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UN Volunteers serving with UNDP Tunisia as part of a Peacebuilding Fund project, during a workshop to plan an internal communication strategy (clockwise from left): Zied Hajji, Nermine Souissa, Riadh Beji and Dalila Ksir.
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Engaging Tunisian youth in shaping peace through volunteering

In Tunisia, young women and men continue to experience political, economic, social and cultural marginalization, especially in the south. The obstacles to inclusion are complex and multidimensional, so the United Nations launched an inter-agency project to promote social cohesion and sustain peace through endogenous processes, mechanisms and structures. Nine national UN Volunteers with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been coordinating this project.

The project for sustaining peace in Tunisia through the inclusion of young people at the local level is being implemented by UNDP, UN Women and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with the support of the UN Peacebuilding Fund, and in

partnership with seven different municipalities.

Each of the UN Volunteers is responsible for the coordination of the project in one municipality, where social cohesion and resilience are promoted through the inclusion of the most marginalized young women and men.

The goal is to increase the civic participation and participatory dialogues between young people, local authorities, associations and the media, by galvanizing wider community engagement in favour of the peace process and, more broadly, strengthening the social capital essential for a lasting peace.

“ Peace is a simple word filled with complexity and meaning. For me, peace is to be respected and accepted for who you are, to have the freedom to completely be yourself, to live in harmony, in cohesion across society, to deal with conflict without resorting to force, to have the necessary conditions for the wellbeing of all. -- Nouha Cherif, UN Volunteer Field-based Coordinator with UNDP in Djerba Ajim

UN Volunteer Nouha Cherif serves as a field-based coordinator for the project in Djerba Ajim region, located on Djerba island in the south-east of Tunisia.

"Becoming a UN Volunteer gave me the opportunity to contribute to fortifying peace in the southern region of Tunisia, using my accumulated experience and knowledge," says Nouha. She adds that her volunteering experience taught her how to 'leave no one behind' and how to behave in unity with others to build trust within communities and fortify social cohesion by improving cooperation and dialogue. All of these actions, she feels, count towards shaping peace together.

“ Empowering young women and men, especially the most marginalized, as agents of change in their societies and increasing their participation in decision-making processes at the municipal level was an amazing change that we get to be part of. --Abdelfatteh Kdiss, UN Volunteer Field-based Coordinator with UNDP in Medenine

As part of their assignments, Nouha and Abdelfatteh develop and promote youth engagement in the community, especially among those that are hard to reach. By helping young people explore their shared interests and concerns, UN Volunteers are encouraging

the youth to become active changemakers and catalyzers of peace and trust building. The UN Volunteers are also ensuring these activities are coordinated with different stakeholders of the project to ensure smooth delivery of the outcomes.

Nermine Souissa, a third UN Volunteer Field Coordinator based in Gabes performs a similar critical and important role in coordinating with municipalities for the execution of project activities. Among other contributions, Nermine surveyed more than 100 marginalized young people about their relationship with the municipality.

“ When I envision a peaceful world, I see a world without violence, without war, without crime, and I see the contentedness of all mankind. --Nermine Souissa, UN Volunteer field-based coordinator with UNDP in Gabes

By coordinating field activities and events, these UN Volunteers help young people have their voices heard, and allow them to participate in decision-making processes, ultimately serving as peace builders in their small communities.

Beyond the experiences of Nouha, Abdelfatteh and Nermine, all nine UN volunteers recruited within the project have recently conducted a survey in 21 targeted localities in the south of Tunisia to collect the impressions of marginalized young women and men. The results of this survey will serve to detect the points to be strengthened and the areas for improvement in the performance of municipal services.

“ At a time when we are celebrating peace, actions need to be taken to make our vision of a peaceful world possible. One crucial thing we can all do is to raise our children on the value of respecting differences. --Abdelfatteh Kdiss, UN Volunteer Field-based Coordinator in Medenine



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