



Sukehiro Hasegawa (far left, front row), former Deputy Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme from 1987 to 1993. In this photo from 1986, he was UN Resident Coordinator in Samoa, and is seen with the UNV Country Coordinator at the time, Don Katabaro (second from left, front row).

UN Volunteers building peace over the years: reflections of Sukehiro Hasegawa

As UNV turns 50, we feature an interview with Sukehiro Hasegawa, former Deputy Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme from 1987 to 1993. Mr Hasegawa helped transform UNV from primarily a community development organization into a strong partner for UN peacekeeping efforts. Find out more about Mr Hasegawa's reflections on our mandate, work and partners 30 years ago.

UNV's first peacekeeping deployment

By the time I became Deputy Executive Coordinator in 1987, peacekeeping had become an important part of the UN's role, with most major operations at the time carried out in Cambodia, between 1992 and 1993.

As the conflict neared its end and the country grappled with the brutality of the Khmer Rouge, the United Nations sought to help the country rebuild and establish a viable government through transitional administration arrangements. I travelled to UN headquarters in New York and met with Under-Secretary-General Rafeeuddin Ahmed and Assistant Secretary-General Hédi Annabi for Peacekeeping Operations to engage UN Volunteers as electoral supervisors and technicians to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

This was the first time UN Volunteers were deployed on a large scale to assist in peacekeeping operations. We had a good mix of 500 international volunteers serving as UN Electoral Supervisors, hailing from different countries and regions. One third from Asia, one third from Europe and the North America, and the remaining one third from Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

Tragedy: the need to remember

As the 1993 election neared in Cambodia, armed conflict increased. Tragically, we lost one of our own: Atsuhito Nakata, a UN Volunteer from Japan was ambushed and murdered while fulfilling his duty.

The loss of Atsuhito devastated the organization and many discussions took place in Geneva to decide whether we should continue with deployment in Cambodia. Understandably, nearly 20 per cent of UN Volunteers deployed at that time decided to terminate their assignments. Despite the incredibly difficult circumstances, the rest insisted on continuing their efforts to support the peace process. After weeks of discussion, painstaking consideration of the security measures, elections were held and we successfully helped build the transitional administration in Cambodia.

“ It is important not to forget the ones who died in the course of service. The value of volunteerism that previous volunteers have tried to create – even though they could not finish their mission – motivates people to engage and volunteer. We appreciate the endeavours of volunteers who have served before us and will continue with that spirit.

We, the colleagues serving at the time, commemorate the death of Atsuhito Nakata each year, together with UNV headquarters. We are now preparing for the 30th anniversary of Atsuhito’s death, which will take place in Japan in 2022.



Marching forward – the peace and development nexus

In his 1992 Agenda for Peace, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali gave rise to the nexus between peace and development. Peace cannot be sustained without development and development is not possible unless there is peace and solidarity in the society. This was an era in which the UN Secretary-General took a lead and we marched forward.

“ I have had the honour of seeing volunteers do an excellent job navigating the path from conflict to peace and development, numerous times. They have “marched forward” – just as our UN Volunteers did in Cambodia. UN Volunteers are special as they can

“ connect the UN with local and grassroots people.

For instance, in Timor-Leste, where I was the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, we had the United Nations Development Programme’s Recovery, Employment and Stability Programme for Ex-combatants and Communities in Timor-Leste (UNDP-RESPECT). UN Volunteers played a crucial role supporting disarmed and disengaged ex-combatants reintegrate into the community.

What UN Volunteers can do differently

UNV is now playing its pivotal role as a service provider to various UN agencies. However, I think we should always consider what we can do differently. Sometimes, as DEC, I saw how well-qualified and professional volunteers found limitations in the UN system.

I believe UN Volunteers can excel even more – not just as service providers, but specifically as technology providers in new technologies such as artificial intelligence. UN Volunteers can expand their careers with their expertise and can redefine the role of UN Volunteers in the UN system.

UN Volunteers are special in that we represent the UN and embody its principles, ensuring we uphold the universal values and facilitate multilateral and international cooperation.

Difficult setup: reflecting on the challenges we faced

To engage UN volunteers in peace operations, there is no doubt we faced challenges accessing expertise, which I believe was political in nature. Like other UN organizations, we had to balance differences in expertise, yet ensure high standards of motivation and professionalism.

Of course, we also had to address the expectations of UN Volunteers, many of whom felt that their deployment was the start of an international career as UN professionals. When this transition did not happen, there was of course, a natural amount of disappointment.

For UN Volunteers today and based on my previous experience with these challenges, I think training is part of the solution. UNV Organization can guide volunteers by orienting them to achieve their long-term goals through their volunteering assignment. Things like learning a local language are valuable skills that can facilitate a professional career with the UN or elsewhere in the development arena.

At the end of the interview, Mr. Hasegawa emphasized that we must recognize the needs of volunteers and their families and make provisions for all that may arise, including tragic

incidents. This is in line with what UNV has been doing this year in revising the Conditions of Services, as we continue to work on safeguarding UN Volunteers' wellbeing, safety and interests. Our progress today is a continuation of what Mr Hasegawa started many years ago with care packages for UN Volunteers, which including, for the first time, provisions for a death benefit for such unfortunate cases.

[Sukehiro Hasegawa](#) served with the United Nations since 1969. He was Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP in Nepal (1978-1980) and in Indonesia (1980-1984). He served as Deputy Executive Coordinator of UNV (1987-1993). He later served as UNDP Resident Representative and Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in the South Pacific (1985-87), Rwanda (1995-1996) and Timor-Leste (2002-2006) and as Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Timor-Leste (2004-2006). Mr Hasegawa has published a book on *Primordial Leadership: Peacebuilding and National Ownership in Timor-Leste* (Routledge and University Press, 2013).



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