

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC CVO
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
AVI CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING
HYATT HOTEL, CANBERRA
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Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to join you here tonight to celebrate 60 years of Australian volunteering abroad.

To acknowledge the contribution that over 10,000 Australians have made during that time for the betterment of people and communities all over the world.

Friends, I am privileged in this role to meet many extraordinary Australians doing remarkable things.

Among them are our volunteers.

I see in each one a deep sense of pride in what they are achieving; they are utterly inspiring.

Our volunteers overseas are particularly impressive.

Last year I had the most stimulating conversations with AVI and other volunteers in Vietnam and Tonga.

Australians of all ages and backgrounds working in areas as diverse as community health and education, legal services, fisheries development, financial management, capacity building, and sport.

You can imagine how proud I was to learn that in Vietnam, a new culture of water safety is being introduced by Australian swimming and life saving instructors.

It was thrilling to see the red and yellow caps of Australian surf life savers at the beach in Danang.

To see at Hue University that an AVI volunteer is helping students to learn English, to support their training and research programs.

That Tongan girls are being taught how to play soccer - a very particular interest of mine!

And that precious Tongan artefacts are being conserved and catalogued for future generations due to the work of an AVI volunteer who has been working with the Tongan Traditions Committee for several years.

These volunteers bring a vibrancy to Australian expatriate communities everywhere they go. They complement and add an extra dimension to Australia's diplomatic efforts and official bilateral links.

Most importantly, though, they are highly valued and warmly appreciated by the community, who understand that their contribution is as much personal as professional.

My friends, a young Herb Feith, newly graduated in political science, had a dream to live, work and learn alongside the people of Indonesia.

After setting off under his own steam from Melbourne in 1951, he took a job with the Department of

Information in Jakarta and worked there, on a local salary, for two years.

This was the start of a long relationship with Indonesia.

It triggered Herb Feith's humanitarianism and sense of justice.

His vision and his fire in those early days were the genesis of Australian Volunteers International.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the philosophy behind volunteerism is noble, yet straightforward.

The practical implementation is a more complex process.

AVI has achieved much over the past decades through its thoughtful linkages and partnerships.

Working beside Australian and other governments, aid agencies, organisations in developing countries, and - critically - local communities.

Identifying key areas of need; making judgements that will provide the best outcomes for the community.

The programs and projects are certainly dynamic. For example:

The Pacific Technical Assistance Mechanism giving technical assistance to Pacific governments and agencies by recruiting professionals from Australia and other countries for assignments that cannot be filled locally.

PACE International - a joint program with Macquarie University. Over 200 Macquarie students across all faculties and learning areas have had the opportunity to participate in programs in India, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia.

The Lawyers Beyond Borders initiative (I am proud to be Patron). Working towards improving children's and women's rights, on governance, and strengthening national and international law and justice systems.

The achievements are as varied as the volunteers themselves; the establishment of Timor-Leste's first national park, assistance in drafting Swaziland's first Child Protection and Welfare Bill, improving maternal and infant health in Cambodia by working with the University of Health Sciences in Phnom Penh on safe motherhood and birthing programs and services, training the first Hamlin College of midwifery graduates in Ethiopia.

The record shows that AVI has been able to respond to evolving needs in the international community by devising innovative programs and finding solutions in specific communities.

It works in countless niche situations.

Truly adaptable, contemporary and responsive.

Friends, it takes a very special person to volunteer for overseas work.

To have the altruism and the motivation to contribute toward building a better world.

To share experiences and expand horizons.

To have the courage to leave the comforts of home for the challenges of the unknown.

All our international volunteers will return to Australia wiser, with clearer understandings and deeper compassion.

I congratulate AVI on this special anniversary and I wish you the very best in continuing your very important work.

I want you to know how much I admire and respect your personal and professional dedication.

Thank you for what you do.