



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**MS. NAHEED HAQUE
DEPUTY EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR
UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS**

AT

**SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
(SADC)
REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON VOLUNTEER ACTION
FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Johannesburg, South Africa

17 October 2011

Volunteer partners for development,
Distinguished delegates,
Fellow volunteers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

I am very happy to be back in South Africa and among you to participate in this first ever conference on volunteer action and development in the Southern African Development Community. It is indeed an honour and pleasure to be on this platform alongside such distinguished colleagues, and to share with you some thoughts on the enormous transformational power of volunteerism for peace and development.

It is so inspiring to see the wide range of stakeholders participating in this Conference – including Governments, regional bodies, UN agencies, development partners, civil society and volunteer organizations, youth, private sector and the media. This conference is the outcome of a series of intense consultations and conversations between numerous organisations, including the European Union, UNV, VOSESA, FirstRand, Lovelife, Sarua, VSO, RAISA, National Youth Development Agency of the South African Government, FK-Norway, Canada World Youth and other key partners, who recognized the urgency of bringing volunteerism to the centre of the policy and development agenda of the SADC region. I wish to pay special tribute to UNV's strategic partner, VOSESA, and say a big thank you to FNB for providing us this beautiful venue.

During this tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers or IYV+10, a wide range of partners and stakeholders are promoting the values of volunteering by recognizing its positive impact, building and reinforcing volunteering networks, and facilitating people's contributions to peace and the MDGs through volunteering. This Conference is the culmination of many global and regional conferences on volunteerism including five regional consultations organized by UNV from March to June this year in Ecuador for Latin America; in Turkey for Europe, Central Asia and the Arab States; in the Philippines for the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific; and in Senegal one for Anglophone Africa and another for Francophone Africa. During these meetings, we

gathered 125 key recommendations from stakeholders, and distilled them into a synopsis of 13 recommendations that we have offered to UN Member States as they begin discussions on the way forward for volunteerism for peace and development. You can find copies of these recommendations and conference declarations on your tables or on the IYV + 10 website (www.iyvplus10.org)

Global conferences included the annual DPI/NGO conference in September, which we hosted with the UN Department of Public Information and Germany. Entitled “Sustainable Societies, Responsive Citizens”, it placed volunteerism at the centre of sustainable development and was an official consultation for the sustainable development discussions to take place next year 20 years after the first Environment Summit in Rio – hence “Rio+20”. Again in September, we joined the International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies in Hungary to bring together high-level representatives from civil society, volunteer-involving organizations, youth, private sector and governments around the world in a Global Volunteering Conference. Both these events led to firm declarations, which, again, we are putting forward to UN Member States in the quest for international action to bolster the voluntary sector.

After this Southern Africa Conference on Volunteer Action for Development, the next major event is International Volunteer Day on 5 December, when the United Nations General Assembly will discuss volunteering and recommend what the international community can do to better recognize and promote volunteering, and to facilitate the hard work of volunteers through better policies and legislation. Also on 5 December, we will raise the curtain on a multimedia exhibition called “Volunteers of the World” at UN Headquarters in New York. We have collected photos and videos from volunteering organizations across the spectrum, including from many of you. The first ever State of the World’s Volunteerism Report will also be launched on 5 December all over the world including, I hope, in the SADC region – we seek your support for this.

Volunteer tradition and transformational power of volunteer action and civic engagement

Volunteering has a long and rich tradition in Southern Africa and is deeply rooted in society. It is deeply embedded in the cultures and languages of the people of the region, and is reflected in concepts such as *ubuntu* (Isizulu language), *letsema* (Setswana), *kubatsira* (Shona) and *kujitolea* (Kiswilihi). Volunteering has contributed to fostering community solidarity, social cohesion, ushering in independence and democracy, and addressing development needs in thousands and thousands of communities across the region. With this strong foundation of social and development capital embedded in volunteerism, you will agree that there is boundless potential to reinforce the voluntary sector in SADC countries for transformational development.

As we celebrate and recognize the contributions and achievements of millions of volunteers all over the world and in Africa during IYV+10, this Southern Africa Conference on Volunteer Action for Development is an unprecedented opportunity for volunteer organizations, Governments, regional bodies and other stakeholders to strategize on how to continue to work together even more closely to harness the transformational power of volunteer action, civic engagement and other forms of free will, participation and philanthropy for MDG achievement, sustainable development and regional integration.

