

INNOVATION, WORK, SOCIETY

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES IN THE SPHERE
OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION**Anastasiia Demidenko**

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Summary

The article is devoted to the volunteer movement in the sphere of human rights protection and cooperation of volunteers with non-governmental human rights organizations. It is pointed out that due to the activization of civil society and the growing number of violations of human rights on the international arena, this issue needs to be studied in more detail. In order to study the nature of volunteer organizations, a retrospective historical analysis of the phenomenon of volunteering since its appearance has been conducted. Several directions of historical development of the volunteer movement are compared.

In order to understand the role of volunteer movements in the protection of human rights, the definition of the concept is proposed and explained, their functions and features as well as the main directions of activity are singled out. The comparison of concepts, functions and roles of volunteer and non-governmental human rights organizations is made. Also, the definition of the concept of “non-governmental human rights organizations” is given, on the base of which the common features of the above elements of civil society are defined.

Examples of state regulation of volunteering activities in European countries, as well as the activities of volunteers in the sphere of human rights protection and cooperation of the latter with non-governmental human rights organizations are analyzed. The importance of cooperation between volunteer organizations and NGOs is also emphasized, as well as the mutual benefit for these organizations.

Keywords: volunteer movement, volunteers, non-governmental human rights organizations, human rights.

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1. Introduction

In order to understand the expediency or, more precisely, the needs of activities of volunteers, in particular, in the sphere of human rights, it is necessary to find out in exactly what way and for which issues they provide assistance. According to Article 3 of the Constitution of Ukraine, “A human being, his or her life and health, honor and dignity, inviolability and security are recognized in Ukraine as the highest social values.”

In addition, the Basic Law enshrines the thesis that the content and direction of the state activity determine the rights and freedoms of man and their guarantees, and the main duty of the state is to establish and ensure them. Based on the above, we can say that in the process of realization of rights and freedoms between the state and civil society there are certain relations, which, unfortunately, are not always harmonious. This is due to the expansion (and in some cases even transformation) of the worldview of citizens and their awareness that in the modern world they have significant opportunities (moreover, certain levers) to influence developments in the world community in general and the state in particular. This is confirmed by the fact that since the beginning of the XXI century, citizens have been able to force the state to make certain political decisions, or to abandon them, and the rights of a human as an individual became more important than the interests of the state.

Today, one of the institutions that allows to control the activities of the state in order to promote and ensure human rights is non-governmental organizations, including human rights organizations (hereinafter – NGOs). For example, in present conditions, the role of NGOs in strengthening the legal culture of society and restoring social justice by means of combating violations of legal rights of citizens by government officials has increased significantly, which, of course, is litmus paper and an important indicator of democratization. These organizations provide public control over the activities of both public authorities, their officials and private law entities and this, in its turn, strengthens the position of civil society in the state.

Despite the expansion of influence and powers, NGOs still have fewer opportunities than the state apparatus, and therefore need the support of citizens, which may be manifested primarily in the participation of citizens in NGO activities on a gratuitous basis (unselfish). In this case, we mean volunteers – people who are willing to spend their energy, time and talent for the benefit of society or a particular person, without waiting for any reward.

Continuing the consideration of the issue, we emphasize the fact that that NGOs and volunteer movements are quite similar. In today's conditions, it has become quite clear that their activities are useful and necessary, and therefore, they need to interact, find ways and means to coordinate actions that will be useful for both institutions of civil society. However, in order to offer the possible ways, first it is necessary to explore their concepts and identify common features, as well as to find out the pros and cons of their interaction.

Taking into account the above, the purpose of the scientific article is to identify common features of NGOs and volunteer movements, as well as to study the positive aspects of their interaction.

The theoretical basis for the study of the outlined topic were the works of Bondarenko Z.P., Matvienko G.M., Ignatusha A.L., Pavlyuk K.S.

2. The history and formation of the volunteer movement

As we know from history, the volunteer movement originated in 1859. It was during this period, known for the bloody pictures of the Battle of Solferino, that the French writer and journalist Henri Duman proposed the idea of creating an organization that would work on a volunteer basis and provide first aid to wounded soldiers. This organisation received the name 'The Red Cross'.

