Sharing facts on drugs and trafficking, saving lives

For Nermine Abdelhamid (Egypt), her UN Volunteer experience with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was only the beginning of a journey. She served as a UN Volunteer Communications and Visibility Officer with the Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa in Cairo. Now a staff member, Nermine continues the work she started then, raising awareness to combat drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

Nermine holds a Master's degree in International Relations, specializing in Strategic Communications. During her studies, she jobbed as a researcher, reporter, editor, writer and social media analyst. The skills developed from these academic and professional experiences prepared her for the role she was to assume as a UN Volunteer Communications and Visibility officer.
I got the call for the interview on the day of my graduation rehearsal. I remember I was in my cap and gown thinking that being a UN Volunteer at UNODC was my chance to achieve lasting impact and provide the public with knowledge and information through strategic communications. -- Nermine Abdelhamid, former UN Volunteer with UNODC’s Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa

"My position allowed me to experience – first hand – the power of using communications for social change, for raising awareness, helping reduce different social stigmas, and give a voice to many," says Nermine. "I am especially excited to support the development of web content in different languages. These communications reach a wide audience and ensure the public has access to accurate information on drug abuse, the importance of receiving treatment, social protection and rehabilitation services. This information could be life-saving," she adds.

Throughout her volunteer assignment with UNODC, Nermine has contributed to more than 400 products, including articles and podcasts, and campaigns – all in Arabic, English and French. In addition, she managed to increase the Regional Office’s reach up to four million users on social media.

This year, the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, aims to combat misinformation and highlight facts about drugs, Nermine points out that communications professionals have a vital role in addressing misinformation and sharing facts through various channels. "This allows information to reach the audience on drug abuse, the importance of providing and receiving treatment, health care, social protection and rehabilitation services, and drug trafficking trends, such as arrest and seizures," she explains.

The content Nermine develops and manages often draws upon data from the UNODC World Drug Report, a critical resource for local, national and international agencies. It includes information about the latest drug trafficking trends around the world, from which both complementary and targeted interventions can be developed.
Besides combatting drug abuse and trafficking, Nermine is especially proud of her work in support of victims of human trafficking. "One of my proudest moments was a campaign I co-led with UN colleagues to raise awareness about human trafficking, entitled Saving Dignity," she reports. "The campaign went viral, reaching around two million people in the region, and was covered extensively in the media. It was even embraced by the Ministry of Labor in Lebanon, providing a helpline for people who feel they may be victims of trafficking. The campaign helped raise awareness on the different forms of human trafficking and gave survivors a channel to voice their stories." Yet the most significant thing about this campaign for Nermine was its tangible impact. "If one out of these two million people sought help or escaped trafficking, then I did my job right," she says.

“If I could do it all again, I would, in a heartbeat. UNV led the way for me to be a global civil servant at the UN and achieve my dream of using strategic communications for social good. --Nermine Abdelhamid, former UN Volunteer with UNODC's Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa

- International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

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