



## **United Nations Volunteers Statement to the**

### **Fourth Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction**

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Managing disasters efficiently and effectively begins and ends with communities. People, as victims of disasters, are the first to respond, rebuild and disaster proof their communities and lives. Communities living in hazard prone environments are not helpless prospective victims of events outside their control. They may have limited livelihood options but, given support and opportunities, they engage fully in implementing initiatives that reduce their vulnerability to the impact of disasters.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is working towards providing such support and opportunities. In Haiti, for example, UN Volunteers support the capacity development of local authorities and communities in disaster risk prevention and post-disaster management. They provide expertise to the Haiti National System of Disaster Risk Reduction and to community-based re-construction programmes through community mobilization. In Peru, UN Volunteers trained community leaders and municipal civil servants on earthquake recovery measures, including disaster risk management. They helped develop eight networks for volunteer leaders, and a total of 1,500 community volunteers were mobilized under the project.

In this regard, volunteerism and volunteers are essential components of any disaster risk reduction strategy - strengthening the national and international response by leveraging people's engagement and action, while enhancing community capacities to foster recovery and resilience. Volunteerism is a fundamental source of community strength and social capital that is inherent in all societies throughout the world. Recognizing, promoting and implementing volunteerism mechanisms within the vision of reducing disaster risk are decisive steps to ensuring its achievement. Volunteerism, at the individual, community and collective level, is an expression of action, an instrument to create ownership and the means to channel and build local capacity in face of significant development challenges, including disaster risks.

The current Hyogo Framework for Action explicitly recognizes the contribution of volunteerism to disaster risk management, particularly in strengthening community capacities to respond to and prevent disasters. The *Priorities for Action* of the Hyogo Framework for Action suggest that community participation in disaster risk reduction includes the strategic management of volunteer resources and calls for the development of specific mechanisms to engage active stakeholder participation in particular by building on the spirit of volunteerism. Volunteerism is also highlighted as a way of contributing to community resilience, community engagement and good governance for all stakeholders, particularly those most vulnerable to disasters, wherein the *Priorities for Action* notes: *"As an outgrowth of good governance, volunteerism was cited as an important contributor in creating community engagement and therefore improved resilience."*



The Chair's Summary of the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) in May 2011 identified as a "critical step" to "encourage collaboration with communities and volunteers including through participatory risk assessment and local multi-stakeholder monitoring and reporting".

Organized and trained, volunteers can play a crucial role in multiple phases of the disaster cycle. To reduce risks, volunteers conduct risk mapping, and vulnerability and capacity assessments, and provide community-specific information to feed into disaster plans. In preparation for disasters, volunteers can be mobilized to reduce community vulnerability and enhance risk perception through training, education and public awareness campaigns. Volunteers administer early warning watch posts and provide essential information on hazards such as fire or flood. Volunteers are on the frontlines in responding in the aftermath of a disaster and are key to coordinating relief efforts. Volunteers form community networks, which serve to mitigate the adverse effects of disasters and foster social cohesion in the road to recovery. Volunteers are an essential ingredient to building and sustaining resilience.

Coming back to the Peru example, municipalities in Chincha and Pisco have established government offices for volunteering and neighbourhood involvement. Furthermore, authorities have approved pro-volunteerism plans that look beyond emergency actions, and which are focused on the wider framework of volunteerism for peace and development. Similarly, UNV has been involved in disaster response and risk reduction activities in a number of countries including Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. And the 2011 *State of the World's Volunteerism Report* includes a Chapter on *Volunteerism and disasters*.

UNV partners with all agencies in the UN system and adds volunteerism and volunteers to their operational strength. This year and next, UNV will continue to provide national and international disaster risk reduction specialists and partner with UN Country Teams and Agencies to ensure volunteerism is built into their interventions under the post-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action system.

UNV strongly recommends that governments and organizations, explore further the contribution of volunteers and volunteerism for disaster risk reduction for resilience by supporting the integration of volunteerism into disaster policy, planning and programming processes. Through all phases of the disaster cycle and at all levels – global to community – the volunteer spirit - inclusive, responsive and far-reaching - can and should be harnessed to reduce vulnerability to risk and strengthen resilience.