

International Volunteers Day celebrated

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UNITED Nations Volunteers are celebrating International Volunteers Day from December 5 until the end of the month with various events in Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Bokeo.

This year both national and international volunteers are focussing events to promote the Millennium Development Goals. These goals aim to tackle major global challenges such as how to pull over 1 billion people out of extreme poverty, reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and protect the environment. All UN member countries, including Laos, signed up to achieve these goals by 2015.

International Volunteers Day aims to help the Lao PDR address its commitments to the goals; specifically to eradicate poverty and hunger (goal 1), achieve universal primary education (goal 2), combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases (goal 6), and ensure environmental sustainability (goal 7).

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme has been active in Laos since 1973, believing that volunteering can make a real difference in reducing poverty and boosting development. UNDP's Resident Representative, Mr Finn Reske-Nielsen, said, "It is important that International Volunteers Day is used to demonstrate that small actions and local participation can make a big difference. Volunteer action goes a long way to help the country pull itself out of poverty and to meet

development goals."

This year volunteers organized an art competition for children in Luang Prabang on Monday on the theme "How to Fight Malaria". National volunteers will also run a youth training workshop on environmental conservation in Bokeo province on December 18.

Other volunteers will repaint Vat Phosay school and build shelves for the school library from December 18-19 in Vientiane.

Another volunteer team will run sports competitions to highlight the fight against drug abuse and HIV/AIDS in Phonexay district.

The UNV programme in Laos contributes to the national goals of the government and the global mandate of the Millennium Development Goals. UN Volunteers, both Lao and international, promote citizen participation in local decision-making processes, especially among the poor and women. They help strengthen capacities in local governments and civil society organisations in district development through the promotion of volunteerism. The work of UN Volunteers aims to inspire local leaders and strengthen their capacity to achieve greater human development through volunteer effort.

In 1985, the United Nations General Assembly designated December 5 as an annual celebration of voluntary action by people, communities and governments of the world. International Volunteer Day is for volunteers of all walks of life working in communities around the globe.