

UNV Chief of Africa Section visits Kenya

Nairobi, 22 March 2009

Neighbourhood Volunteers have been urged to continue facilitating dialogue in the neighbourhoods in order to foster consensus building and enable community healing, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence within the community. UNV Chief of Africa Section, Mr. Michele Falavigna, said the role played by Neighbourhood Volunteers in promoting peace and reconciliation in Kenya is important because the neighbourhood volunteers are a representative of the community and are therefore well placed to come up with solutions to problems faced in the neighbourhoods.

Mr. Falavigna was speaking when he visited Mathare 4A neighbourhood in Nairobi North District which is one of the neighbourhoods under the Neighbourhood Volunteer Scheme. He met volunteers and some residents who had returned to their homes more than a year after they were forced out during the post election violence. About 700 displaced residents of Mathare 4A who were living in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or with relatives have returned to their homes following dialogue interventions facilitated by Neighbourhood Volunteers and the District Administration in Nairobi North District.

Mr. Falavigna was accompanied by UNDP Country Director, Ms. Tomoko Nishimoto, and UNV Country Coordinator, Ms. Annet Mpabulungi – Wakabi. Ms. Tomoko said the NVS is at a transition stage because all challenges coming up have to be addressed in a sustainable manner to make the project workable for all and linked with other ongoing efforts. She added that she is impressed by the work being carried out by Neighbourhood Volunteers despite the fact that there is still no real peace. “Absence of violence does not mean peace, peace has to be durable and deeply rooted in the community” she said.



From Left: UNDP Country Director Tomoko Nishimoto, Neighbourhood Volunteer Vitalis Anyiko, Mama Teresiah Wambui Kungu, NVS Nairobi North District Coordinator Ruth Musili and UNV Chief of Africa Section Michele Falavigna. They had visited Mama Teresiah who has resettled in her house one year after she was forcefully evicted during the post election violence in Nairobi's Mathare 4A slums

She told the volunteers that the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) is a historical moment for Kenya. “The commission will not only look at the injustices caused by the post election violence but all the past injustices because the violence was caused by a manifestation of many injustices and ethnic resentment build up over a long period of time”. She added that following the post election violence last year, Kenya was still at a transition and that there is no proper peace in place “The country will be going through a three year transition of truth justice and reconciliation by the commission that’s being set up and it is important that the commission works closely with the community and put closure to past injustices”.

Nairobi North District Commissioner Ms. Matilda Sakwa thanked the UNDP/UNV team for visiting the district. She said the government is committed to ensuring that there is lasting peace by working in collaboration with all peace actors within Nairobi North District. She said the work being done by the

neighbourhood volunteers is commendable because the volunteers have managed to provide good results under difficult circumstances.

The District Commissioner also cautioned residents of Nairobi North that though calm had been restored, lasting peace has not been attained and therefore they should not relent in their quest for lasting peace and reconciliation. “There are people who have not returned to their homes and so there is still a lot to do in peace building and reconciliation within the district. Moving out of a house that you had illegally occupied does not mean there is peace, there has to be genuine reconciliation” she said.

UNV Country Coordinator Ms. Annet Mpabulungi – Wakabi said the Neighbourhood Volunteers Scheme has so far mobilized 928 volunteers covering 21 districts. In Nairobi there are 228 volunteers in 9 neighbourhoods. “The volunteers have made positive progress, but the challenges are still there therefore there is still more work to be done”.

She said that there is need to continue building the capacity of Neighbourhood Volunteers through training, because various challenges are coming up as they continue to work in the community and that the NVS is currently being redesigned to make it more sustainable and strengthen the projects relationships with other actors in the community. “In the process of the redesign, there will be interaction with the Community, Neighbourhood Volunteers and all other stakeholders at the district level so that they can give insight about the direction that the project will take”.

The UNV Country Coordinator also thanked volunteers for the work that they have done and encouraged them to continue being committed and dedicated because the project is looking towards the long term by building sustainable human resource capacity within the communities. In areas where the project has exited the volunteers have been able to create their own network and continued with volunteer work. She encouraged volunteers in other neighbourhoods to take on this kind of approach in order to keep the volunteering spirit alive even after the project exits from their neighbourhood. “Volunteerism should be anchored in the community and done in a structured way, so what has been started should be engrained and continue within the community”

The Neighbourhood Volunteer Scheme is an initiative that is being implemented to harness positive attitudes in the neighborhoods in order to enable reconciliation and the recovery process following the violence that was witnessed in many parts of the country after the 2007 disputed Presidential elections in Kenya.