

21 September 2015



Robert (far right) and his team during a training exercise in Juba at the UNMISS fire training ground. (Sammy Gathogo, UNV, 2013)

Being even more determined as UN Volunteer

"I started doing voluntary work when I was in primary school so the spirit of volunteerism has always been with me" says Robert Kiiza, a UN Volunteer from Uganda, based in Yambio South Sudan. In 2012, Robert became an UN Volunteer with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) as a Fire Safety Assistant in the Aviation Section. When he got deployed in Juba, there were only two fire safety personnel across the mission and he was asked to coordinate fire related activities in areas where UNMISS launched air operations.

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Although his responsibility was to train the national fire brigade units, his work was extended beyond his call of duty as he often found himself engaged in peer counseling and encouraging local participants in the firefighting training.

In December 2013, a civil conflict erupted in South Sudan. The ensuing violence killed more than 10,000 people and displaced more than 230,000. Robert was one of the UN volunteers who experienced the conflict and whose volunteerism was beneficial to the UNMISS efforts to support the peace process.

"When the 2013 crisis started, I was in Juba and it was a very tough working environment. At this time, I was alone as the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the Aviation Fire Safety Unit coordinating activities with the South Sudan Civil Aviation Authority Fire Department. We worked under tense conditions, but we encouraged each other as volunteers and we were determined to make a difference in the lives of the people of South Sudan. At one point we spent the night in the office because there were gun shots around our accommodation area so I got first-hand experience of working in a civil war environment. I saw helpless civilians running as they were displaced and injured. But all this made me even more determined as a UN Volunteer."

Robert was redeployed to Yambio in June 2014 to continue his volunteer assignment. Thinking about that assignment, Robert says: "Apart from training a team of three Fire Safety Assistants, I was also able to initiate awareness talks with community members. Our talks focused not only on development ideas, problem-solving skills and responsible citizenship but also on an ideal world of peace. Through these talks, people developed self-awareness skills which will hopefully amplify their drive for personal development."

Robert says that he looks forward to setting up an independent workforce so that when UNMISS has completed its mandate in South Sudan, the local people he trained in fire safety related duties can work with minimum or no supervision.

"I have gained international exposure. I have interacted with different people of different levels and backgrounds. I have shared ideas with colleagues and the local community and I have overcome challenges in multiple situations. I have also added value to other people's lives. I feel so honored to have made a great contribution in South Sudan as UN Volunteer."

Bios

*After High School **Robert Kilza** joined the Civil Aviation Authority, Uganda and trained as a Crash Fire and Rescue Firefighter, graduating in 2003, from the International Civil Aviation Organization 111 Basic Course. Robert then studied Elementary Law at Uganda Police Training School in 2004. He has also completed the Breathing Apparatus Wearer's Course, Aerodrome*

Certification, Safety Management Systems from Aviation Quality services, International Air Transport Association (IATA) dangerous goods regulations, as well as Aircraft Marshaling Techniques from the East African School of Aviation, Kenya.

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