Contribution of volunteerism to MDG achievement, 2015

The role and contribution of volunteerism to the sustainable development and peace agenda have been consistently acknowledged in various UN resolutions and reports. Yet volunteerism's contributions and potential as a development asset have rarely been recognized and utilized. The international community understood this oversight when it designated 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers.

In a ground-breaking resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly at the end of the International Year of Volunteers, Member States concurred that, (quote) *"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”.

In September 2010, on the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the MDGs, world leaders from 160 countries came together to assess progress and reaffirm their commitment towards achieving the MDGs by 2015. The Outcome Document, which emerged from the MDG summit, also invited (quote) *“civil society and voluntary associations... and other relevant stakeholders at all levels, to enhance their role in national development efforts; specifically, in relation to their contribution to the achievement of the MDGs.”* The MDG Outcome Document particularly recognizes the importance of CSOs, including voluntary organizations, in creating an enabling environment for development and recovering from conflict.

Our gathering here today is key step in that direction by raising the profile of volunteering and demonstrating – through our discussions and sharing of MDG results and good practices – that voluntary action and civic engagement are a viable and credible means for MDG acceleration, sustainable development and transformational change in the SADC countries. It is essential for us to collectively document the impact, results and good practices of MDG achievement through volunteerism to demonstrate to Governments and policy makers how volunteerism can bring about transformational change that traditional development cannot because volunteerism is based on inspiration, free will, commitment and solidarity without any expectation of financial gain.

UNV in the region and youth as “agents of change”

UNV is proud to have a long and fruitful partnership with the Southern African volunteer movement, and since 2002 has worked side by side with civil society organizations and volunteer-involving organizations such as VOSESA, as well as governments and regional entities, to strengthen the enabling environment for volunteerism through policies, legislation, networks and national volunteer corps in countries such as Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Liberia, Niger, Mali, Senegal and Togo. In the SADC region, UNV has supported Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Mauritius.

I am very pleased to see youth from Southern Africa participating in this conference and taking part in charting out their region's future as well as their own future. What kind of a future do we want our youth to have? What kind of a role do we want them to play? In this context, I would like to highlight the important role of youth as "agents of transformational change" and give a few examples to inspire you.

In Lesotho, the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation is implementing a National Youth Volunteer Corps Programme, launched in 2009, to mobilise young graduates in support of national development programmes. Beyond the SADC region, we are working with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to promote regional integration through volunteering. The ECOWAS volunteerism programme launched in March this year will contribute to the consolidation of peace, national reconciliation, recovery and development.

In 2006 at the Fifth African Development Forum, organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, a study entitled *Youth Volunteering for Development: Africa in the 21st Century*^[1] was presented. The research, covering nine countries, showed how young people's capacities develop when they volunteer and become active development agents in their communities. The research emphasized how volunteer programmes can be linked to policy frameworks on a sustainable basis. The outcome statement declared: "It is essential, therefore, that African governments, working with their development partners, foster the spirit of volunteerism among young people."ⁱ In 2010 the African Union launched the African Union Youth Volunteer Corps, a development programme that recruits and works with youth volunteers in all 53 countries in Africa. The initiative, a product of the African Youth Charter, the Fifth Africa Development Forum, and the African Union, promotes volunteering to address poverty, weak professional and leadership development and slow development of a Pan-Africanist orientation, and to promote a better socio-economic climate. It aspires to improve the status of young people in Africa as key participants in the delivery of Africa's human development targets and goals. The volunteers serve across the continent, sharing expertise in areas including education and ICT, gender and development, advocacy and communication, post conflict reconstruction and peace building, health and population, infrastructure and energy, and agriculture and economy. Together, these

volunteers share skills, creativity and learning to promote the spirit of service to Africa, their countries and communities, while developing leadership skills.¹

This shows how volunteer programmes can be linked to policy frameworks on a sustainable basis. The outcome statement declared: “It is essential, therefore, that African governments, working with their development partners, foster the spirit of volunteerism among young people.”^[iii] This also shows the will of Governments and other stakeholders to support volunteerism. Let’s respond to this strong show of support. Would it not be wonderful if this Conference inspires a Southern African vision and action plan for MDG achievement through volunteerism – particularly through youth as agents of change?

