

UPF International: Strengthening Communities Through Volunteer Action

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Every year on 5 December the international community marks [International Volunteer Day](#), established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1985 to recognize the contribution of volunteers to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2025 this observance takes place under the theme "[Every Contribution Matters](#)" and coincides with the global launch of the [International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development](#) in 2026 (Res. A/RES/78/127). In this context the [Universal Peace Federation](#) affirms that well-organized volunteer engagement helps advance the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development and supports ongoing cooperation among individuals and communities amid complex humanitarian, social, and environmental challenges.

Service has been central in the vision taught by UPF co-founders [Dr. Hak Ja Han](#) and [Dr. Sun Myung Moon](#), who underlined that genuine social progress depends on people seeing one another as members of a single human family under God. Volunteer work makes that insight concrete by inviting individuals to cross lines of culture and belief and by building practical habits of responsibility within families and local communities. In this spirit the founders initiated organizations such as the International Relief Friendship Foundation ([IRFF](#)) and Religious Youth Service ([RYS](#)), which from the mid-1980s onward organized international projects that combined interreligious learning with hands-on assistance. The first Religious

Youth Service project, held in the Philippines in 1986, brought young people of different faiths together to support community development, and later projects included environmental work and school rehabilitation in locations such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Australia, and Nepal. In 1999, Religious Youth Service returned to the Philippines, holding "World Peace Through Inter-Religious Community Service" projects in Manila, Batangas City and Bauan, with volunteers from across Southeast Asia.

In the aftermath of the [2011 tsunami](#) in northern Japan, Youth Ambassadors for Peace of UPF collaborated with [Christian Disaster Response](#) and local volunteer networks to assist shelters and clear damaged homes in Ishinomaki and coastal communities near Matsushima.

Another example is the Religious Youth Service "[Leadership Through Service](#)" project that helped rebuild communities in Pokhara, Nepal, following the April 2015 earthquake, in which young volunteers from several nations assisted with repairs and educational activities in affected districts. In parallel, [UPF Nepal](#) and its partners distributed tents, rice, and other basic items to families, supported memorial events, and helped mobilize resources for longer term recovery, including substantial donations for relief and reconstruction.

Through the International Relief Friendship Foundation and [Women's Federation for World Peace](#), volunteers have also contributed to humanitarian efforts after major disasters, including reconstruction support in [Haiti](#) following the 2010 earthquake and relief campaigns associated with later emergencies in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the southern United States.



In December 2024 [UPF Sri Lanka](#), together with IAYSP and Religious Youth Service and supported by donors in Singapore, delivered food aid to 250 families affected by flooding in Mullaitivu following Cyclone Fengal. In 2024 UPF Europe and the Middle East partnered with Project CURE to support the delivery of medical supplies to hospitals in [Palestine](#), building on the initiative of UPF Israel and earlier coordination with Palestinian Authority representatives and [Project CURE](#) leadership. In April 2025 [UPF Lebanon](#), with support from IRFF Germany and in cooperation with the municipality of Chiyah, distributed large food boxes to 64 families in Beirut who had been severely affected by regional

instability.



In the wider international context the Universal Peace Federation expresses appreciation for the work of global volunteer networks whose values resonate with community responsibility and mutual support. These include the [United Nations Volunteers](#) programme, which works with governments and UN entities to integrate volunteerism into the SDGs, the [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#), whose volunteers are often among the first to respond in emergencies, and organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, whose community-based construction initiatives expand access to adequate housing. Their experience provides an important reference point as the world enters the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development in 2026 and seeks to recognize and measure the contribution of volunteers in national development planning.

In this spirit the Universal Peace Federation encourages [Ambassadors for Peace of UPF](#), national and local chapters, partner organizations in our wider movement, and youth leaders to mark this International Volunteer Day by planning a clear sequence of service activities from now through the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development in [2026](#). A practical goal can be for each chapter to organize at least one community service project in the coming months, in cooperation with civil society and public institutions, focusing on needs such as support for older persons, tutoring and mentoring for children and youth, environmental cleanups, or assistance for persons with disabilities. When people of different generations, cultures, and beliefs work side by side to assist neighbours in need, they give tangible expression to the idea that humankind is meant to live as one family under God.

In offering this message, the Universal Peace Federation expresses gratitude to volunteers in every setting and commits itself to continued cooperation with the United Nations system, governments, and civil society so that volunteerism can make a sustained contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals in the years ahead.

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