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The 100th UN volunteer of the Swiss Expert Pool, Kenza Gueddi (right), with staff and the director of the women's shelter in Bethlehem during her visit on June 19, 2019.

The 100th UN volunteer of the Swiss Expert Pool

This article is based on an interview with UN Youth Volunteer Kenza Gueddi, who was the 100th UN Youth Volunteer deployed through the Swiss Expert Pool for Civil Peacebuilding (SEF). Kenza's assignment was sponsored by the Peace and Human Rights Division (formerly Human Security Division, of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland.

You were the 100th United Nations Youth Volunteer (UNYV) deployed by SEF. What is your assessment of this young talent promotion programme?

It is an interesting and inspiring programme for young people and I am pleased that I could benefit from it. Working as a UN volunteer is a unique opportunity to take part in a UN field mission. The world is becoming more and more competitive these days, especially in international fields, where candidates come from all over the world. Young university graduates often find it difficult to enter the professional world and sometimes have to complete one internship after another. In this context, I think the UNYV missions offer valuable and professional experience, including new contacts, for young people.

Did you get a chance to meet other volunteers? How were these encounters?

Before my departure to Palestine, I met other Swiss people and other volunteers from all over the world who had been accepted for the programme around that time in Bonn. I also met UN Youth Volunteers in Palestine, where there is a large volunteer community. The exchange with other young people in similar positions was very enriching. We exchanged our experiences, gave each other advice. I could also experience solidarity and mutual support from other volunteers. These encounters also make it

possible to network and get to know motivated young people with different but interesting backgrounds.

How did your first UN mission go?

The first few weeks were difficult because the assignments given to me were broad and not clear. However, as time passed, with some specific tasks, I could develop my project management skills. Particularly, I worked on a project that looked at how local law enforcement agencies dealt with gender-based violence cases. I prepared awareness workshops and training courses in Ramallah to strengthen the capacities of the police and prosecutors in investigating cases of gender-based violence.

What was the biggest challenge?

One of the biggest challenges for me was the language barrier. Though I was able to improve my Arabic, it was not enough to attend meetings and workshops, some of which took place without translation.

What was your most memorable moment working as a UNYV?

In July 2019, I had the opportunity to accompany the SDC Swiss Cooperation Office on a visit to Gaza. We met many civil society organizations that support women who have suffered gender-based violence. For example, we visited a refuge and vocational training programmes for women. There, we were able to speak to experts who provide medical, legal and psychosocial support to women affected by violence. This experience was extremely interesting, not only professionally but also emotionally.

What were you able to take away from this mission?

The memory of an enriching year, both professionally and personally. On the one hand, I was able to develop my professional. On the other hand, I was able to make friends in Palestine. I am proud of what I have achieved and, overall, satisfied with the experience I have gained from it. But most of all, I have gained a deeper understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian context, the reality of the Israeli occupation, everyday problems that the Palestinian community face, and the human rights defenders I met during my mission. From this opportunity, I could be aware of the ongoing political and ideological conflicts and the consequences for the local people.

What are your next plans in Switzerland - now or later?

For now, I have no plans to return to Switzerland as I want to continue working in the Middle East, at least for a few years. The region, where people often face challenges is very close to my heart; currently, I am looking for a job in conflict resolution, humanitarian aid and human rights issues.

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