

29 April 2011



UN personnel at MINURCAT march for HIV/AIDS prevention in Chad. (UNV, 2010)

Mission closure a unique, poignant experience for UN Volunteer

Abeche, Chad: When the closure of the United Nations Mission in Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) was announced by the UN Security Council in May, 2010, I was already posted in Abeche as a UNV Project and Advocacy Officer.

“You need to experience a liquidation phase at least once,” I was told by colleagues who had. Some said, “I did it [the liquidation], and I will not do it again.” Others said, “This is the most stressful period of a mission. If you can be in your unit liquidation team, you will learn a lot.”

The first time I heard the term “liquidation phase,” I did not understand what it was. In UN peacekeeping operations, the mission start-up, implementation and end of mandate phases are the best known. During these stages of a mission, the majority of UN personnel are on site and the most media coverage takes place.

Less known is the mission liquidation, at which point most personnel as well as the media have shipped out. But in this phase, UN Volunteers also make an active and dynamic contribution. As you can imagine, when the MINURCAT liquidation was announced, I was very thrilled to be part of it and have a chance to learn more.

I experienced the MINURCAT liquidation in large part through my UNV

colleagues. They would enter our office saying, "Everything is changing so quickly!" The ability to adapt and implement new directives under tight deadlines was often the key to successfully carrying out one's duties. This created a lot of stress, but it also improved our skills in conflict management and resolution while conducting team work.

"While the amount of work increases considerably, that is not the main issue, because we are used to work like this," UN Volunteers told me in sharing their concerns. "The main issue is our not knowing what is going to be expected of us next."

Alain Irankunda, a UNV Administrative Officer in the UNV Field Unit in Chad, provided support and guidance 24 hours a day to all the UN Volunteers. Many times I wondered how he kept going, because he did not take any time-off during the whole liquidation period.

The liquidation phase takes an emotional toll on those involved. On my first visit to Abeche, in May 2010, there was a sense of excitement and energy. The flags were flying, the air terminal was busy, the cafeteria was always crowded and it was hard to find accommodation for the night.

On my final visit to Abeche, in March 2011, only one other passenger shared my flight. The MOVCON (Movement Control, the unit responsible for all transport of people and goods to and from an area of operation) waiting area was virtually empty. The UN flags around the mission grounds were old and needed replacing. Flags of troop-contributing countries were simply gone; the flag poles piled up on the ground.

Another UN Volunteer and I compared our impressions of how Abeche had been before to how it was now. "This is sad, German" he said, contemplating the deserted streets. "We built all this, set up the prefabs, the electricity and water. There was nothing when we arrived here, but now, we are taking it down. It is not easy."

The liquidation phase is also felt by the local population. Many did not want us to leave. A group of five local staff members approached calling me by name. They asked me when we would return. "UN agencies will continue their work here," I repeated several times. We broke off with exchanges of "See you later." But, we all knew the likelihood of seeing each other again was very low, and indeed, this was "Farewell".

Looking back, I can say that my involvement in closing the mission has indeed complemented the way I see UN peacekeeping operations, not only within the mission, but also as it affects our local partners. The hardest part

was dealing with the heavy workload in addition to the emotional stress derived from the uncertainty of not knowing what was next, not only for us, but also for our local partners.

I am so grateful I had the opportunity to experience the liquidation phase. I believe that I will also encourage everybody to live this unique opportunity, because it teaches us to appreciate the other phases of a UN peacekeeping operation.

Fifty UN Volunteers are among the team of national and international personnel working in MINURCAT's Liquidation Phase which started in January 2011 and runs until the end of April.

I extend my thanks to all UN Volunteers who have made a great contribution to the peace and development of Chad. They leave a dynamic network of contacts with local NGOs in different remote areas of the country. More than 70 UN Volunteers serving under the UN entities remain to support the Chadian people. The network will stay alive during this year of celebration of the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10).

German Robles Osuna (Mexico) served as a UNV Project & Advocacy Officer with MINURCAT from 1 May 2010 to 31 March 2011. For more about UN Volunteers' involvement in MINURCAT [read](#)

 Sub-Saharan Africa

• Chad • HIV • AIDS

Sustainable Development Goal: