

26 November 2002

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on Volunteerism and the International Year of Volunteers**

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today the General Assembly will engage in a discussion on volunteerism and reflect on the International Year of Volunteers.

Volunteerism has an important place in our society. Local voluntary involvement is a valuable and indispensable contribution to the betterment of social conditions, promotion of economic development, and empowering people to take charge. It spans over a broad array of areas, ranging from supporting democratization and peace-building initiatives, electoral assistance, verifying human rights, humanitarian aid to education, gender mainstreaming, health-care or sustaining the environment, just to name a few. Volunteerism reinforces a sense of collective responsibility and brings about a tangible difference to the lives of many and self-fulfillment to the individual volunteer. The potential of volunteerism to contribute significantly to the attainment of the Millennium Goals cannot be underestimated.

The International Year of Volunteers was a milestone in recognizing the tireless work of volunteers around the world. It generated and mobilized public awareness. It helped to connect volunteers of various parts of the world, and most importantly, it created an environment conducive and motivating to volunteer action. Clearly, many more governments now see volunteerism as a valuable asset which needs to be strategically factored into development policies and programmes.

The International Year of Volunteers was launched with a view to achieving four main objectives: recognition, facilitation, networking, and promotion of volunteering. Accomplishments in all of these areas have been remarkable. The recognition of volunteerism was advanced by a number of research studies that were conducted globally and nationally through international support and cooperation. The role and contribution of Volunteerism in human development has been recognized by the highest authorities in most countries. Several concrete actions have been taken by them to incorporate this factor into their development strategies. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, which was established over thirty years ago, and its UN Volunteers, have set a noble example through their services in various capacities around the world. The United Nations system, with its specialized agencies and programmes, is committed to increased involvement to promote volunteerism.

A very important achievement of the International Year of Volunteers is the facilitation of volunteering through a number of measures. One of the principle areas has been the enactment of new, or strengthening of existing, legislation which will make the volunteer action in many countries easier. Also important in this respect were consultations on policy options and creation of new volunteer-support mechanisms and infrastructure such as volunteer centers, volunteer corps, national commissions as advisory bodies, national forums and so on.

Another achievement of the International Year of Volunteers was the involvement of non-traditional actors, such as the private sector. In addition, it engaged persons who might rather be associated with receiving of volunteer help such as older persons, persons with disabilities, persons living with HIV/AIDS, or refugees. Their involvement and empowerment is of special significance.

The International Year of Volunteers also helped to build networks of volunteers, thereby giving the volunteers in individual countries a sense of inter-connective support and mutuality. It gave an opportunity for a number of meetings and organizing workshops, training courses to share and exchange information and best practices.

The media, including radio stations, television programmes, newspapers, was harnessed in promotion of volunteerism. Promotional events and tools such as booklets, posters or commemorative postage stamps were undertaken.

The International Year of Volunteers has put volunteering on a more solid basis for the years to come. But a great deal still needs to be done if volunteerism is to fulfill its potential. General Assembly resolution 56/38 last year provided some invaluable pointers in this respect. Governments should continue to support and develop the volunteerism infrastructure and technical cooperation. International organizations, civil society and private sector should also continue to support volunteer movement. The unique relationship between volunteerism and the United Nations should be reinforced and developed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Year of Volunteers has played its role superbly. It invigorated and energized the movement of volunteer action. In closing, let me pay a tribute to all those that made this success possible. A special recognition goes to the United Nations Volunteers that acted as a focal point for the International Year of Volunteers and to the many civil society volunteer involving organizations which played a vital role in ensuring that the Year had a global outreach. Recognition must also go to many governments from the North and the South which contributed to many of the specific activities and events. But above all, the utmost recognition and homage goes to the millions of dedicated women and men around the globe who are acting out their sense of citizenship through voluntary action. Your cause is noble and your endeavors invaluable in our common effort to bring about a better world. I wish you much success.