

## **2001 + 10: What does volunteering represent for us?**

Young people today are engaged in volunteering through increasingly diverse ways, ranging from taking part in a single action or enrolling to a voluntary-service programme to life-time commitment in volunteering movements. As volunteer-based, democratic youth organisations we are committed to offer the environment and opportunities to all young people, no matter their backgrounds, to volunteer. We aim to ensure quality, to be inclusive, equal and open; in turn we expect the political, social and financial recognition and support from global and local decision-makers and from international organisations, governments and public authorities.

We are concerned however that many international organisations and national governments have put their focus in the development of volunteering policy in promoting mainly individuals' participation in what are often publicly controlled voluntary service schemes. While all forms of volunteering are important, such policies can ignore the vast majority of volunteers, engaged in volunteer-based, civil society organisations. We are convinced that voluntary-based and -led organisations offer a unique empowering environment for volunteers and that every volunteer should have the opportunity to fully participate in the organisation s/he is volunteering within.

Knowing, and concerned by the fact, that many young people are deprived their Human Rights and not able to fulfil their basic needs, we acknowledge that volunteering remains a challenge for the majority of young people in the world. As independent, representative and democratic youth-led organisations we want to fight this situation where not all young people can volunteer as freely and easily they wish. Governments should keep in mind that for many young people youth-led organisations are the only tools for participation in democratic decision-making processes.

Volunteering does not only represent a space of participation and active citizenship for young people; it is also important form of non-formal education, providing young people with experience, skills and competences. These skills and competences should be recognised by governments, employers and the wider society.

We are concerned, however of the growing trend where engagement in volunteering becomes an obligatory part on school curricula or an entrance requirement for schools and universities. While we being proud of the economical and educational benefits that volunteering brings to societies worldwide, we worry that the over-focus given to the economic side of volunteering may not only be positive as it can increase the pressure on young people - ultimately jeopardising the very essence of volunteering.

2011 will mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary on UN Year of Volunteers. With view to the preparations of this special event we call upon the United Nations and the Member States to step up their coordinated efforts to recognise and support volunteering and volunteer-based, volunteer-led organisations - providing young people with safe and democratic framework of changing our world for good.