Beyond IYV+10 and beyond MDGs: a new sustainable development paradigm

And what about “beyond MDGs” and “beyond IYV+10”? What lies next? The Declaration adopted at the Global Volunteering Conference in Hungary on September 2011 states: “The world has changed since the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. Much has been achieved through the efforts of volunteers. In the run-up to Rio+20 the post MDG sustainable development agenda must put volunteering at the centre”. The Declaration calls for the adoption of a holistic approach to sustainable development and human rights through gender sensitive community-centred initiatives that build on the values that volunteering contributes to foster economic growth and social change.

The first State of the World’s Volunteerism Report provides an alternative vision of a better society: one in which progress is measured more by well-being indicators than economic ones. It argues that volunteerism is a major contributor to the well-being of individuals as it fosters a sense of belonging, happiness and self-respect through service to others.

What then, is this new development paradigm “beyond the MDGs”? I will try to give you my understanding of what the post MDG world might look like. I hope that the post MDG

¹ *Source:* African Union, April 2010

development will be holistic, sustainable and equitable and that volunteerism will be an essential component of it. I hope it will be development led by youth as agents of transformational change. It will be development in which the elderly, men, women, boys, girls as well as the marginalized and socially excluded can participate – development that is inclusive and which leaves nobody out or behind. Development that comes from the heart, is rooted in inspiration, and is propelled by the desire for the common good for one's community and for humanity. It will be a community-centred sustainable development approach that places people at the centre and empowers them to get involved in both individual and collective action. When civic engagement is harnessed to its full potential, people become a genuine force for change. It is not just the UN and Governments that will achieve the Millennium Development Goals –, it is the citizens, the activists and the popular movements.

Community-centred development will be bottom-up development based on a community's vision for its future, with benchmarks, milestones, targets and indicators set by the communities themselves – and not by outsiders – and which are implemented by communities themselves drawing first upon their own resources, capacities, abilities, knowledge and social capital and only then with support from local and national Governments, development partners and other stakeholders. The communities' goals will be incorporated in local, regional and national plans and budgets. I believe that such a new development paradigm will be holistic and not happen in “silos” as at present where health practitioners do not speak to the poverty practitioners and the environment practitioners rarely to the gender practitioners. Communities do not think in sectors or silos – we do. Earlier this year, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told business leaders at Davos that we need change “in our lifestyles, our economic models, our social organization, and our political life”. He talked about “tearing down the walls between the development agenda and the climate agenda.” We must stop seeing sustainable development as a parallel track to economic or social development.

I hope and pray that the post-MDG world will be characterized by sustainable, just and equitable societies and communities and that it will be based on human well-being rather than material well-being and will protect and preserve our planet because it is the only planet we have, and which we would like to pass on intact to our children and grand children. I hope that the future will contain a strong global volunteer movement or

coalition which is at the forefront of visioning and implementing this new development paradigm for the world and for Southern Africa.

Can we dream of such a volunteer-centred and community-centred development paradigm? Do you want to transform your region, your country and your community through the power of volunteerism? If so, let's make sure that volunteer voices are heard by Governments and policy makers at the Rio+20 discussions next year and beyond, when the world's new sustainable development goals will be designed and adopted. Let's make sure that volunteerism is at the centre of these sustainable development goals and when funds are allocated, volunteerism will get its due share this time around. Let's dream together and act together to demonstrate inspiration in action!

It is Governments, civil society and voluntary organizations that empower citizens to act together and build sustainable societies. You inspire, engage, and build on people's capacity to create change from the grassroots. So you need to go out there to inspire many more people to understand what sustainable and equitable societies are all about, how they can become responsive citizens, how they can volunteer, become activists, make change and bring about sustainable development.

I hope and expect that, during the next three days, this Conference will come up with concrete recommendations and a declaration that will place volunteerism at the centre of community-centred sustainable development as we fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic, address youth unemployment and foster peace and social cohesion across racial, ethnic, class, religious and gender divides in the SADC region.

Finally, I would like to call upon you to join the world in celebrating volunteering as an expression of our common humanity, and in engaging the will, positive energy and innovation of millions of people towards realizing the MDGs and sustainable development.

Thank you.

^[i]Patel, Perold, Mohamed &Carapi, 2007

ⁱUNDESA, 2007, p. 110

^[ii]UNDESA, 2007, p. 110