Women volunteers helping to rebuild Gaza

Gaza, State of Palestine: Volunteers are catalysts of change and make important contributions to sustainable development – this is so aptly personified by Mona Ouda and Diana Abu Ramadan, two national UN Volunteers with UNDP’s rubble removal programme.

Engineers and workers are part of this USD $14 million project to facilitate the removal of debris of destroyed homes and other civic infrastructure in The Gaza Strip. Four female engineers that include Mona and Diana are also part of this programme.

Mona and Diana are in their late 20s. They are helping the local population rebuild their lives and their environments that have been destroyed in ongoing conflict with Israel.

“Working in the field is such a challenging task. Every day we work to clean rubble and dust to improve the living conditions of families in our community and help with the reconstruction of our homes,” says Mona.

She continues, “As a woman, it is challenging not only due to the nature of the work, but
also due to the emotional burden as we remove homes of other women. Women benefiting from the programme used to come to me and tell me how their homes were demolished. They used to talk about their economic situation and their lives. I felt I was not only an engineer, but also a woman supporting other women and I am proud of it.”

Mona sees volunteering as a way to give back to society and a positive step in her career development. “In a place like Gaza, with such high poverty and unemployment, volunteering for me and my colleagues is really something special. I enjoy it as I serve my people.”

With funds from USAID and the Governments of Sweden, Japan and Italy, UNDP is currently implementing a rubble removal programme that aims at removing one million tons of rubble generated by the 2014 conflict in The Gaza Strip.

UNDP has been moving rapidly in clearing the rubble in order to provide the local residents with access to basic services along with reducing the risk of collapsing buildings. Once crushed, the rubble will be recycled and used for building roads.

Diana has volunteered with Mona for the past eight months in this rubble removal project. She says, “I challenged societal norms and my family when I studied engineering and later by working in this field. Most of my colleagues would seek a job as a math teacher to secure an income, but I wanted to work as an engineer.”

She continues, “My experience as a UN Volunteer has been amazing. I am working to help others improve their livelihoods. I am also contributing to protect the environment as the recycled rubble will be reused for roads.”

As women, Mona and Diana are still in the minority in the traditionally male-dominated field of engineering. But as both women along with their male colleagues, supervised and led the process of removing rubble in more than 1,500 locations of The Gaza Strip including Shujayia, Gaza City, Middle Area, Rafah and Khan Younis, they have, merely by their presence, advanced gender equity and the mainstreaming of women in their profession.

Through their work, the local people are able to return to their homes with safety and dignity.

Arab States

• State of Palestine • rubble removal programme • Gaza Strip
Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure**