An opportunity to improve human rights

La Paz, Bolivia: When I heard about the opportunity to come to Bolivia as a UN Volunteer with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), I was very excited to be able to take on new challenges in my professional and personal life. With a Master’s Degree in International Studies, specializing in Human Rights, and experience in Latin America, I felt that this volunteer opportunity was ideal for me.

I have been an international UN Volunteer in Bolivia since February 2013, serving as a UNV Associate Human Rights Officer. One of my main activities is to observe the situation of human rights in the country and to ensure follow-up action of cases, especially in the areas of justice administration, violence against women, the use of excessive force by security forces, arbitrary detention, the rights of victims during unconstitutional regimes, freedom of expression and human rights defenders.

This experience has been very enriching because I feel that I really contribute to making a difference in people’s lives. My motivation comes from the idea that each step counts, and
that even if something is improved in a small way, it can really have an impact.

During my assignment I have interacted with different actors of Bolivian society, from local authorities, victims and witnesses to social and human rights organizations. I collect first-hand information that helps make a clear diagnosis of the situation in the country, and when needed to take urgent measures. This information is used to draft an Annual Report about the human rights situation in Bolivia, published every year by OHCHR, in which several recommendations are made to the country about how Bolivian authorities should act, in line with international human rights standards. These recommendations may also be taken up by other human rights bodies, leading to stronger compliance by the country.

My work requires having good communications and analytical skills, as well as confidentiality, especially when working with cases related to the administration of justice, which can have important media coverage.

During this year, I monitored two major cases in the country: the hearings about the racist incidents that took place in Sucre on 24 May 2008, when indigenous farmers were publically beaten and humiliated; and the hearing of a case where more than 20 people who allegedly promoted the separatism of the region of Santa Cruz, and allegedly attempted to kill the current President.

I feel proud to have served as a UN Volunteer during this year and to have contributed to the improvement of human rights in Bolivia. I hope to have the opportunity to serve again as a UN Volunteer in the future.