



Leila Mirembe during her work at the United Nations clinic in Somalia.

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## Being the rainbow in someone's cloud: delivering medical services at community level

My name is Leila Mirembe, a UN Volunteer Medical Doctor working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Somalia. Volunteering allows me to meet people from different levels of society, share diverse perspectives, and help those in need. I also learn new skills and get new experiences. In this article, I share my experience.

I have always loved to help people, to see the sick get better, and to make a difference in the lives of others. I am Ugandan, and I worked in South Sudan with Doctors with Africa CUAMM before joining UNDP.

“ I always quote Maya Angelou. ‘Be the rainbow in

“ someone’s cloud.’ I have always loved to help people to see the sick get better, to make a difference in lives. --Leila Mirembe, UN Volunteer Medical Doctor

Bossaso is a vibrant big town in Somalia bordering the Indian Ocean to the south and the Gulf of Aden to the east. Despite being near water, the temperature is quite high. The people are warm and welcoming. The United Nations (UN) clinic here is one of five UN clinics in Somalia managed by UNDP. The UN Clinic Manager works out of Hargeisa and oversees the activities of all clinics.

A doctor heads each UN Clinic, while a nurse assists. I am the doctor in charge of the UN Clinic in Bossaso, which treats residents of the greater Bari Region. The UN Clinic ensures good health and wellbeing of the population.

Every day, I wake up to support people in need at the clinic. I undertake daily clinical duties like walk-in clinical check-ups, emergencies, stabilization of critical patients and any other clinical services required.

I have followed up positive COVID-19 cases and participated in contact tracing. I also perform daily occupational health duties, which include pre-placement, periodic medical examinations, preparing UN staff for travelling, administering immunizations and malaria prophylaxis, as well as travel kits.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, we are constantly advocating for proper sanitation. We are encouraging people to boil their drinking water, wash their hands, and keep the surroundings clean.

“ I respond to people with COVID-19 symptoms who call or come to the clinic for relevant assistance. We also provide health education and promotion programmes, with emphasis on the prevention of the COVID-19 outbreak. Through our work, the community is more vigilant in hand hygiene, general sanitation, and they have adopted social distancing

measures. --Leila Mirembe

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When necessary, I refer staff to specialists and follow-up with them after the referrals. The poorly streamlined medical referral system often leads to delayed management of cases. I usually visit these health facilities to speak with the doctors and managers and advising on relevant changes where possible.

“ As the saying goes, ‘a journey of a thousand miles begins with a step.’ I believe that if you want to be great at whatever you want to do, you have to love it and make sacrifices for it. --Leila Mirembe

One experience that stands out for me was a Somali lady, whose pregnancy was so complicated that she had to stop working. Bossaso has no obstetrician, so I conducted monthly visits to follow up on her. All went well in the end, and she delivered a beautiful baby girl and named her after me. I was thrilled.



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