I have been serving as a Public Information Officer within the Communication Division of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) since 2019. This is my first-ever volunteering assignment with United Nations peacekeeping. This Christmas, I was far from my family, so I decided to celebrate with little angels.

Coming to CAR was not an easy decision because I had to leave my family and friends in Guinea Bissau where I am from. I am motivated to gain new experiences with the UN, growing in the organization, and contributing to peace and stability worldwide. As a UN Volunteer, I am here not only to promote peace but also to assist populations. And it is possible to do it in different ways.

Christmas is a moment of joy and thanksgiving for many families worldwide, especially for those who value its meaning of charity, love, caring, and happiness. This year, I had a different Christmas celebration. I chose to share my affection and love with some orphans in the Central African Republic.

Two weeks before Christmas, I started to collect funds to help orphans in the Enfants de Grace and Saint Charles orphanages in Bangui. I collected US $2,797 from many colleagues of MINUSCA, the World Food Programme (WFP), and some former staff members. This enabled me to purchase pasta, sugar, milk, beans, rice, oil, biscuits, soap and other items that would give a smile to people in need. --Juelma Mendes, UN Volunteer Public Information Officer, MINUSCA

Even with this delivery, I did not feel satisfied. Something was missing. Christmas is more than food and gifts. One of my best friends suggested me to do a small party for the kids. Ideas started to come out.

I went to offices again to collect more funds for the party. Thanks to my colleagues who
supported this initiative again, I bought cakes, toys, notebooks, pencils, pens, juices, balloons and candies. Other colleagues offered popcorn, juice, chocolates and biscuits. We also prepared a “Jerusalema” dance for the children.

On 25 December, together with my friends who volunteered to help me, we organized a nice party at the Enfants de Grace orphanage. I was in a Santa Claus outfit, which I believe makes children so happy. We had fun with kids who received gifts from Santa. It was very emotional. Our goal was to make them happy and to make them forget about their problems and difficulties for a while.

“As a mother, I would have loved to be home with my children during this end-of-year celebration, but since it was not possible due to my assignment in support of the elections, I chose to be happy with these orphans. When you are mandated to be at work during Christmas, you find joy in blessing others. Happiness has different flavors. --Juelma Mendes.

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 3: Good health and well-being, SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals