

Volunteers

Story

01 August 2016

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Bringing hope and social cohesion in post-conflict Côte d'Ivoire

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Maria Zamani served as UN Volunteer head of the public information office of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). (UNV, 2016)

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Operating in the field, in direct contact with the population was the decisive factor motivating my application. My daily work involved visiting the entire region, meeting with village leaders and elders to identify problems and tensions, and raise awareness on the work performed by UNOCI to protect civilians, provide political support, address security challenges and support humanitarian assistance.

By maintaining regular contact and interacting constantly with the population, I was in a position to truly engage in two-way communication, acting as a channel between headquarters and the population: promoting the work of UNOCI, but also relaying the population's needs and concerns.

Representing UNOCI in the entire Western region of the country required innovative and dynamic communications methods. I therefore constantly developed new outreach activities. I organised events such as the "UNOCI tour", a series of visits and conferences to raise awareness about UNOCI's work, as well as to initiate discussions with local people on key issues such as peace, social cohesion and national reconciliation.

Engaging with youth is of utmost importance to create a lasting environment of confidence and cohesion. My first UNOCI tour included a tailored event in Bonon's high school. The high attendance (up to 1,000 pupils!) was a challenge, but their dynamic participation, interest and hospitality was the greatest reward.

The organisation of UN Day was another memorable highlight of my work, with a number of outreach activities such as medical consultations, blood donations, photo exhibitions, and sports events for youth. In addition, specific meetings and events were organised to raise awareness amongst the entire population. Coordinating multiple events in a short timeframe proved challenging, requiring creativity, flexibility and capacity to mobilise all partners, but it was particularly rewarding to succeed in reaching out to all segments of the population, with over 5,000 participants.

My UN Volunteer assignment with UNOCI was particularly enriching as it enabled me to develop a number of skills, from project management and coordination, relations with institutional and societal leaders, to political reporting and development of innovative solutions. Representing UNOCI in the Daloa region, I was privileged to be the "face" of the UN and a key interlocutor for the local population.

Overall I felt extremely proud to contribute, as a UN Volunteer, to the efforts of UNOCI to provide support to the Ivoirian population, which has faced serious challenges over the last decade.

Marie Zamani (France/Afghanistan) holds a Master's degree in social sciences and studies international relations. Before joining the UN operation in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI), she gained experience in the field of migration and refugees (at the Red Cross), public communication (at the UN Regional Information Centre in Brussels) and security/foreign policy (with the French government).

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