

THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF VOLUNTEERS

The year 2001 has been proclaimed the International Year of Volunteers by the United Nations General Assembly upon the request of Japan, and will feature a World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, organized by the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights, in Durban, South Africa, next August. In the domain of sport and Olympism, the International Olympic Committee has invited the International Federations and National Olympic Committees to celebrate the Year by launching their own initiatives, and by paying tribute to their own volunteers. The IOC will organize an international conference on sport and volunteerism next June and will honour 70,000 volunteers worldwide. The volunteers at the XVIII Olympic Winter Games in 1998 will also organize a conference on the role of youngsters in creating and administering their own volunteer activities in Nagano next December.

The IOC launched its own campaign on 1 February in Lausanne, on the occasion of the despatch of the official invitations to participate in the XIX Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City in 2002, in the presence of the chief coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers programme, Sharon Capeling-Alakija, and volunteers who worked at the Olympic Winter Games in Albertville in 1992, Lillehammer in 1994 and Nagano in 1998. In accordance with the four themes proposed by the United Nations, the NOCs are invited to lay the emphasis on:

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- **Recognition**, to pay tribute to volunteers serving the Olympic Movement by highlighting their human values;
- **Facilitation**, mobilizing national sports federations, clubs, leisure and recreational entities, physical education institutions, school, university and military sports organizations with a view to create partnerships;
- **Networking**, establishing networks between the sports movement and national and local volunteer groups, such as the scouts, the Red Cross and humanitarian entities;
- **Promotion**, to devise a strategy to recruit more volunteers from differ-

ent age groups to help the development of sport, be involved in humanitarian activities and promote a culture of volunteerism.

Volunteerism is a tradition that exists in every culture, even though mentalities are changing and individualism increasing. It is therefore vital that NOCs and International Federations organize round tables on volunteerism; launch recruitment campaigns at all levels (teachers, administrators, coaches, referees, judges, assistants, etc.); look to the future by recruiting young sports leaders from both the public and private professional sectors, and prepare replacements for the future; promote the cause of women in sport, the environment, Olympic education, the arts and culture, by recruiting volunteers



Security volunteers in Atlanta.

interested in these areas; develop inter-generation, inter-ethnic, and inter-community volunteer systems in the fields of sport for all, recreation and leisure, art and culture, whilst also promoting peace and harmony, dialogue and coexistence wherever needed.

The Olympic Movement is the largest volunteer movement in the world. The very foundation of Olympism is volunteerism. It is important, when the commercialization of sport is developing at a frightening pace and when volunteers are asking themselves why they should keep working for no reward, to renew the tradition of volunteerism.

The arrogance and behaviour of some leaders, conflicts of interest, lack of transparency, discrimination of any kind, and moral and financial corruption have indeed become factors that discourage volunteerism in the sports world. Volunteers are above all good-intentioned people who work for free out of idealism or moral obligation, for the good of society. Whatever their standard or form of education, all volunteers without exception, deserve respect and admiration. That is why it is vital to pay tribute to them, to consolidate the culture of volunteerism, to spread the fundamental principles of Olympism, and explain in detail the difference between amateur sport, which so needs volunteers, and professional sport, that produces millionaires, and where the worst-paid players earn more than a surgeon who spends his time in an operating theatre saving human lives.

Globalization, which is spoken of so much nowadays, does not, contrary to what we might believe, encourage volunteerism. It is cultural, community and family traditions that keep the spirit of volunteerism alive. It is however, a fact that volunteerism in sport

attracts more participants than in other sectors of activity.

In a book on volunteerism in Germany, published by the government, the experts Bernhard Von Rosenblatt and Karen Blanke demonstrated that 37% of the population, i.e. 23 million people, are volunteers in sport, making it the largest volunteer sector in the country.

In the United States of America, 56% of the population devote themselves to volunteer activities, for three to four hours a week. In Korea, nearly four million people devoted 451 million hours to volunteer activities in 1999. The economic value of volunteerism is estimated at two billion dollars.

In surveys conducted in various different countries, all volunteers express the same reasons for giving up their time: the pleasure of helping someone else and being useful to the community. Volunteerism is certainly an action that gives true moral satisfaction to every human being.

Volunteerism also distinguishes itself in several different ways in developing countries. Helping each other within the family unit, between brothers and sisters or uncles and aunts, helping out between neighbours or members of a club or association, between people from the same village or place, are just some examples of traditional ways of helping each other. Babysitting or keeping an eye on a neighbour's house, doing someone a favour, are all acts of volunteerism that are done naturally and spontaneously. It is at this everyday school that volunteers are trained to serve the good causes they are associated with during their lives.

Olympic volunteers are a true reflection of all the social classes that come from this school of generosity. The 47,000 Australian volunteers who ensured the success of the Games of the XXVII Olympiad in Sydney,

included people of all ages and all walks of life, united in the ambition of serving a single cause. The Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis, the President of the Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad in Athens in 2004, Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, supported by all the Greek political parties, recently launched a campaign to recruit 60,000 volunteers. It is not enough to recruit these volunteers; it is also necessary to train them. Those who speak foreign languages are more in demand. The success of the Games in Athens will depend on these volunteers becoming key participants. Even the city of Turin, the host city of the XX Olympic Winter Games in 2006, has identified its recruitment policy for volunteers to be ready when the time comes.

Everyone is aware that volunteerism is a capital whose economic value is on the increase. The services of a volunteer indeed have no price. They are the ones who establish the degree of their commitment to receive in return an accolade and a big 'thank you'. But the volunteer is enriched by an unparalleled human experience.

For Olympic volunteers who work within a community composed of citizens from 200 countries, during the Olympic Games, the experience obtained remains unique and unforgettable. When it is recorded on video or kept in a photo album, the Olympic adventure is an experience that we never get tired of relating whenever we have the opportunity.

It is to help this human adventure of volunteers at the service of others develop, and for the main actors to at least be symbolically recognized, that the International Year of Volunteers was proclaimed by the United Nations.

Let us ensure that this Year is a fruitful one for the culture of volunteerism.