



Former national UN Volunteer Oluwatosin Samson Jegede served with UNODC in Nigeria. Here, he was making a presentation to raise awareness on HIV/AIDS.

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Upholding the dignity and rights of persons in detention

Nelson Mandela International Day recognizes service to humanity in conflict resolution, race relations and the promotion and protection of human rights, including for prisoners. Today, meet national UN Volunteers Rihanata and Oluwatosin, serving in Burkina Faso and Nigeria, respectively. The two are experts in human rights, judicial and legal issues, and work to ensure that the dignity of prison inmates is upheld.

Nelson Mandela International Day is celebrated every year on July 18 based on a 2009 United Nations General Assembly resolution. This recognized Mandela's values and dedication, including service to humanity in conflict resolution, race relations and the promotion and protection of human rights. In December 2015, the General Assembly expanded the scope of Nelson Mandela International Day to promote humane prison conditions, raise awareness of prisoners as part of society and value the social services provided by prison staff.

UN Volunteers such as Rihanata Khogaraboux-Nion Sawadogo (Burkina Faso) and Oluwatosin Samson Jegede (Nigeria) are experts in human rights, judicial and legal issues. They work daily to ensure that the dignity of prison inmates is respected.

Rihanata, 42, is a national UN Volunteer Paralegal Assistant who provides legal support to male and juvenile inmates at the high security prison in Ouagadougou. She offers legal advice, informs detainees on criminal law and assesses their conditions of detention.

As part of her work with UNODC, Rihanata interviewed 52 people detained for terrorism in a high security prison to identify their legal, health and social difficulties. She updates the database on juvenile and adult detention in prisons, monitors detention conditions, provides monthly reports on the same and trains community volunteers on human rights.

In addition, Rihanata supports the production of internal periodic reports for UNODC Burkina Faso that aim at providing guidance on monitoring persons admitted to penitentiary establishments, for more effective interventions and to engage in dialogue with stakeholders on issues of concern.

"I contribute to lifting the veil and reducing the low opinion that citizens have of detainees by raising awareness at every opportunity," Rihanata says.

One of her most memorable experiences was when she reported a sick inmate to prison authorities, who immediately took charge. This saved his life.

Rihanata also faces challenges in her volunteering assignment. As a Paralegal Prison Assistant, her work is sensitive, especially in the national context linked to terrorist attacks. This has forced her to become more cautious and discreet in her social interactions.



People in detention are human beings. The error is human. Rightly or wrongly, we can all end up in detention. Detainees must not be marginalized or forgotten, because they have committed a crime, voluntarily or involuntarily. They need me, you and the society to help them correct behavior that is not in accordance with the law. --Rihanata Khogaraboux-Nion Sawadogo, national UN Volunteer Paralegal Assistant with UNODC in Burkina Faso

As for Oluwatosin, he was a UN Volunteer with UNODC in Nigeria for 2-years (2022-2022) in charge of HIV/AIDS and health among prisoners and drug addicted victims. His activities ranged from the provision of technical advice to the government, national policy development, research, capacity building, advocacy for health of inmates, HIV prevention and care services.

Oluwatosin always felt that people in custodial centers are left behind in the national HIV/AIDS response. During his UNV assignment, he contributed to, and in some cases led, advocacy meetings to relevant government stakeholders (Federal Ministry of Health, National Agency for the Control of AIDS, Nigerian Correctional Service) and donor agencies (Global Fund, the United State **President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief**) to ensure that the health of inmates is given attention in HIV-related programmes.

During his time with UNV, Oluwatosin also volunteered for COVID-19 control in Nigeria through the organization of social media campaigns, production of information, education and communication materials,

and training of health workers on infection prevention and control among prisoners. He supported the development of four national documents on HIV, monitoring and evaluation and communication work at UNODC; built national capacity for HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, Tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections programming and contributed to UNODC grant writing to the Global Fund.

"While I was serving as a UN Volunteer, I felt fulfilled contributing to UNODC efforts in supporting the Government of Nigeria in the control of HIV epidemic."

For this 37-year-old Nigerian UN Volunteer, one of the greatest highlights of his assignment was when the Deputy Controller General of the Nigerian Correctional Service informed him that she was going to present Nigerian good practices on the prevention of COVID-19 in custodial centers at the First World Conference on Health in Detention in July 2022. So far there have been no reported cases of COVID-19 among the over 70,000 inmates in the 244 custodial centers in Nigeria, an achievement that can be partially attributed to the context-specific training UNODC and the **Nigeria Centre for Disease Control** held for correctional officers in September 2020.

For Oluwatosin, his UNV assignment has been a wonderful experience, sharing his expertise from Oyo State level to national level. His work in the field of health in detention centres began more than 7 years ago in Oyo State and the UNODC activities have helped him to escalate them.



Prior to joining UNV, I had worked in private settings, faith-based organizations, state government and national government organizations and had very beautiful experiences and exposures. However, I wanted more. I wanted an avenue to impact more than a few persons at a time. I wanted to contribute to health development in Nigeria and globally. I saw UNV as a channel to achieve this purpose, and I succeeded through my assignment at UNDOC Nigeria. The most rewarding moment was when I won the UNV Award for my contribution to the fight against COVID-19 in Nigeria. --Oluwatosin Samson Jegede, former national UN Volunteer with UNODC in Nigeria

After two years as a UN Volunteer, Oluwatin became a national consultant with UNODC. His UNV experience has allowed him to work on promoting respect for the dignity of prisoners and defending their human rights. In his new assignment, Oluwatosin built the capacity of 54 implementing partners and Nigerian prison officials on HIV, human rights and medical ethics using the Nelson Mandela Rules.

Eighty UN Volunteers currently serve with UNODC in 10 countries of the West and Central Africa Region. Of these, 70 per cent are national UN Volunteers and 44 per cent are women.



West and Central Africa

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