



Marko Miljevic, International UN Volunteer Civil Affairs Officer with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, during a peacebuilding sports activity.

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Contributing to fortifying peace in South Sudan

Originally from Bosnia and Herzegovina, I am serving as a UN Volunteer Civil Affairs Officer with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. Becoming a UN Volunteer gave me the opportunity to contribute to fortifying peace in South Sudan, using my accumulated experience and knowledge.

With a particular focus on the protection of civilians, all my efforts were geared towards communicating with parties to the conflict and identifying ways forward, while simultaneously managing and preventing conflicts.

I met many people – from the opposition, the towns and the villages, government representatives and '*monyomiji*' (youth) from different tribes – to discuss the peace process and the problems faced by the communities while maintaining peace and working on the development of their respective communities at the same time.

“ From my experience working in South Sudan, one thing is abundantly clear: everyone is tired of the war. The people cry and hope for peace; peace in Eastern Equatoria, peace in South Sudan. -- Marko Miljevic, UN Volunteer Civil Affairs Officer, South Sudan

I worked in the town where the uprising against the North of Sudan started in 1956 and ever since, generations of the indigenous people have lived in fear and have known very short periods of peace.

The very idea of peace seems almost mythical to the people of South Sudan as the country has been a war zone for over six decades. Their potential for development once peace is established is limitless, but from my conversations and observations with the nationals, this fact seems lost on them.

This does not come as a surprise because the ability to envision a future is a luxury when you're not even assured of tomorrow. The beginning and end of their interests seems to be cattle and farming, because for them, this is survival. However, their very survival is also often a trigger for conflicts.

Drawing from my own personal experiences from my home country, my job entails explaining to them what peace can bring to the community.

With peace comes a sense of harmony and unity, which in turn can lead to an improvement of their basic living conditions and their security as they would be working together for the benefit of their community. Their potential becomes limitless.

Take for example, the Imurok Payam community who came together in one day to make a football field so their teams can receive support from United Nations Mission in South Sudan: UNMISS in form of footballs and goalpost nets.

This was an initiative by UNMISS mission to support the development of social cohesion activities among the communities in the Payam, as a part of working with the people of South Sudan to build durable peace. What stood out to me was the huge turnout – over 200 community members showed up. Not only did they show up for the benefit of their teams, in a sense, they also showed up for themselves.

“ I am incredibly proud to say that our efforts on the ground made it possible for the communities to come together. --Marko Miljevic

However, my work did not come without challenges: deeply rooted customs mixed with high illiteracy rates presented major obstacles for peaceful coexistence among the South Sudan tribes.

Working in South Sudan, one thing you have to keep in mind is that conflict is almost always imminent, but we do what we can to prevent it rather than to manage it. It is my hope that our collective efforts serve to provide South Sudan not only with peace, but with the luxury of hope; hope for a better tomorrow, hope for tomorrow.

In conclusion, we are not only UN Volunteers, but also experts in our respective fields complementing UN teams, thus enabling the smooth implementation of the mandate.

I am incredibly proud and honoured to be a UN Volunteer. To me, being a volunteer often means going beyond your 'description of assignment' by utilizing different approaches to address various challenges and to make a positive difference in the lives of local communities.

I leave you with a quote from Minor Myers that inspires me to keep volunteering for humanity:

“ *Go into the world and do well. But more importantly, go into the world and do good.* ” --Minor Myers

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