Henry Armas' story

Lima, Peru: I first became interested in HIV issues a number of years ago when I learned that close friends had acquired the virus. At that time, I was in Peru working on rights, citizen participation and health issues. Soon after, I left for the Netherlands to study. My Master’s dissertation, which focused on citizen participation of people living with HIV, brought all of these issues together.

When I finished my Master’s degree in Development Studies, it was clear to me that I wanted to work on HIV/AIDS-related issues. As a Peruvian national, I was particularly keen to work in my own region, and with great fortune I had the opportunity, in August 2009, to join UNICEF’s Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office as a UN Volunteer.

As the Regional Office’s HIV/AIDS Programme Officer, I am the focal point for knowledge
management initiatives on HIV/AIDS, and, as such, I am involved in the evaluation and systematization of best practices, the documentation of innovation, as well as in qualitative/quantitative research.

I have had the opportunity to participate in regional trainings, and to advocate for the rights of children with policy makers, civil society organizations and government representatives. One of the most rewarding experiences of my tenure as a UN Volunteer has been to meet courageous activists living with HIV—adults and adolescents—who fight against discrimination, rights violations and lack of services.

A highlight of my work to date has been the opportunity to participate in the first Latin American and Caribbean meeting for adolescents against HIV in Peru. This opportunity helped me to be aware of the many difficulties that adolescents living with HIV have to face to participate and get organized at a regional level. I have also had the opportunity to participate in other important regional events on HIV/AIDS, such as the Laços Sul-Sul network. Through my participation in this Brazilian-led network, I became involved in South to South cooperation, as well as part of an inspiring network of adolescents working to prevent HIV/AIDS across Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Recently, I have had the opportunity to facilitate a workshop in Jamaica on HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean and Young Key Affected Populations, including men who have sex with other men, transgender populations, sex workers and drug users. Through this training, I have helped to raise the awareness of policy makers and other colleagues in the Caribbean working in the UN system on the importance of working with these populations to address the multiple dimensions of stigma, discrimination and HIV/AIDS.

I feel fortunate to be part of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, as I have had the opportunity to learn a great deal during my tenure, as well as to give something in return towards improving programmes and policies for people in my region.