Advocating for human rights and peacebuilding through volunteerism in Afghanistan

Corina Elsa Rueda Borrero hails from Panama and serves with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) as a UN Volunteer Human Rights Officer. Based in the Central Region Office, Human Rights Service, she is involved in the verification and confirmation of human rights violations allegations and protection of civilian cases. Corina shares her experience as a UN Volunteer serving in a politically delicate context.

Corina Elsa Rueda Borrero testifies that she has always dreamed of working for human rights in a context that needs her the most.

Serving in Afghanistan, a country with a long history of armed international conflict and with
a complex political scenario, a regular day for her can include meetings with civil society actors or working to confirm the number of casualties after incidents like an explosion, suicide attack, target killing or case of torture.

After the collapse of the previous government and the takeover of the Taliban, the team dramatically reduced. Many of her counterparts fled the country and this affected her job as she lost many of her contacts and sources.

Corina then tried to create new contacts with the help of some organizations and managed to convene three workshops for Afghan women, a platform that allowed them to speak up about the human rights situation in their communities.

Corina’s assignment as a UN Volunteer contributes to peacebuilding. As part of its mandate, UNAMA engages in human rights advocacy with authorities, including human rights awareness raising to discuss human rights standards that the Afghan State has committed to in the past. Corina shares, "My biggest achievement so far has been to provide advocacy workshops and human rights tools to Afghan women."

“It’s an incredible experience each time I meet a civil society activist. Their energy, passion and resilience are surprising. When I listen to their stories and share my experiences as Latina, we find a middle ground and we see each other reflected in our separate realities. Somehow their hope, gives me hope. --Corina Elsa Rueda Borrero (centre standing), UN Volunteer Human Rights Officer with UNAMA

Corina engages in advocacy with local authorities to promote human rights awareness raising. Furthermore, she engages civil society actors, such as journalists, human rights activist and women collectives on issues related to human rights violations.

Her assignment also includes advocating for the rule of law and the rights of detainees. The mission convenes workshops for civil society, which is key for peace building. Corina enjoys this part of her responsibilities, as such training creates capacities in members of the society that aspire to advance the peace and reconciliation process in their country.

Reflecting on the political turmoil recently experienced in Afghanistan, Corina confesses, "One part of me asked how I expected to keep going, but I remembered that my biggest motivation to come here was the challenge, and to abandon would mean that I don’t believe in human rights work."

Working in a volatile situation like Afghanistan may be difficult, but Corina attests that the results are rewarding.
If we don’t come to the world to serve other people, what’s the purpose of our existence? --Corina Elsa Rueda Borrero

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