It is noteworthy that, despite the fact that in Ukraine the concept of "a volunteer" was not used till the end of XX century, certain forms of volunteer activity existed for a long time in the Ukrainian lands. First of all, it is worth mentioning that the first domestic volunteers – the

representatives of the Red Cross – during the world wars organized a free admission to hospitals where Sisters of Mercy worked, for the sick and wounded.

However, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the volunteer movement became very popular. This is due to the fact that the events that took place in the world over the last decade have forced people who wanted to influence social development to unite in certain movements. This is often connected with the common ideology. At the same time, public organizations operating at the time were forced to deal with both personnel and financial issues. Of course, under such conditions, organizations involve volunteers in their work and participation in their own activities, thanks to which some issues were removed from the agenda, because the volunteers themselves found a way out of the situation (either through sponsorship or otherwise). Thus, volunteering has contributed and, in some cases, even stimulated the involvement of citizens in change in almost all spheres of life.

Based on this, the world community is gradually recognizing the volunteer movement as a way to preserve and strengthen universal values, to realize the rights and responsibilities of citizens and their personal growth through awareness of human potential. As a result, international programs and documents started to highlight the benefits of volunteering. Finally, in 1985, the celebration of the International Volunteer Day was initiated on December 5, and the UN General Assembly called on governments to promote the dissemination of information about the work of volunteers to involve more and more people from different fields in the volunteer movement.

In 1994, the Council of Europe expressed its position on this issue in the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers for the Promotion of Volunteering, which, in particular, called for the status of volunteering to be defined at the national level. Subsequently, the world community went further. It is about declaring the year of 2001 the International Year of Volunteers. In connection with this initiative, it was decided to conduct a study, based on which the UN in its resolutions recommended that all states include volunteering in their national strategies for socio-economic development, find and eliminate from their own laws all barriers and obstacles that directly or indirectly hinder people engaged in volunteer activities and relieve tax pressure, which puts the volunteer at disadvantage. Moreover, the UN called on the world community to give volunteers legal status and adequate social protection with full respect for their independence. It is worth noting that there were also national initiatives in this regard: in 2005 the Year of the Volunteer was held in Great Britain.

It is also worth mentioning that the United Nations recognizes the importance of volunteering and its public utility. It is firmly believed by the world community that it is carried out on a voluntary basis, which should be an important part of any strategy developed to address many issues, especially in areas such as poverty alleviation, sustainable development and health, social integration, overcoming social inequality and discrimination, etc. In accordance with the provisions of the UN Resolution and the recommendations on the support of the volunteer movement, the governments of all states were invited to include volunteering in their national plans as a component of achieving the goals of sustainable development.

In January 2001, the XVI World Conference of Volunteers was held in Amsterdam (Netherlands), during which the International Board of Directors of the International Association of Volunteer Efforts adopted the Universal Declaration on Volunteering. This act enshrines the principles of activity: recognition of the right to volunteer for all men, women and children, regardless of their race, religion, physical characteristics, social and material status; respect for the dignity and culture of all people; providing assistance, free services personally or organized in the spirit of partnership and brotherhood; recognition of the equal importance of personal and

collective needs, promoting their collective provision; transformation of volunteering into an element of acquiring new knowledge and skills, improving abilities, stimulating the initiative and creativity of people and giving everyone the opportunity to be a creator, not a user and an observer. In addition, the Universal Declaration on Volunteering states that volunteering is the foundation of civil society bringing to people the need for peace, freedom, security and justice.

Based on the above provisions, it can be stated that the above document characterizes volunteering as a way of:

- upholding and strengthening human values such as caring for and helping members of the community;
- using their own rights and responsibilities by each person as a member of a certain community in the process of lifelong learning and development, and realizing all their human potential;
- providing interaction between people, despite all the differences, in order to live together in a healthy stable society and to develop new ways of solving problems that arise (UN, 2001).

It is not accidental and rightly so that Pavlyuk K.S. considers volunteering to be a global process of uniting people who seek to contribute to improving the well-being of their own and of the world community, and volunteers – as people of different ages and professions from various fields and walks of life who give part of their strength, time, knowledge for the benefit of others and society as a whole. The governments of most countries, including the most developed countries in the world, have recognized and promoted the spread of the national volunteer movement in their countries, considering it an effective tool for the development of society (Pavlyuk, 2015).

3. Volunteering today

Today, using common terminology, volunteering can be considered in a sense synonymous with the term “charity”, as citizens donate money and spend their time to implement ideas that coincide with theirs. Some people make efforts to do so, creating or producing something themselves, some do it passively,

i.e. through financial assistance.

