

## **IVSO 2001**

### **International Volunteer-Sending Organizations Conference in Prague**

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In October, 21.-23., 2001, the International Volunteers Sending Conference was held in Prague. The organizations that were represented by their directors send their volunteers to the whole world, to join different development and humanitarian projects. The conference was held under the auspices of Mr. Jan Kavan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and organized by the civic association Bohemia Corps.

Bohemia Corps is devoted to support and strengthen volunteerism, defining it as the basic principle of the civil society. Since its start in 1997, the organization is a member of non-formal network of organizations that send their volunteers to development projects all over the world. The directors of these organizations regularly meet for a conference, where the future strategy of development is being discussed, and different resolutions, statements, etc. are accepted, reflecting the momentary situation in the world.

The Prague conference was the fifth such event in the history of directors' meeting, happened for the first time in the post-communist country, and, moreover, during the International Year of Volunteers. There were 37 delegates from 18 countries of all the continents, as well as 10 observers from the Czech Republic, and 16 Czech volunteers working hard during the whole event.

The conference was one of the most important activities of the International Year of Volunteers, dealing with the topic of international volunteerism, and its results will be published on several venues.

One of the most important outcomes of the conference is the willingness on the side of large organizations to include several volunteers a year from the emerging countries (like the Czech Republic, and other post-communist countries especially from V4 group) to their already existing and running projects. The conference accepted the Charter of international volunteerism in principle, and the statement that the executive heads of organizations present for Prague meeting will keep meeting on a yearly basis. The next meeting of this network will be highly likely organized in Johannesburg, in 2002.

The participants of the conference were the directors of big organizations of the world, representing all the continents; among the most important guests there were Mr. Mark M. Brown, UNDP Administrator, Ms. Sharon Capeling-Alakija, Executive Co-ordinator of UNV and official coordinator of the International Year of Volunteers world-wide, Mr. Paul Beggan, President of FORUM, and other important guests. Different sessions were attended by different diplomatic corps representatives, i.e. Canadian Ambassador, Ms. Margaret Huber, and others.

The conference carefully listened to the presentation of Dr. Bela Hejna, the Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs and the deputy head of National Coordination Committee for the IYV 2001, Dr. Pavel Vosalik, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, who talked about the development assistance especially from the view of a Czech diplomat

having worked in development world for a period longer than 4 years, and others. At the end of the conference, the delegates were accepted by the Lord Mayor of Prague, Mr. Jan Kasl, who -- along with the Bohemia Corps' Director -- presented the delegates with the Certificates of attendance. Delegates had a chance to meet the Czech volunteers speaking different foreign languages (for instance the Korean delegate was very pleasantly surprised by having been welcomed in Korean, as well as Japanese delegates could not forget their welcome in Japanese, and Czech young volunteers had a chance to meet the directors of organizations working in the development world.)

Civic association Bohemia Corps considers the results of the conference as the very important step in helping the organizations from emerging countries to develop their voluntary-sending projects, and reach a certain sustainability status. Especially in this quickly globalizing world, the attempt to listen to one another, and willingness to understand each other in spite of the differences among us is a very hopeful element.