Message for International Volunteer Day (IVD) from the Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, Olivier Adam

International Volunteer Day (IVD) is an opportunity to promote volunteerism, support volunteer efforts and recognize volunteer contributions to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This year, IVD focuses on SDG 10 and the pursuit of equality and inclusion through volunteerism. Volunteering provides opportunities for people, particularly those often left farthest behind, to play a meaningful role in their communities.

Of the estimated one billion volunteers globally, many mitigate the impacts of inequality by providing support and services to those who are in need. However, volunteering is another way of impacting inclusion in societies.

For example, with the right support, volunteering within migrant influx regions can create opportunities for refugees and their new communities to work side by side and foster understanding. As well, a feeling of contribution and respect can be established through volunteering activities such as women’s micro-loan groups in Africa and volunteer initiatives for the LGBTI communities in Asia and the Pacific. And across communities in conflict, volunteer-led initiatives, such as in Yemen, contribute to building tolerance among young people.

At UNV, we have witnessed time and time again how our own UN Volunteers globally are making an impact on equality in the communities they serve. Among the 8,034 UN Volunteers serving in 2019, 50 per cent are women. There are people from the age of 25 to 81, representing 163 nationalities, along with persons with disabilities, from indigenous groups and those who choose to be non-gender identified.

By empowering people to act, and by increasing interactions between groups, volunteering can promote recognition of the inherent value of all people regardless of gender, age, ethnic background, disability or sexuality. Volunteerism is universal and, when accessible to everyone, can become a powerful equalizer.

More investment in volunteering as an opportunity to reduce social distance, by creating spaces and opportunities to build empathy and solidarity, is critical given the challenges the world faces now and in the future.

Today, on IVD, I thank all volunteers for their commitment and sacrifice in making the world more just, diverse and inclusive.