As already noted, the volunteer movement permeates all spheres of a person’s life, and has certain features which include, in particular, the fact that it is based on the principles of voluntariness. Considering volunteering within the domestic policy of Ukraine, such a conclusion can be made by referring to the Constitution of Ukraine, which declares that no one may be forced to join any association of citizens or restricted in rights for belonging or not belonging to political parties or public organizations (*Constitution of Ukraine, 1996*). In Germany, as well as in our country, volunteering has certain features, which is reflected in legislative initiatives. Thus, since 1964 there has been implemented the state program “Volunteers’ Social Year” (Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr (FSJ) or Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr (FÖJ)), which allows German youth to carry out practical activities in the social or environmental spheres during the year and since 2002, volunteering has been accepted as an alternative to military service.

At the same time, in the Czech Republic, volunteering has long been recognized as compulsory, free and obligatory. As we can see, approaches to this activity, vision of its essence and meanings differ.

Native scientist Bondarenko Z.P., while analyzing the views of home and foreign scientists on the definition of “volunteering”, notes that it is mostly identified with the concept of

“voluntary activity”, emphasizing the fact that researchers interpret the essence of this phenomenon in the following ways: charity carried out by individuals on a non-profit basis, without wages or promotion for the sake of the welfare and prosperity of communities and society as a whole; voluntary activity based on the ideas of selfless service to the humane ideals of mankind and without pursuing the goal of making a profit, receiving a salary or career growth; obtaining comprehensive fulfillment of personal and social needs by providing assistance to other people. Taking into account all the above, Bondarenko Z.P. concludes that volunteering is a form of civic activity of the population; the national idea of charity and philanthropy, and a volunteer is a citizen who participates in solving socially significant problems on a free basis. In addition, they promote the functioning of public organizations (*Minenko et al., 2017*).

This gives us grounds to claim that another sign of volunteering is gratuitousness. In addition, the volunteer movement is usually common in those areas of life in which the state is unable to provide assistance, and sometimes in those that embody the opposite ideas of the state in a particular matter.

4. The ratio of the volunteer movement and non-governmental human rights organizations

Having understood what exactly is volunteering, let's move on to non-governmental human rights organizations (hereinafter – NGOs) and their similarities with the volunteer movement. First of all, we emphasize the point that according to the classification of public organizations proposed by Slinko T.M. and Kushnarenko O.G., volunteer organizations and NGOs belong to the same group – human rights organizations. In addition, through their activities, NGOs implement the ideas which mostly contribute to the emergence of the volunteer movement (*Slinko, Kushnarenko, 1998*). After carefully reading the common definition, one can find a lot in common between them. Thus, a non-governmental human rights organization is a non-political, officially registered, internally organized, voluntary association of individuals and / or legal entities based on private funds, not subordinated to the executive authorities and not endowed with power, which operates both free of charge and on a paid basis and aims to protect the rights of all subjects.

Agreeing with the thesis that the volunteer movement has a social focus, but at the same time remembering the topic of this study, we pay attention to volunteer organizations in the sphere of human rights.

First of all, we note that the analysis of the above definition allows us to deduce the main features of NGOs:

- voluntariness;
- non-political organization;
- not subordinated to public authorities;
- activities are carried out both free of charge and on a paid basis.

Thus, non-governmental human rights organizations are built on the same principles as the volunteer movement, which means that the cooperation of these organizations is most widely spread phenomena.

There are several explanations to this.

First, funding. Non-governmental human rights organizations focus on the protection of human rights, which are violated primarily due to inaction or improper activities of law enforcement officials and public authorities, lack of funds and ineffective mechanisms that the state has in its arsenal, etc. In addition, they are devoid of public funding and are therefore

forced to find sources of funding. Of course, there are state-supported human rights organizations, but we only consider non-governmental human rights organizations.

Most NGOs operate at the expense of membership fees or financial assistance from citizens who do not participate in the organization's activities but support them. This is the first similar feature of NGOs and the volunteer movement, because financial assistance and support (so to speak, raising funds) is a manifestation of volunteering.

Secondly, given that human rights violations are quite common, NGOs are not able to know about each case because their own information sources and resources are limited, and therefore in order to increase and expand opportunities to protect violated rights, they use the services of volunteer organizations that conduct analytical work and bring to the attention of NGOs information and statistics on this issue. This allows them to respond more quickly to violations of rights and freedoms and to cover more cases.

