<sup>1</sup>, UN Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan declared that the Year had been successful by any account. As indicators of this success, he highlighted the 123 National Committees and scores of local, regional and state committees formed in every corner of the globe, as well as the nine million hits on the official IYV web site. He emphasized the heightened recognition of volunteerism, the marked improvements in legislative frameworks and national and local infrastructure for voluntary action, and the networks established among and between the sectors.

These are some of the achievements, but what about longer term impact? While it is clearly too early to have a comprehensive idea of the difference the Year has made, we can say that there is now a much better understanding of the concept of volunteering and the connections between its various expressions, including traditional forms of mutual aid and civic engagement and more modern forms of volunteer service and activism. Global trends towards greater self-help, decentralization, participatory democracy and networking are all affecting civic participation, and volunteering is one defining characteristic.

There is also a better understanding of the diverse range of stakeholders involved, including government agencies, non-governmental

organizations, community groups, private companies, academia and the media. As the reciprocal relationships that lie at the roots of voluntary action are better appreciated, the issue of exclusion of certain population groups from access to opportunities to engage in volunteerism is now coming to the fore.

One significant impact of the Year is a growing recognition by governments of the role and contribution of voluntary action and the desirability, and feasibility, of adopting strategic approaches to enhancing the environment for such action to flourish. One convincing indicator of this recognition is the inclusion of voluntary action in statements and declarations of various inter-governmental fora<sup>2</sup>. The UN World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: Achieving Social Development for all in a Globalizing World, held in Geneva in June 2000, took up the theme of volunteering as a new dimension in fighting exclusion. The Third UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) held in Brussels in May 2001 encouraged, on the one hand, LDCs to build on traditions of voluntary mutual aid to enhance the effectiveness of social sector investment and, on the other, development partners to include voluntary action in policies and measures to strengthen LDCs. The Habitat+5 conference, held in Istanbul in June 2001, acknowledged the contribution of volunteerism to human settlements. The World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid

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in April 2002, recognized the opportunity volunteering provides to older people to continue participating actively in the life of their communities, and called for the removal of barriers to such participation. The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in August 2002, for the first time at an Earth Summit conference, made explicit the linkage between sustainable development and the role of volunteer groups.

In addition to the above "thematic" inter-governmental resolutions adopted at special sessions of the General Assembly, there have also been two landmark resolutions adopted during the regular sessions of the General Assembly in 2001 and 2002 respectively. The first, *Res/A/56/38* deals with ways that governments and the UN system can support volunteering and the second, *Res/A/57/130*, concerns the outcome and follow-up to IYV 2001.

Inter-governmental resolutions have some important implications.

- First, securing wording on volunteerism in a resolution generally calls for clear articulation of positions, and often intense and lengthy negotiations both at national level and international levels, to arrive at an appropriate final text. The process of awareness-raising around the subject of volunteerism is in itself desirable for a subject area which is often invisible to policy makers.
- Second, while not legally binding, resolutions do carry the weight and moral authority of the world community.
- Third, resolutions help to contextualize volunteerism within the framework of some of the major issues of our times, and provide indications as to general directions to take.
- Fourth, resolutions provide opportunities for civil society groups to hold their governments accountable to text to which they have agreed.

The last in the series of General Assembly resolutions was *Res/A/57/130* on the Follow-up to IYV 2001. Tabled by the Government of Brazil and adopted on 26 November 2002 with co-sponsorship of 142 Member States, this resolution brought to a close a five-year cycle which began in 1997 with the designa-

tion of 2001 as IYV. Through this resolution governments welcomed the successful observance of IYV 2001, and in so doing, recognized the important role of volunteering in helping to achieve the development goals and objectives set in the Millennium Declaration and other major UN conferences.

The resolution encourages an expansion of networking among all stakeholders, including governments and civil society organizations, in support of such areas as volunteer-related research, information dissemination, and training. It encourages governments to enact enabling legislation supportive of volunteerism, and renews calls for implementation of the various actions that can lead to the promotion of volunteering which were outlined in the annex to earlier mentioned *Res/A/56/38*. The social dimensions of volunteering have long been accepted and recognized. This resolution raises the economic significance of volunteering as an additional benefit to be taken into account. It also stresses the need for an inclusive approach to volunteering which involves and benefits all parts of society, including more disadvantaged groups.

Some of the specific proposals include focusing public awareness campaigns around International Volunteer Day—which since 1985, occurs annually on December 5—on the follow-up to IYV 2001 with the active involvement of civil society. The private sector is also invited to support volunteerism through expanding corporate volunteering. As the focal point for volunteering in the UN, the UN Volunteers are invited to develop a global Internet volunteer resource to enhance network capabilities and expand information, knowledge and resource management, and all stakeholders are encouraged to contribute. There is a call to bodies of the UN system to integrate volunteerism into their policies and programmes and the UN Secretary General is requested to factor volunteer contributions into his reports on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and other major UN conferences. The UN Secretary General is required to report back to the General Assembly in 2005 on the implementation of *Res/A/57/130*.

An enormous amount of energy was expended, and creativity displayed, in the period leading up to IYV 2001 and during the Year itself. While there are still many issues that the volunteer movement needs to address, there now exists, in many parts of the world, an enhanced perception of volunteering as a powerful and vibrant force that can be harnessed to meet many of the challenges of our times. Indeed, as the UN Secretary General has pointed out, by "...neglecting to factor volunteering into the design and implementation of policies, there is a risk of overlooking a valuable asset and undermining traditions of cooperation that bind communities together."

