



**Name of Event: [Side Event] Engaging the Community – Volunteerism and Disaster**

**Date of Event: May 11, 2011**

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**Organizer: United Nations Volunteers**

**Speakers:**

- Mr. Allen Jennings, Deputy Chief, Development Division, UNV (Moderator)
- Mr. Oliver Wittershagen, Portfolio Manager & DRR Focal Point, UNV
- Mr. Umesh Dhakal, Executive Director, Nepal Red Cross Society
- Mr. Ronald Jackson, Director General, Office of Disaster Preparation and Emergency Management (delivered by Ms. Collette Roberts Riden, Office of the Prime Minister, Jamaica)

**1) Outline**

The **key issues** include looking at government and civil society strategies, policies, programs and processes for harnessing community and volunteer efforts towards building disaster resilient communities. Communities are understood as effective and cost-efficient frontline force in disaster prevention and mitigation;

Volunteer/community engagement facilitates the building of a culture of safety.

**Challenges include** engaging communities and volunteers in an organized process and building structured volunteer program and tools, which allow for expanded and efficient use of volunteer resources. The issue of ownership of community engagement process and sustainability is a challenge; community DRM should focus on what affected communities can do for themselves. There is also an acknowledged cost to volunteerism in terms of lost economic livelihood in harsh economic times/situations.

**2) Key messages, outcomes, recommendations**

- Ensure inclusion of volunteerism in national disaster management plans, policies and programs with a focus on local capacity development

- Establish a framework within which the community/volunteer program will function: a volunteer management schemes and policies should be developed to govern the sourcing, capacity building and deployment of volunteers in DRR for both government and civil society actors.
- Strong local governance mechanisms are necessary for effective volunteer management at a community level.
- Planning processes for engaging volunteers in DRM must be linked to community and national development.
- Community volunteer engagement builds solidarity, ownership and optimum utilization of local resources and knowledge for risk reduction.

### **3) Conclusions**

Disaster situations create an outpouring of volunteer/community contribution to relief, response and recovery. Capturing, channeling and preparing for this, governments and organizations should support the role and integration volunteerism into disaster policy, planning and programming processes. Voluntary community engagement is a key to building resilient and safe communities.