

15 June 2021

Gulfam Mustafa (Pakistan) and Samal Bekmaganbetova (Kazakhstan)



Gulfam Mustafa's family is in Pakistan, while he serves in Guinea Bissau. He holds on to positive memories and communicates regularly with them virtually.

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"Following the news of increasing COVID-19 cases causes me fear, anxiety and mental stress"

Due to COVID-19, this past year has placed a tremendous burden on families and parents. We have had to deal with lockdowns, separation from loved ones, school closures and online learning, and shouldering additional responsibilities. As we mark the International Day of Families on 15 May and the Global Day of Parents on 1 June, we feature the very personal stories and coping strategies of our UN Volunteers – as partners, parents, children and more. In this article, meet Gulfam and Samal.

Gulfam Mustafa, UN Volunteer Partnership and Resource Mobilization Officer serving with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Guinea Bissau

As an international UN Volunteer, I live in a country thousands of miles away from my home. I have my family and kids back in Pakistan. Following the news of increasing COVID-19 cases causes me fear, anxiety and mental stress.

I feel concerned when I think of the health and safety of my family and kids. I have two sons and a daughter, aged 11, seven and four years old. I have travelled once to see them. In addition to difficulties caused by the pandemic, travel takes 2-3 days to reach from Bissau to Pakistan, after taking three different flights.

The other challenge is to work remotely. Due to the pandemic, I cannot go to the office regularly, which is hard. Even if I go to the office, I have fewer opportunities to interact with my peers. While living away from my family and friends in a country with difficult living conditions, the pandemic has made it challenging to establish social networks and meet new people.

On the positive side, I think the Coronavirus has helped us find innovative ways to stay connected with our loved ones. We are experiencing a digital revolution in using online modes of communication, telecommuting, sharing and even signing documents digitally. I think this is also good for nature, as there will be less paper and less carbon emissions. We have also to take better care of our hygiene, which is no longer just a good habit, rather necessary for our survival.

For those who live with their families, the COVID-19 pandemic has given them opportunities to improve relationships within the family. Parents should stay at home, set aside the time to spend with their children, help them improve self-confidence, and build stronger family bonds.

“ Sometimes, kids drive us crazy, but we must stay positive. We should praise our children for their creative skills. It will help them learn positive behaviours and bring new ideas. Teach your children about hygiene, safe behaviours, social distancing during the pandemic and help them manage the stress.

Samal Bekmaganbetova, national UN Volunteer Technical Officer with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in Kazakhstan

Over the past summer we lost many relatives to the Coronavirus, and general anxiety at some point led to a state of periodic uncontrollable panic. The fact that I was at home and next to my family helped me to realize that they are healthy, the children are safe and everything is fine.

To my great happiness, the beginning of isolation coincided with the second half of the pregnancy, when it became difficult for me to sit all day. So, working from home was a great solution for good productivity.

For one year and three months of telecommuting, I got the opportunity to spend time with my family and not worry about my little children. In May, my eldest will turn two and a half and the newborn will be one.

“ For me, the past year and the experience of working from home has been absolutely positive. This is also due to the great merit of my parents and relatives, who look after my children while I hide somewhere at home to work.



Samal and her family during Christmas celebrations. ©Samal Bekmaganbetova, personal archive

 Global

• International Day of Families • Global Day of Parents • COVID-19 • Coronavirus • Pakistan •

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