



Ilya Novikov (far right) participating in the Human Rights Day celebration in December, 2016. (UNV, 2016)

Protecting human rights in Senegal

Ilya Novikov is a UN Youth Volunteer in Protection and Promotion of Human Rights at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Senegal since March 2016. His assignment is funded by Switzerland.

I am based in Dakar and part of a dedicated team of five people working towards the promotion and protection of human rights across the 14 West African States. A challenging and fascinating mission in a few words is but a gross understatement.

My area of responsibility includes economic, social and cultural rights of the local people, the rights of people on the move, especially asylum seekers, as well as the human rights situation in Niger. This is especially where I saw my mission bringing the United Nations closer to the people we serve.

It is in this context that I facilitated the 50th anniversary of the International Covenants on Human Rights. It was an opportunity to gather more than 50

people to raise their awareness, but more importantly, to hear their perspective on human rights. It was a chance to conduct primary research on the subject. The unrelenting message is that migration is, inevitably, linked to human rights.

“ Migration can and must be managed in a way that respects the rights of all, including the rights of migrants and the social rights of people in developing countries.

I am captivated by the job and count myself lucky to be working in a challenging role where I can really make a difference.

Given the scale of the challenge and the limited resources, we seldom have the satisfaction of seeing the direct impact of our work on the ground. This can be a challenge in itself, especially for me, as I am in direct contact with the local population – listening to people on a daily basis about the violation of human rights, and staying determined to my mission while developing concrete projects that will make a real impact in West Africa.

My line of work involves capacity building of civil society; engaging in dialogue and building partnerships with local stakeholders; and monitoring, evaluation and advocacy of human rights in the region.

I organized a workshop for Senegalese civil society that focused on the access to justice by migrants for the Special Rapporteur on migrants' rights. Lessons learned were crystal clear – migration is a phenomenon of life. Countries can either open their borders and manage it, or close the borders, but at a cost. As countries lock their gates, they force migrants to enter through windows. This results in deadly risks for migrants and opportunities for criminal networks.

My UN Youth Volunteer assignment exemplifies North-South cooperation. As I almost come to the end of my assignment, I take back with me to Switzerland the understanding and the conviction that migration can and must be managed in a way that respects the rights of all, including the rights of migrants and the social rights of people in developing countries.

This opportunity has increased my knowledge of how the United Nations works in practice to a whole new degree. I interned at the OHCHR headquarters in 2015 – that coupled with my University education became the starting point of my learning about the UN system.

A year full of discovery and inspiration is how I will encapsulate my experience as UN Youth Volunteer in Senegal. It has been a remarkable experience both at a professional and personal level.

My name is Ilya and I am contributing to the protection of human rights in Senegal!

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