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In her duties as a UNV Civil Affairs Officer deployed to UNMISS, UN Volunteer Katia Da Silva (seated with sunglasses) from Portugal, registers newly arrived internally displaced persons seeking refuge at a camp in Bentiu. (Photo: UN Volunteer Anna Adkiri, 2014)

## UNMISS posting helps UN Volunteer retain her belief in humanity

**Bentiu, South Sudan:** When Katia Cristina Da Silva, from Portugal, joined the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme in 2007, her main goal was to use her skills to improve the lives of others and share her expertise to enhance the capacity of others. Since then, Katia has been a UN Volunteer in East Timor, Nepal, Sudan, and South Sudan.

In April 2013, Katia joined the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) as a UNV Civil Affairs Officer having been a UN Volunteer with the United Nations Mission in Sudan from 2009 to 2011.

**General  
enquires**

Email: [unv.media@unv.org](mailto:unv.media@unv.org)  
Tel: +49-228-815 2000  
Fax: +49-228-815 2001

**Partnership  
enquires**

Email: [partnershipsupport@unv.org](mailto:partnershipsupport@unv.org)  
Tel: +49-228-815 2000  
Fax: +49-228-815 2001

“Organizing peace conferences and reconciliation meetings are part of my day to day job,” Katia says of her current assignment. For UNMISS, she works in conflict prevention and resolution and trains her local counterparts in the peacekeeping techniques. She also implements and shows counterparts how to design an early warning/early response program between communities.

“2014 was what I call my year of learning as a UN Volunteer,” Katia recalls. “Since the beginning of the crisis in Unity State, the UN Volunteers on the ground have played a very important role, most times going beyond their call of duty, to ensure the protection and wellbeing of the thousands of internally displaced Persons (IDPs) who have taken refuge inside UNMISS premises.”

“We participated in all manner of activities, from body searches, food distribution, digging graves, counseling and advising new IDPs to organizing peace dialogues between the different communities in the IDP camps,” Katia says.

In her view, the UN Volunteers who worked such long hours in Bentiu, in very challenging conditions, showed the true spirit of volunteerism and commitment to the people of South Sudan. “2014 in South Sudan showed me the real spirit and commitment of UN Volunteers, along with their strength and ability to cope with hard situations, while never losing the will to do more regardless of the conditions and the situation,” Katia says.

2015 will be Katia’s last year as a UN Volunteer. The challenges she has faced in a conflict area, have actually made her hopeful for the future. “Because so many people from all over the world are willing to leave their families and jobs behind to serve UNMISS, where they touch the lives of those who most need it, we can still believe in humanity,” Katia maintains.

Katia hopes to use her experiences, and the skills she has gained during her years of being a UN Volunteer, to support South Sudanese communities affected by the ongoing conflict.

*Katia received a degree in Portuguese studies from the University of Algarve. Before becoming a UN Volunteer she taught Portuguese in Angola in an international NGO building capacity for teachers. When in Portugal, she volunteers in an NGO which supports students from Africa and trains volunteers for projects in West Africa. In South Sudan, Katia supported a youth group to create a youth center where they could do activities for the community. When the crisis started this project was terminated, but Katia remains an avid volunteer through her work.*

 Sub-Saharan Africa

• South Sudan • UNMISS • peace • reconciliation

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