Thirdly, some non-governmental human rights organizations are funded by volunteers, i.e. volunteers participate passively in the organization's activities. However, they can also take an active part (physical participation) in the protection of human rights. Volunteers conduct educational activities, analytical work, protect individuals in court, cover the facts of violations in order to attract public attention. Fourthly, NGOs and volunteer organizations have the same position in civil society.

They are independent of the state and other organizations, and act as independent subjects in civil society. NGOs work in three directions:

- 1) protection of human rights in specific cases (this assistance should be free of charge for the applicant), public investigations into human rights violations by public authorities;
- 2) dissemination of information on human rights and legal education;
- 3) analysis of the situation with human rights (*Zakharov, 2004*).

In each of these activities, volunteer movements have an opportunity to participate and help increase the effectiveness of NGOs and the level of human rights protection.

The events taking place in the East of Ukraine in the area of the anti-terrorist operation will best of all allow to study the interaction of volunteers and NGOs on a practical level. It is said, in particular, that the number of cases of human rights violations in the context of an armed conflict has increased significantly, which, in turn, is explained by the fact that the territory of Operation Allied Forces is not under the control of Ukraine. Based on this, it is clear that the main non-military activities are carried out by volunteer movements, and therefore they are involved in NGOs in case of significant human rights violations. For example, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group operates on the territory of the Environmental Protection Agency, which every month recruits volunteers who are ready to join the activities of NGOs. Thus, realizing a human rights direction of activity, they focused their efforts on protection of the rights of those people who got into difficult life situations. It is said that volunteer lawyers monitored and tried to counteract illegal actions of the authorities in the legal field. Today, they help IDPs draw up the necessary documents and are part of negotiating groups that work to release hostages and mitigate the conditions of their detention. It should be added that the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, in addition to the above, provides volunteers with an opportunity to undergo trainings and seminars.

In addition, volunteering is an integral part of the activities of the human rights organization "Peace Brigades International" (hereinafter – PBI), the main focus of which is to provide human rights defenders at risk with observers. This is because volunteers are able to attract the attention of the community in case of imminent danger, i.e. their activities bring the greatest effect. Besides, they use their own family and friends, as well as previously acquired activists' connections, which allows a better monitoring performance.

The next well-known international non-governmental human rights organization, which is very active in involving volunteers, is Amnesty International. As you know, they participate in the translation of information materials, analytical work and promotions (by the way, they often become its participants).

However, not only do NGOs need volunteers, but volunteer movements are also interested in working with non-governmental human rights organizations. Citizens benefit from this because they receive assistance from more knowledgeable legal professionals and qualified professionals, which reduces the level of human rights violations. This is confirmed by Berchenko G. V., who emphasizes that NGOs and volunteer movements operate in a single plane (*Berchenko, 2014*), and based on this, he includes non-governmental human rights organizations and volunteer movements among the elements of civil society.

5. Conclusion

Thus, in recent years, the volunteer movement has gained considerable popularity, and its intensification and expansion of spheres of activity is due to two main factors: internal political crisis, which led to the imbalance of public administration, lack of quality management decisions, lack of resource opportunities, and external aggression, which deepened the imbalance between the state's ability to effectively perform its functions and meet the basic needs of citizens.

As practice shows, NGOs cooperate with more volunteers every year. One of the reasons for this was the growing number of human rights violations, especially by the state.

In addition, the cooperation between the volunteer movement and NGOs is quite effective, given the identity of the features, which is primarily manifested in the following ways: free basis of activity; independence from state bodies; voluntary association.

However, not only NGOs need volunteers, but also volunteers participating in the activities of non-governmental human rights organizations benefit in the form of participation in trainings, seminars, actions that expand the legal awareness of citizens.

Cooperation between NGOs and volunteer organizations makes exceptional sense if we consider the above movements through the prism of "the state is the highest body". And it is in this sense that civil society should play a crucial role in protecting the rights and interests of citizens, because, as Rechytsky V.V. notes, civil society is a phenomenon that is a set of social relations which are relatively independent and autonomous from the state, that is, it is the economic, social, and ideological sphere of society (*Rechytsky, 1999*). With mutual assistance, NGOs and volunteer organizations gain independence not only from public funding but also from government influence.

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