



UN Volunteer Dita Bicanovska (far left), a UN Volunteer from Czech Republic, serves with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bolivia. Together with colleagues from the departmental regional branches at the local level, she supported the organization of credible elections in the country in 2020.

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Volunteer-based solutions to guarantee peaceful, transparent and inclusive elections in Bolivia

"Being a UN Volunteer is an exciting role and it is a source of pride for me to work for the good of humanity." These are the words of Carlos del Castillo, a Peruvian UN Volunteer assigned to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Bolivia. Carlos is a Field Public Outreach Voter Education Expert and Electoral Advisor to the Departmental Courts in Chuquisaca and Potosi in Bolivia. "I'm 66 years old and if given the opportunity, I will continue serving as a volunteer until I am 70."

Carlos started his first assignment as a UN Volunteer in 1992 with elections in Cambodia. He is one of 28 UN Volunteers who served under the UNDP-implemented [Electoral Assistance Project of the United Nations](#) in Bolivia, a project that sought to re-establish trust in the electoral body, as part of the UN's peacebuilding efforts in the country. This it did by supporting a credible, transparent, and inclusive electoral process. After the 2019 Bolivian presidential election results were disputed, civil unrest occurred, elections were cancelled and the country was immersed in a destabilizing course.

International actors – such as the Episcopal Conference of Bolivia, the European Union and the UN Secretary General’s Personal Envoy – stepped in to help Bolivia find a peaceful solution to the crisis. Subsequently, the [Peacebuilding Project of the United Nations](#) was set up. Organized around three pillars, electoral, human rights and dialogue, the project aimed to reinforce social trust around a peaceful and democratic electoral process.

"We supported the departmental regional branches at the local level to organize credible elections and collaborated to strengthen Bolivian democracy," said Carlos. "This project was unique in that we set out to organize dialogue roundtables with all political parties, which were extremely important because they facilitated transparency."

The UN peacebuilding initiative was led by the Resident Coordinator Office and implemented by UNDP, UN Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It incorporated volunteer-based solutions through the mobilization of 75 volunteers, including 28 UN Volunteers, 12 UN [Online Volunteers](#) and 35 from Volunteers in Action, a community volunteer initiative where Bolivian citizens can support the peacebuilding project by completing short-term tasks such as research, event logistics and advocacy.

"UNV has the mandate to support, streamline and avail tools to the UN agencies to facilitate implementation of their mandates," explains Cyra Daroca, Country Coordinator of the UNV office in Bolivia. "Our contribution is to put at the service of the UN and its counterparts a roster of highly trained, passionate and competent personnel in an agile manner. We can mobilize experts and professionals who are willing to immerse themselves in complex situations, such as the one we experienced in Bolivia."

This was also the case of Maria Constanza Llanos Torres, a Colombian UN Volunteer serving with UNDP as a Field Public Outreach Voter Education Expert to the Departmental Courts in La Paz. Maria Constanza, affectionally known as Connie, has contributed to the project by advising electoral stakeholders about relational and cultural challenges and organizing debates between young people and candidates. She draws from her experience in various electoral missions in Africa and Southeast Asia.

"We sought a space where young people could have a dialogue with candidates," Connie describes. "This was not a typical scenario where young people listened to the candidates, rather one where the young people interrogated the candidates. Now networked, these young people are doing things together."

Dita Bicanovska (Czech Republic) is a UN Volunteer assigned to UNDP in Cochabamba and Tarija. She supports the electoral tribunals with financial support, logistics and the consolidation of partnerships across electoral stakeholders, including tribunal staff, political parties and civil society. She also is the link between the departmental tribunal and the electoral project.

UN Volunteers like Carlos, Connie and Dita are highly qualified, motivated professionals committed not only to serving vulnerable populations, but also to supporting peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery in affected countries.

Cristina Forello (Spain), a UN Volunteer serving with UN Women since November 2019, makes sure that women's voices and demands are taken into account throughout the programme. She works on human rights and gender equality, strengthening the role and leadership of women in processes generating a culture of peace.

"I always try to engage diverse sectors of the population, civil society, private sector, academia, women from rural areas," the 29-year-old explains. Cristina mobilized nine UN Community Volunteers who were trained in negotiation, mediation, identification and prevention of conflict. These volunteers will focus on teaching and sensitizing the community about gender equality, as well as the importance of tolerance, inclusion and acceptance in polarized contexts.

"The value of volunteering is essential. There is a connection between our role as volunteers and reinforcing the [peacebuilding programme] mandate," Cristina asserts. "There are many people who really have the impetus, desire and also the innovative and creative ideas to really make this peace process a reality."

UN Volunteers are successful in their assignments, because they have the mandate and essential values to integrate other non-UN volunteers into their work, including those mobilized virtually through the online volunteering service and the Volunteers in Action network. The latter civil society volunteers are supporting UN Volunteers in very specific, but highly valued, tasks.

"Volunteers in action and online volunteers are also deemed ambassadors for the UN's mandate on the ground, planting seeds to reduce conflict," Cyra concludes. All forms of volunteering are the most fundamental expression of the ideals of the United Nations, where nobody is left behind and where people's aspirations are factored in and supported.

This article was written with the kind support of [Online Volunteer Nichool Castro](#).



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