Deryck Fritz (Trinidad and Tobago) served as UN Volunteer District Electoral Supervisor with UNTAC. His commute to work was sometimes challenging.

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Contributing to durable peace in Cambodia


In 1992, I, and many others from all around the world, landed in Cambodia as part of the staggered deployment of around 700 United Nations Volunteers to support the Cambodian elections.

It was a truly unprecedented initiative, in a country that was still in the last stages of a brutal civil war and societal upheaval. We were part of UNTAC, a multidimensional peacekeeping mission that had a mandate that included bringing stability to the country though establishing a transitional government, as well as a conducive environment for the return of refugees, and the holding of elections.
For me, it was the first time visiting or even living in South-East Asia, experiencing culture and traditions very dissimilar to what I had previously known in my native Trinidad and Tobago. I, like several of my fellow UN Volunteers, faced a very steep learning curve that included language and culture training, deployment to far flung rural districts, staff recruitment, conducting voter registration and voter education, and finally the polling and counting activities.

Danger was ever-present during that remarkable year, particularly in areas in which there was a heavy Khmer rouge presence, and we witnessed the unfortunate loss of life of one popular UN Volunteer. Along the way, however, we made lasting friendships, with both locals and other internationals. More importantly, we contributed to a durable peace for the Cambodian people.

I would later experience two further UNV assignments, in Mozambique and Angola, both of which were as enriching and formative as the first. Over the years, I have continued to work with and supervise UN Volunteers in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Burundi, Afghanistan and Somalia, and have witnessed their important contributions to international peace and security in these countries.

Even after becoming a UN staff member, and also working with other international organizations, when I look back at the last 30 years, the decision to become a UN Volunteer was one of the best I have ever made, as it put me on a path that was not foreseen. In fact, it was a path on which I have continued to live a professional life of promoting democracy and elections worldwide, in an organization that aims to simply make the world a better place: the United Nations. And all because I began as a UN Volunteer... so, congratulations UNV on your fiftieth birthday... may you continue to change lives for the better, as you have done for me and for millions around the world!
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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals