

“You are the protective wall against indifference and negligence,” said the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, in Kadriorg today, where he acknowledged the volunteers of the year who ranged in age from 20 to 86 years old. “The third sector is organised on a voluntary basis by people who follow their hearts and care about our country, and it is the defence mechanism that we require to keep our society open and healthy, help people make their voices heard and make our country better.”

The Head of State reminded those present that Estonia enjoys a strong tradition of third sector involvement, which was not destroyed during the darkest and most difficult times, and Estonia has a large number of well-operating societies and associations.

“However, our third sector representatives, our government and our companies can and must facilitate the activities of the third sector. And by this I mean support and facilitate, not manage or organise. This is what makes us strong and allows us to cope with even the most difficult problems. Supporting and taking notice of each other will make Estonia greater,” said President Ilves, who is patron of the event for acknowledging volunteers.

He thanked the Voluntary Activities’ Development Centre and all the organisations and institutions that focus on supporting and encouraging voluntary activities: “Although you may sometimes feel tired or are fed up with fighting against these obstacles and problems, the voluntary desire to help, to do something and make the lives of all of us better will always take the upper hand. You, the promoters of the third sector in Estonia, deserve recognition as big as that available to all our volunteers of the year.”

This current year, the European Year of Voluntary Activities, the titles of Volunteer of the Year were awarded to Rauno Avel, Jarmo Idavain, Maite-Margit Kotta, Kuldar Käsper, Leili Nael, Erna-Elise Neimann, Ülle Olli, Margus Press, Aino Suviste and Ina Tepp. The leaders of the volunteers, Piret Ehavald and Svetlana Varjun, were also acknowledged. The Estonian Bar Association was the organisation that has most supported the volunteer activities of employees, having established a long-term and strategic cooperation with the third sector, by offering legal assistance under the *pro bono* arrangement.

The volunteers were chosen from 73 candidatures, which were submitted by a committee consisting of the Advisory Council of the Voluntary Activities’ Development Centre including

Volunteer of the Year 2010, Riina Varts, and representatives of ministries and the Office of the President.

More information is available on the volunteers of the year website at www.vabatahtlikud.ee .

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