INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS DAY, Dec 5, ‘09
Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India

United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with local partners - Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) and Bakul Foundation - jointly commemorated the International Volunteer Day (IVD) on 5th December 2009 at Bhubaneswar, Orissa. The theme for this year’s IVD celebration in Orissa was “Volunteering for our Planet” which recognized the crucial role of volunteers in addressing issue like global warming, climate change and the need for environment protection. Nearly 700 participants from all across Bhubaneswar and adjoining areas took part in the IVD celebrations.

It was a vibrant atmosphere at the CYSD campus in Bhubaneswar - the venue for the event – as young and experienced volunteers started pouring in. They visited the information stalls set-up by organizations working particularly in the field of volunteerism, environment protection and conservation. The information stalls provided an ideal platform for existing and potential volunteers to interact with each other and explore possibilities of working together.

The day-long programme focused on channelising efforts of volunteers towards protecting the environment. A number of activities marked the event in Orissa such as photography exhibition, group art activity, quiz on environment, film shows that not only highlighted the need to protect our environment but also motivate volunteers to act.
Panel Discussion
The programme began with a panel discussion on volunteerism. Doing away with the regular custom of presenting the guests with bouquets, the guests were greeted with saplings. The panelists not only spoke about the spirit and impact of volunteerism, they also emphasized on how people can volunteers their time and knowledge in protecting the planet. Volunteers should get involved, raise awareness and encourage community action, they urged. The panelists also advocated for volunteering efforts in the field of renewable energy, wildlife conservation, afforestation etc.

Gift a plant: Volunteers welcoming the panelists by gifting them saplings

Group Art Activities
The first group art activity was initiated by both young and experienced artists who later invited the audience to join them in painting on a single canvas to highlight the impact of
global warming and climate change. The artists and the audience jointly created a beautiful image of the earth in despair due to environment pollution, carbon emission, non biodegradable wastes etc. It was quite interesting to witness the design of the painting changing every few minutes with the participants expressing their ideas creatively. The second group art was created with only environment friendly colours and materials.

**Quiz**
The quiz was met with enthusiastic response from the audience with the participants vying for the prizes. The quiz questions were mostly related to environment, wildlife, and climate change and environment activists. The prize was an innovative trophy that was created from e-waste. It was heartening to see that the participants included a 10-year-old boy as well as a 70-year-old gentleman enthusiastically raising their hands to answer the questions.

**Volunteering for our Planet: Sharing Experiences**
In another interesting session on experience sharing, volunteers from various fields narrated their experience in volunteering. While Praveen Kumar from VSO stressed on contributing our individual time, Aditya Panda of Wildlife Orissa spoke on informed activism. “There is a volunteer in each of us and it is up to us to harness the volunteer within,” said Aditya, the young wildlife conservationist. Hriday Ranjan of Bakul Foundation spoke on how volunteering had brought about a positive transformation in his life in more ways than one. He also talked about the ‘My Tree’ Campaign initiated by Bakul Foundation.

Jyoti Raj Patra, a researcher and volunteer, began by expressing his deep condolences for the two United Nations (UN) volunteers who passed away while volunteering in
Kabul, Afghanistan. The audience observed silence as a mark of respect for the volunteers. He spoke about the relevance of IVD, and stressed that only leaders and policy makers cannot deal with the problem of climate change. He informed about the UN ‘Seal the Deal’ campaign being closely monitored by the international community and hoped that it will be instrumental in creating a successful initiative to combat climate change.

**Street Play**
The audience were enthralled and moved by a street play performed by the students of Bhubaneswar-based KIIT School of Rural Management. The play based on deforestation depicted the touching tale of a farmer and his family who lose their livelihood and ultimately their lives when their trees are forcibly cut. It highlighted the dependence rural households have on trees and nature.

**Photography exhibition**
The photography exhibition displayed photographs on “volunteering for our planet” which were invited from the public prior to the IVD ’09 event. Selected entries were exhibited at the venue and the three best entries were awarded. The participants not only enjoyed seeing the photographs but also were inspired by the ways in which one can volunteer.
Film Screening
The participants were deeply moved by the special film screening. The audience was treated to some of the most inspiring and effective films on climate change, global warming, ecological imbalance, conservation of energy etc.

Valedictory & Conclusion
An interesting feature of the event was inspirational songs on volunteerism and environment protection presented by a volunteer of the National Youth Project (NYP). This motivated the audience and the whole area reverberated and echoed with their chorus expressing solidarity towards volunteerism. The IVD '09 programme concluded with a valedictory function and a huge round of applause for the organizers and participants.

The IVD '09 event at Bhubaneswar, Orissa, was successful in highlighting the need for voluntary action both at an individual and collective level. In fact many participants were seeing involved in small voluntary action at the venue itself. The participants, mainly students, left the venue with a determination to work towards protecting their environment.

Snapshots