Clearly, efforts on the part of governments to improve the well-being of billions of citizens can only complement what actions, individually and collectively, are taken by those very same citizens, often on a voluntary basis. A relationship between government and civil society based on mutual trust and respect, one where the willingness of people to volunteer is not exploited, and the responsibility of the State is not curtailed, needs to be nurtured. The adoption of resolutions by the international community described in this article are but a first step in the evolution of a more pro-active, intentional approach on the part of governments towards promoting volunteering. A concerted effort is now called for on the part of government and civil society, and other stakeholders, to work together to build on commitments made, with a view to positively affecting both the levels and impact voluntary participation makes to the well-being of societies.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>International Year of Volunteers: outcomes and future perspectives: Report of the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly, 24 September 2002

<sup>2</sup>Information on recent inter-governmental legislation on volunteering can be found at [www.worldvolunteerweb.org](http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org)



# General Assembly

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Agenda item 98

## Resolution adopted by the General Assembly

[without reference to a Main Committee (A/57/L.8 and Add.1)]

### 57/106. Follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers

*The General Assembly,*

*Recalling* its resolution 40/212 of 17 December 1985, in which it invited Governments to observe annually, on 5 December, an International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development,

*Recalling also* its resolution 52/17 of 20 November 1997, in which it proclaimed the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers, and its resolution 55/57 of 4 December 2000 on the observance of the International Year of Volunteers,

*Recalling further and reaffirming* its resolution 56/38 of 5 December 2001, which lays down recommendations for ways in which Governments and the United Nations system could support volunteering,

*Recognizing* the valuable contribution of volunteering, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, to economic and social development, benefiting society at large, communities and the individual volunteer,

*Recognizing also* that volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at, inter alia, such areas as poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, disaster prevention and management and social integration and, in particular, overcoming social exclusion and discrimination,

*Recognizing further* that volunteering, particularly at the community level, will help to achieve the development goals and objectives set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration<sup>1</sup> and at other major United Nations conferences, summits, special sessions and their follow-up meetings,

*Noting with appreciation* the efforts to increase awareness of volunteerism through global information sharing and education, including efforts to develop an effective network for volunteers through, inter alia, the International Year of Volunteers web site<sup>2</sup> and linked national sites,

<sup>1</sup> See resolution 55/2.

<sup>2</sup> [www.iyv2001.org](http://www.iyv2001.org).

*Acknowledging* the existing contribution of the organizations of the United Nations system to supporting volunteering, including the work of United Nations Volunteers around the world,

*Bearing in mind* the need for an integrated and coordinated follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers to be pursued in the relevant parts of the United Nations system,

1. *Welcomes* the report of the Secretary-General on the outcome of and follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers, 2001;<sup>3</sup>

2. *Welcomes also* the successful observance of the International Year of Volunteers, 2001, with the support of one hundred and twenty-three national International Year of Volunteers committees and the many regional and city International Year of Volunteers committees with broad representation from Governments, international organizations, civil society, including non-governmental organizations, as well as the private sector, recognizes the contribution of States and civil society organizations and alliances at the international, regional, national and local levels to such a success, and encourages this network to be maintained and expanded, as appropriate, with a view to further engaging all stakeholders, undertaking volunteer-related research, disseminating information and experiences, providing preparation and training to volunteers, particularly from developing countries, and forging new partnerships at all levels;

3. *Welcomes further* the various developments of policies and the enactment of legislations for the growth and development of volunteerism taken up as a result of the international year, and recommends that Governments continue to acknowledge the valuable role of volunteers and further support voluntary activities, including through appropriate policies and enabling legislation;

4. *Calls upon* Governments and the United Nations system to implement further the recommendations contained in the annex to its resolution 56/38, bearing in mind the economic significance of volunteering;

5. *Calls upon* Governments, with the active support of the media, civil society and the private sector, to observe 5 December, International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development, and to include activities focused on following up on the achievements of the International Year of Volunteers in its public awareness-raising campaigns;

6. *Reaffirms* the need to recognize and promote all forms of volunteerism as an issue that involves and benefits all segments of society, including children, young persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, minorities and immigrants and those who remain excluded for social or economic reasons;

7. *Invites* all stakeholders, especially from the private sector community and from private foundations, to support volunteerism as a strategic tool to enhance economic and social development, including by expanding corporate volunteering;

8. *Welcomes* the work of the United Nations Volunteers, as the focal point for the International Year of Volunteers, as well as their role in the preparations and implementation of the Year, and requests them to continue their efforts, together with other stakeholders, to raise awareness of volunteerism, increase reference and

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<sup>3</sup> A/57/352.

networking resources available and provide technical cooperation to developing countries, upon their request, in the field of volunteerism;

9. *Invites* the United Nations Volunteers to develop a global Internet volunteer resource based on the International Year of Volunteers web site<sup>2</sup> and on national web sites with a view to enhancing network capabilities and to expanding information, knowledge and resource management, and encourages Governments and all stakeholders, in particular the private sector, to contribute on a voluntary basis to this initiative;

10. *Calls* for the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to integrate volunteerism in its various forms into their policies, programmes and reports, and encourages the recognition and inclusion of volunteer contributions in future United Nations and other relevant international conferences, such as the World Summit on the Information Society;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General to factor such contributions made by volunteers in his reports on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration<sup>1</sup> and of other major United Nations conferences, summits, special sessions and their follow-up meetings;

12. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to take measures, in particular within the mandates and the existing resources of the United Nations Volunteers and the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, to ensure that the potential of the International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development in follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers is fully realized;

13. *Further requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session on the implementation of the present resolution under the item entitled "Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family".

*61st plenary meeting  
26 November 2002*

Note: Resolution A/Res.56/106 is available in multiple languages, including French and Spanish at [www.iyv2001.org](http://www.iyv2001.org).