Thirteen years of sowing peace in Darfur

This year’s International Day of UN Peacekeepers comes five months after the United Nations Security Council – through UNSC Resolution 2559 – ended the mandate of the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) as of 31 December 2020. Full withdrawal is to be completed by 30 June 2021, followed by a liquidation phase.

For UN Volunteers, many of whom have served with UNAMID for years, this is an emotional period, particularly as they bid farewell to local communities in Darfur.

Many UN Volunteers hope that their work and peace dividends gained in this peacekeeping operation over the last thirteen years can be sustained, at least for the sake of the vulnerable people who
have endured suffering for far too long.

Starting with the deployment of its first UN Volunteer in August 2007, UNV had deployed over 696 Volunteers to the mission by 2020, from over 70 nationalities. These UN Volunteers were deployed to both mission support and substantive functions.

The list is long: water and sanitation, transportation, technical cooperation, storage and warehousing, social services, purchasing and contracting, public information, production, machine maintenance and repair, laboratory operations, inventory and supply, building maintenance, administration, financial management, medical and nutrition, computer information systems, architecture, engineering and administration. Several were also deployed in human rights, political and civil affairs, gender and protection roles.

In partnership with UN agencies, funds and programmes, civil society organizations and other stakeholders, UNV also implemented important programmatic activities. These included the Youth Volunteers Rebuilding Darfur programme and the Youth Volunteerism for Peacebuilding Project, as well as critical quick impact projects. UN Volunteers, therefore, played a critical role in UNAMID’s delivery of its peacekeeping mandate.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 brought with it many significant challenges, including freezing of international travel, imposition of multiple lockdowns and increased workload (without the much-needed rest), thus resulting in increased levels of stress. Some UN Volunteers contracted the virus itself. However, this did not deter the determined UN Volunteers from carrying on with their assignments.

I am one proud Programme Manager, because of the achievements of these selfless UN Volunteers. Every time I participate in Mission meetings or events and hear the endless testimonies and praises heaped on our volunteers by mission section chiefs and senior management, I am reminded of the sacrifices UN Volunteers, many of whom were in the frontline of service provision, have made for the people of Darfur. --James Duku, UNV Programme Manager, UNAMID

While it sometimes feels sad to bid farewell to the now departing UN Volunteers, I am deeply thankful for their contribution to peace in the Darfur region of Sudan. On this International Day of UN Peacekeepers, may their commitment to service and contribution be recognized as the greatest catalyst for Peace and Development here and in the world beyond.
UN Volunteers are, indeed, an inspiration in action!

• International Day of UN Peacekeepers

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 3: Good health and well-being SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals