

27 June 2018

Tarik Jašarević, Spokesperson, World Health Organization



Tarik Jašarević (centre) takes part in Independence Day Celebrations in Timor-Leste, which culminated at midnight with lowering of the UN flag and the raising of East Timorese flag, in the presence of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. (UNV, 2002)

## From UN Volunteer in Timor-Leste to WHO Spokesperson

I was part of the first group of UN Volunteers that arrived to Kosovo in August 1999. Being from Bosnia and Herzegovina, I had a good understanding of the political context and I was also able to communicate with the population in one of two languages that were widely used. I keep a special place in my heart and mind for UNV. It is a platform that helped hundreds to be a part of the extraordinary work of the United Nations and in some cases such as mine, to define a life-long path.

In 1999, two large humanitarian crises were unfolding: Kosovo and East Timor. The United Nations was tasked to support local authorities in both places to establish administrative and governance structures.

One of the first steps was to conduct civil registration in order to define electoral lists and provide everyone with an identity card. That operation required an important number of civilian staff and the UN turned to the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme to field hundreds of volunteers over next couple of years in Kosovo and East Timor to support the peacekeeping mission and to assist in the nation-building process.

In 1999, I lived in Syria and had a great luck to meet a person who would help me discover the UN Volunteers programme and become a friend for years to come. I had just completed my Masters degree in political sciences and was looking for opportunities.

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The next 18 months were both challenging and rewarding: contributing to the establishment of the new Kosovo administration and learning about the work of the United Nations. For couple of months, I worked on the issue of missing persons and it was heart-breaking to spend time with families who lost their loved ones.

I met some wonderful people both from Kosovo and among fellow UN volunteers who were coming from all parts of the world. I worked a lot with Kosovo journalists from all communities who were trying to report in a difficult situation of political tensions.

There was a great camaraderie among UN Volunteers as many of us were discovering the UN system for the first time. We launched not-so-serious UNV newsletter and we felt fully supported by UNV Support Unit.

UNV gave me the opportunity that was going to change my life. My next UNV assignment was with the UNV support Unit in Timor-Leste at the time when the country was preparing to become the newest member of the United Nations.

At some point there were more than 700 UN Volunteers in the country and it was a real pleasure meeting them across different provinces of Timor-Leste; I could feel the excitement they had to be part of the nation-building process.

On 20 May 2002, the Independence Day Celebrations culminated at midnight with lowering of the UN flag and the raising of East Timorese one. I had the honour to be part of 6 people who lowered the UN flag in the presence of the UN Secretary General and the President of East Timor. My presence at that moment was an acknowledgement of the work done by hundreds of UNVs in East Timor.

My career led me afterward to many countries and working with different organizations but I keep a special place in my heart and mind for UNV. It is a platform that helped hundreds to be a part of the extraordinary work of the United Nations and in some cases such as mine, to define a life-long path.

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*Tarik Jašarević is currently working with the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, as Spokesperson/Media Relations.*

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Global

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