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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY****5 December 2016**

Volunteers work tirelessly to create a better future for all. They contribute to national well-being and show global solidarity at times of crisis. We see this in action all over the world, most notably over the past year as volunteers have provided shelter and wide-ranging support to millions of refugees forced from their homes by armed conflict and persecution.

Volunteers help to eliminate poverty and reduce the impact of disasters. In Haiti, we saw the efforts of thousands during the recent floods, helping to re-build devastated communities. In Sri Lanka, volunteers were instrumental in achieving the great feat of eradicating malaria. In Mali and Colombia, UN Volunteers are among those working to achieve peace.

Volunteering gives the most marginalized people in society an opportunity to get involved in the decision-making process. Volunteers can use their voices to shape conversations, question social norms and promote the values we all hold dear. Volunteers are critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the more than 6,700 United Nations Volunteers, 12,000 United Nations Online Volunteers and the one billion community volunteers worldwide. You are all instrumental to the future of people and the planet. Your commitment and passion can act as inspiration to us all.

On this International Volunteer Day, let us recognize the immense value of the world's volunteers. As they lend a hand to others, let us give volunteers a hand by applauding their global citizenship and their commitment to building a future of peace, prosperity and dignity for all.