

## SOUTHERN AFRICA CONFERENCE ON VOLUNTEER ACTION FOR DEVELOPMENT

### ***CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR VOLUNTEER ACTION IN THE REGION*** Organised by VOSESA and the United Nations Volunteer Programme

Volunteering is universal, inclusive and embraces free will, solidarity, dignity and trust. Throughout the Southern African region, strong traditions of volunteering are an expression of the African philosophy and way of life: Ubuntu<sup>1</sup>, which connects individuals and communities through reciprocity and provides a powerful basis for unity, common humanity, peace and development.

Volunteering is a transformational force in society and contributes to community-centred sustainability development, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS awareness, environmental sustainability and regional cohesion and integration. It plays an important role in disaster mitigation and crisis prevention and it helps build livelihoods, strengthens social cohesion and promotes human development.

In the spirit of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10) we recognise and celebrate the contribution of the millions of volunteers for national and regional development in Southern Africa. In particular, we acknowledge the role of volunteers – men, women, old and young – in poor communities who daily provide the support required to combat the ravages of poverty and ill-health.

**As volunteers and advocates, policy makers, supporters and practitioners of volunteering – a cross-section of members of the volunteerism movement in Southern Africa – gathered here Johannesburg on 19 October, we reaffirm that:**

- a. Volunteering is a universal form of civic engagement and has deep roots in the Southern African region. It can play a major role in promoting regional integration and can strengthen a sense of regional identity, connectedness and solidarity.
- b. Volunteer action plays a role in advancing regional efforts to combat poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, to promote social and economic participation among youth, and to foster peace and social cohesion within and between countries.
- c. Regional integration can be accelerated by a greater focus on people's participation in sustainable development through all forms of volunteering that are community-centred, gender-sensitive and based on mutual respect, human dignity and reciprocity. These include youth volunteering, community-based volunteering, international volunteering, faith-based volunteering, diaspora volunteering, corporate support for volunteer action, elder service, online volunteering and higher education community engagement.
- d. Volunteering builds social cohesion and social capital among diverse groups based on real needs when developed from the bottom up through grassroots empowerment and community voluntary action.
- e. While volunteering cannot replace effective education and training systems, it can increase the employability and holistic development of young people through experiential and inter-cultural learning and leadership, which produces the skills and capabilities relevant to the workplace, innovation, entrepreneurship and community leadership.
- f. Volunteering facilitates social inclusion, including volunteering for and with refugees, internally-displaced people and all marginalised groups irrespective of gender, age, cultural background, disabilities or socio-economic status.
- g. Through teaching, research and community engagement, higher education institutions in Southern Africa play a major role in developing responsive citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> "I am because you are"

**We urge:**

**1. Stakeholders, including all volunteer-involving organisations, governments and member states, private sector organisations, higher education institutions and other development partners to increase investment in, improve and widen regional and institutional collaboration during IYV+10 and beyond to draw on the value of volunteering in addressing development challenges and in fostering peace and human well-being. This includes:**

- a) Showcasing and celebrating the diverse contributions of volunteering and civic engagement in general to achieving the objectives of peace and development;
- b) Identifying opportunities and strategies to strengthen the role of voluntary service in national and regional development;
- c) Documenting and increasing research on the nature, scope, impact and value of voluntary service;
- d) Exploring the potential for establishing a variety of regional voluntary service exchange programmes in Southern Africa that promote inter-cultural learning and awareness to support national, regional and international development;
- e) Creating an enabling environment for volunteering and civic engagement by fostering policies and sharing good practices to scale up opportunities for people to volunteer, build new capacity for well-managed programmes, and identify community needs, assets and knowledge for transformational change;
- f) Exploring new forms of volunteering by connecting and engaging people through information and communication technologies;
- g) Enhancing private sector support for voluntary action through collaborative corporate community partnerships (including employee volunteering) that recognise the interdependence between business and societies and leverage the unique value that companies can add to sustainable development;
- h) Integrating the impact of volunteering into the monitoring of cross-sectoral development objectives and MDG achievement; this includes noting that the extent of community participation is itself an indicator of progress in societal well-being;
- i) Undertaking volunteering using a holistic approach, that prioritises human rights, gender equality, sustainability and economic and social development;
- j) Accelerating and integrating higher education community engagement for increased scope, depth, visibility and impact so as to form a core component of knowledge production in the region.

**2. Governments of Southern African member states and other stakeholders to incorporate volunteering in their forthcoming deliberations for "Rio + 20" and recognise the transformational power as well as economic and social value of volunteering in achieving national development goals and regional priorities by facilitating the creation of an enabling environment for volunteering, which supports, protects and empowers volunteers.**

**3. Southern African Member States and Regional Bodies, the United Nations system, development partners and Volunteer Involving Organisations and other stakeholders to renew efforts through collaboration to implement resolution 56/38 and subsequent resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on measures to support, promote and advocate for volunteering as a powerful means for transformational change and sustainable development, particularly in Southern Africa.**

**4. All stakeholders to call for volunteer coalitions to provide a platform for knowledge sharing, capacity building and collective action for achieving peace and sustainable development goals through volunteer action.**

**We commit to bringing this declaration to the attention of our constituencies in our different institutions and countries and regional organizations.**