



How can the work of the UN agencies honor the diversity in our region? One way is integrating afro-descendants UN Volunteers in their teams.



Engaging Afro-descendant UN Volunteers essential to reduce inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean

Inequality and discrimination are still a challenge in Latin America and the Caribbean. On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, discover the stories of Glenda Joanna and Maribeth. These two afro-descendant UN Volunteers contribute from their own experience to the solutions of their host entities.

According to [CEPAL \(2015\)](#), 75 per cent of the afro-descendant population in Latin America and the Caribbean participated in national electoral processes. However, their representation in power and decision-making is not proportional.

“ Participation and representation in agendas and institutions is

“ fundamental. There must be people of every identity in every space, so their concrete demands are being taken into account. This can reduce inequality. --Glenda Joanna Wetherborn UN Volunteer specialist with OHCHR in Guatemala

Glenda Joanna is a Guatemalan afro-descendant communicator with a Masters in Equality for Development. She serves with the Genre Unit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

For Glenda Joanna, being part of the United Nations represents a relevant professional experience, and "offers the possibility to strengthen the coordination, approach and work projection of these people and their organizations, whether within my team or other units, in collaboration with other agencies or in the assistance and technical support to state institutions."

In her view, the bottom line is: Not without the afro-descendant population. Inclusion needs awareness, which is why Glenda Joanna promotes participatory approaches and visibility of the human rights situation of afro-descendant women and their agendas. She delivers training on International Human Rights Standards, communication campaigns, writing and editing documents and publications and facilitating dialogue and reflection.

Maribeth Cotes is a Colombian afro-descendant UN Volunteer serving with UN Women in her home country. She defines herself as black, woman and feminist, three aspects that deeply mark her work as Territorial Assistant to the mix migrant flux in Barranquilla.

“ "Leaving no one behind" means also raising the issues of migrant women. Through the integration of women in activities of economic entrepreneurship, I use a successful tool: empowerment, because closing gaps means empowering diversity. --Maribeth Cotes, UN Volunteer with UN Women in Colombia

How can the work of the UN agencies honour diversity in Latin America and the Caribbean? One way is by integrating afro-descendant UN Volunteers in their teams. Volunteers like Glenda Joanna and Maribeth.

Such participation increases the visibility of the afro-descendant agenda, which in turn results in its being considered by UN entities. Additionally, their own recognition of their identity as part of an afro-descendant culture enriches the team vision and impact.

Glenda and Maribeth empower migrant, indigenous and afro-descendant women, as well as other women in a vulnerable situation, through their contributions as UN Volunteers. Their stories and backgrounds are an example of how, through their assignments, afro-descendants professional not only impact their own issues, but also contribute to other women not being left behind.

“ UN Volunteers have different profiles and backgrounds. They contribute to an exchange of professional and personal learning, which is very powerful for all members of the teams. --Margarita Lema Tomé, Coordinator of the Genre Unit in OHCHR Guatemala, and Glenda Joanna's supervisor.

But that is not all. "UN Volunteers, besides their experience and professionalism, can connect in a more profound way with the UN mission," adds Carolina Tejada, Programme Analyst with UN Women in Colombia, and Maribeth's supervisor.

This article was prepared with the kind support of Online Volunteer Beatriz Garlaschi.

Latin America and the Caribbean

• International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women • Afro-descendants • Gender-based Violence

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 5: Gender equality](#) [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#) [SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)

