



Marco Federico Alvarez, UN Volunteer from Guatemala, fulfils his mission with a great deal of determination. His colleagues describe him as someone who has the art of gathering energy around the causes which he defends. Within the Environmental Agreement Unit (UCE, for its acronym in French) of MINUSTAH, this UN Volunteer is responsible for the training of sanitation workers and for the inspection of the MINUSTAH offices within the framework of the UN mission's campaign for solid waste recycling. (UN/MINUSTAH, 2014)

Volunteering for the environment

UN Volunteer Marco Federico Alvarez is one of the creators of the solid waste recycling campaign initiated in October 2013 by the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Since then, the 32-year-old volunteer has been touring the MINUSTAH offices to train sanitation workers, raise awareness amongst his colleagues and inspect the various locations with the aim of recycling 25% of the waste produced by the MINUSTAH offices.

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"Marco's commitment in carrying out the campaign is faultless. His personal contributions are remarkable, especially in the training of sanitation workers", says Hermelinda Plata, head of the Environmental Agreement Unit (UCE, for its acronym in French) of MINUSTAH.

Beyond disseminating simple messages about waste recycling, the aim of the campaign is to encourage a change in actual behaviour in the management of household waste in a sustainable manner.

Marco knew that the task would be sensitive: "I know it's hard to get people to adapt to new behaviours. Therefore it is important to know how to talk to them, how to give them confidence and be patient so that they join this cause", he advises.

This Guatemalan's biggest advantage is his command of the Creole language. "This allows him to easily establish contact with sanitation workers and with the volunteers in charge of the door to door awareness campaign", adds Hermelinda Plata.

"The training of the sanitation workers is critical to the campaign. They are the foundation of recycling. They need to know how to sort waste and to understand why they are made to do this job", says Marco in a workshop that gathered thirty sanitation workers, especially logistics staff, from MINUSTAH in Port au Prince.

Marco Alvarez arrived at MINUSTAH just 10 months ago, however he already expresses himself fluently in Creole. "When you're able to speak the language of a community, its members accept you more easily and have more confidence in you", says Marco. "And to learn a language well you also have to understand the culture of the community that shares it."

Marco acknowledges that he is delighted to have learned so much during these years as a volunteer. His skills as a researcher have been enriched by the experience in the field, where he has worked with men and women from diverse backgrounds. Marco hopes to be able to use these skills in future projects, mainly because he hopes to resume research for environmental preservation.

But before that, Marco wants to give the best of himself to help protect the environment in Haiti. "The environmental conditions in Haiti are quite precarious. It would be very irresponsible for MINUSTAH's work to contribute to the pollution of the environment", he says.

So far, the campaign has enabled the recycling of 18% of the solid waste generated by the mission. However, Marco won't allow himself any satisfaction. "The maximum amount of waste must be recycled. Thus MINUSTAH will have actually contributed to the development of Haiti and will set an example in the field of environmental protection", he concludes.

Article translated from Spanish by UN Online Volunteer Amanda Moody.

• Haiti • MINUSTAH • waste • recycling • environmental protection • environment

Sustainable Development Goal: