



Kyoko Yokosuka (right), UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, interacting with the UNMISS Movement Control Section team, who support planning and management of movement, freight and cargo.

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In South Sudan, UN Volunteers are rebuilding hope and resilience

Since its birth, South Sudan has been facing unprecedented humanitarian and development challenges. Over the years, the United Nations has been working closely with the Government to strengthen national institutions, empower communities, maintain peace, support humanitarian efforts and improve food security. To support these efforts in the country, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme has been deploying national and international UN Volunteers with a wide range of professional expertise. Currently, South Sudan hosts the second largest deployment of UN Volunteers globally, after Colombia, with 598 UN Volunteers. These volunteers serve UN entities in the fields of health,

engineering, aviation, transport and logistics, legal affairs, refugee protection, child protection, human rights, gender affairs, communications and public information, among other areas.

From 19-22 September, Ms Kyoko Yokosuka, UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, visited South Sudan to meet with partners and UN Volunteers serving in the country. Accompanied by Ms Lucy Ndungu, Regional Manager of the UNV Regional Office for East and Southern Africa, Ms Yokosuka met with representatives of several entities in South Sudan, including the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Women, World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The UN partners expressed their gratitude for the contributions of UN Volunteers in their operations and shared their insights on options for enhancing collaboration with UNV. As expressed by Mr Paul Egunsola, Chief of Staff at UNMISS: "It is a very good experience working with UN Volunteers. I am impressed by their commitment. UNMISS appreciates UN Volunteers and there are many good things to say about them."

Ms Yokosuka also held a consultative meeting with the UN Country Team in the country to discuss the UNV Strategic Framework 2022-25, options for strengthening existing collaboration and pathways for accelerating peace and development outcomes in South Sudan through volunteerism.



Ms Yokosuka also met with UN Volunteers serving in South Sudan to exchange experiences and lessons learned. "Thank you for your outstanding contributions to supporting peace and development in South Sudan, particularly for your commitment and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. You are the everyday

heroes making a difference on the ground. UNV will continuously pay attention to the concerns of UN Volunteers in South Sudan and strive to address them," she said during the meeting.

On the last day of her mission, Ms Yokosuka joined the [Spotlight programme by Radio Miraya](#) South Sudan for an interview. She shared the background and experience of the mission, reflected on her work as UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, as well as her journey within the UN over the years. Below is an excerpt from the [radio interview](#).

Q. Give us a background on the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. What is the history behind it?

Ms Yokosuka: The United Nations Volunteers programme was established in 1970 and became operational in 1971. Our vision is to create a world where volunteerism is recognized and valued as an important contribution to world peace and development. One way UNV achieves this vision is by deploying qualified and highly motivated global citizens to different parts of the world to work in all areas of the UN.

Q. How long have you been working with UN Volunteers programme as Deputy Executive Coordinator?

Ms Yokosuka: I have been working with United Nations for a very long time, mainly with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), but I joined UNV in 2019.

Q. Since 2019, how has the work and the agenda of UNV across the globe changed?

Ms Yokosuka: In 1971, the UNV programme started by deploying few numbers of international UN Volunteers mainly working in technical areas, such as agricultural extension services, engineers, etc. Since then, UNV's work has evolved to be engaged in all areas of the UN, including, very importantly, the peacekeeping missions, such as UNMISS, which hosts one of the largest contingents of UN Volunteers in the world. In 2021, UNV celebrated its 50th anniversary and the deployment of more than 10,000 UN Volunteers worldwide within a year, working in 160 countries with 56 UN agencies. Over the years, we have also developed a wide range of volunteer categories and a diverse group of global citizens who can contribute to the work of the UN, from ages 18-80. These include persons with disabilities and Refugee UN Volunteers.

Q. What prompted you to join the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme as the Deputy Executive Coordinator?

Ms Yokosuka: Since I have been with UNDP for many years, UNV (which is administered by UNDP) has always been interesting for me. The single factor that really attracted me was the noble mission that the programme has – to attract global citizens to join the United Nations, so that they can be part of the global agenda for peace and development.

Q. What would you say is different about the UNV programme in South Sudan from other countries?

Ms Yokosuka: South Sudan is currently the second largest host country for UN Volunteers globally, after Colombia. What is unique about the operations in South Sudan is that UNMISS hosts a big number of UN Volunteers among all UN peacekeeping missions. This is one of the reasons I visited South Sudan – it is important for us to meet with key partners and meet UN Volunteers in person to directly learn about their concerns, achievements and expectations in their assignments. UNV will strive to ensure that their needs are met, despite working in hardship duty stations, and that they have opportunities to grow to the next steps of their careers.





The success stories emerging from South Sudan are inspiring, especially of volunteers working outside Juba. The real success to me is that they are really making a difference on the ground. --
Kyoko Yokosuka, UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator



Q. What are some of your observations and take-aways from your visit to South Sudan?

Ms Yokosuka: In South Sudan, I see a lot of challenges, but a lot of opportunities. Every time I visit the field, I try to learn the situation and context of the country that can help us develop future programmes. However, it comes with a sense of excitement and a lot of curiosity.

Q. What do you recollect from your first experience working with UNV?

Ms Yokosuka: I am based at UNV headquarters in Bonn, Germany, but I have the responsibility of monitoring the work of the regional offices and field units. What I enjoy the most is being able to directly interact with partners and colleagues on the ground. My visit to South Sudan is one such mission.



In the town hall with the UN Volunteers in South Sudan, I could directly hear their concerns, what they appreciate in their assignments, what excites them and all of this really inspires me – to see that they are so committed to the work on the ground. Every time I visit the field and I come back; I feel like my battery has been recharged. --Kyoko Yokosuka

Q. When you look back in 50 years' time, are you happy with what you have achieved so far?

Ms Yokosuka: Yes, I always wished to work for the UN, even from the time when I was in high school in America. That is how I came across the issues in Africa that motivated me to apply for my very first internship with UNDP at the start of my career. Until this day, that is my motivation and I feel very blessed.

Q. Who are the people that have been the most influential in your life.

Ms Yokosuka: I am influenced by so many people who worked in the UN, my direct bosses, the leaders of the organizations and heads of the programmes that I have had the privilege to work with. I think that is what makes my work in UN even more special – to have the opportunity to interact with such incredible individuals.

Q. Working as the UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, which are the three most memorable missions you've had so far?

Ms Yokosuka: South Sudan is one the most memorable missions that I have had so far, considering that it is my first time here and the country hosts a large number of UN Volunteers, especially in a peacekeeping context. The second one was when I visited Uzbekistan after 11 years, where I spent four years in different positions. The last one was when I went to Jordan, which was also very special, considering that it was my first time in the Middle Eastern region.



My role gives me the opportunity to visit different parts of the world and really learn about global challenges. For me, it has really been a great learning experience. --Kyoko Yokosuka

Q. Lastly, what is the one book you'd carry everywhere with you to read?

Ms Yokosuka: There are many, but among my favorites I would like to go back and read the *"Quiet; The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking"* by Susan Cain. Through this book, she clarifies the myth around the people with introvert personalities; they are quiet but have a great contribution they make. I consider myself as an introvert, so this book gave me positive energy and I want to go back and reflect.



<https://audioboom.com/posts/8163597-spotlight-on-ms-kyoko-yokosuka>



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