

The Universal Declaration on Volunteering



Volunteering is a fundamental building block of civil society. It brings to life the noblest aspirations of humankind – the pursuit of peace, freedom, opportunity, safety, and justice for all people.

In this era of globalization and continuous change, the world is becoming smaller, more interdependent, and more complex. Volunteering – either through individual or group action – is a way in which:

- human values of community, caring, and serving can be sustained and strengthened;
- individuals can exercise their rights and responsibilities as members of communities, while learning and growing throughout their lives, realizing their full human potential; and,
- connections can be made across differences that push us apart so that we can live together in healthy, sustainable communities, working together to provide innovative solutions to our shared challenges and to shape our collective destinies.

At the dawn of the new millennium, volunteering is an essential element of all societies. It turns into practical, effective action the declaration of the United Nations that “We, the Peoples” have the power to change the world.



This Declaration supports the right of every woman, man and child to associate freely and to volunteer regardless of their cultural and ethnic origin, religion, age, gender, and physical, social or economic condition. All people in the world should have the right to freely offer their time, talent, and energy to others and to their communities through individual and collective action, without expectation of financial reward.

We seek the development of volunteering that:

- elicits the involvement of the entire community in identifying and addressing its problems;
- encourages and enables youth to make leadership through service a continuing part of their lives;
- provides a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves;
- enables others to participate as volunteers;
- complements but does not substitute for responsible action by other sectors and the efforts of paid workers;
- enables people to acquire new knowledge and skills and to fully develop their personal potential, self-reliance and creativity;
- promotes family, community, national and global solidarity.

We believe that volunteers and the organizations and communities that they serve have a shared responsibility to:

- create environments in which volunteers have meaningful work that helps to achieve agreed upon results;
- define the criteria for volunteer participation, including the conditions under which the organization and the volunteer may end their commitment, and develop policies to guide volunteer activity;
- provide appropriate protections against risks for volunteers and those they serve:

- provide volunteers with appropriate training, regular evaluation, and recognition;
- ensure access for all by removing physical, economic, social, and cultural barriers to their participation.



Taking into account basic human rights as expressed in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, the principles of volunteering and the responsibilities of volunteers and the organizations in which they are involved, we call on:

All volunteers to proclaim their belief in volunteer action as a creative and mediating force that:

- builds healthy, sustainable communities that respect the dignity of all people;
- empowers people to exercise their rights as human beings and, thus, to improve their lives;
- helps solve social, cultural, economic and environmental problems; and,
- builds a more humane and just society through worldwide cooperation.

The leaders of:

- **all** sectors to join together to create strong, visible, and effective local and national “volunteer centers” as the primary leadership organizations for volunteering;
- **government** to ensure the rights of all people to volunteer, to remove any legal barriers to participation, to engage volunteers in its work, and to provide resources to NGOs to promote and support the effective mobilization and management of volunteers;
- **business** to encourage and facilitate the involvement of its workers in the community as volunteers and to commit human and financial resources to develop the infrastructure needed to support volunteering;
- **the media** to tell the stories of volunteers and to provide information that encourages and assists people to volunteer;
- **education** to encourage and assist people of all ages to volunteer, creating opportunities for them to reflect on and learn from their service;
- **religion** to affirm volunteering as an appropriate response to the spiritual call to all people to serve;
- **NGOs** to create organizational environments that are friendly to volunteers and to commit the human and financial resources that are required to effectively engage volunteers.

The United Nations to:

- declare this to be the “Decade of Volunteers and Civil Society” in recognition of the need to strengthen the institutions of free societies; and,
- recognize the “red V” as the universal symbol for volunteering.

IAVE challenges volunteers and leaders of all sectors throughout the world to unite as partners to promote and support effective volunteering, accessible to all, as a symbol of solidarity among all peoples and nations. IAVE invites the global volunteer community to study, discuss, endorse and bring into being this Universal Declaration on Volunteering.

Adopted by the international board of directors of IAVE – The International Association for Volunteer Effort at its 16th World Volunteer Conference, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, January 2001, the International Year of Volunteers.