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Volunteers

Story

21 September 2017

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## **Green light from volunteer, we are ready for take-off**

Serving as an international UN Volunteer in UN Peacekeeping Missions in Africa has been an overwhelmingly positive experience for me. I began my assignment with the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) in 2010 and was seconded in 2011 to the Aviation Section in the Congo (MONUSCO). Assisted by the Movement Control Section (MOVCON) and contractors, I handle flights for several UN missions in the region.

Lauri Hukkanen (Finland), second from left, posing with colleagues in the Entebbe International Airport in Uganda. (Lauri Hukkanen, 2014)

Throughout my career, I always had the idea of one day joining the United Nations Volunteers (UNV). I was inspired by the many UN Volunteers I met during my years of service in Africa. While most were young, active individuals, there were also older ones like me now, with a strong vision of volunteerism. Fortunately, I was

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successful in my application and am blessed to now be in my second UNV assignment.

I have been working in peacekeeping thirty years of my life. I started military active service with the Finnish Army in 1963 and retired from the Finnish Air Force in 1986. While in active service, I was sent out twice to support UN peacekeeping missions. What followed was a long career of both peacekeeping military service for the UN while in the Finnish Military reserves (1987-1992) and then a second career of administrative positions in UN missions across Africa and beyond (1993-2009).

Like most people, my original intention was to retire once I reached the “appropriate age” but, when that day finally came, I realised I was determined to keep working. Joining the United Nations Volunteers was the obvious choice for me.

Based at Entebbe International Airport in Uganda, my principle duties today involve the coordination and management of passenger and cargo handling, refuelling, and the arrival turn-around and departure activities of UN aircraft, mainly for [MONUSCO](#) and the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)) missions. We occasionally also handle flights from other UN missions in Eastern and Central Africa.

My main work is to coordinate passenger and cargo flights, evacuation flights (MEDEVAC) and, unfortunately, flights bringing deceased UN staff. With my MOVCON colleagues and contactors, we assure that flights are timely handled and effectively turned around. Sometimes that means simultaneously handling several flights, which demands strict coordination ability with everyone working on the ramp (the area where aircraft park). We work with strict aviation safety and cost effectiveness criteria. The impact of my work may seem indirect to the UN's goals of peacekeeping in the region, but it is a crucial part of fulfilling the mission mandate for UN missions in the region.

When a UNV offer of contract is received, applicants should be prepared to work anywhere in the world. In my case, it was Abeche, Chad, with the UN Mission in Central African Republic and Chad ([MINURCAT](#)). I had worked in administration and logistics in several African countries before, but the Republic of Chad was a new challenge for me. Being from Finland, I initially found the work very demanding because of the heat and dry desert conditions. Confident in my abilities and empowered by UNV, I pushed myself to do my best for the organization and for the people in need.

I was fortunate to meet many UN Volunteers in Abeche—the majority from Africa, but also some from South and Central America, Asia and even some from Europe, like me. Now, in my second mission, I am lucky to meet some of them again and the reunion is always cheerful—even some of whom I had personally encouraged to enrol in the UNV volunteer roster!

In choosing to volunteer, finances should not be the top concern. The crucial focus should be on assisting people in need by utilizing our individual skills and knowledge to aid the local population.

Volunteering is contributing to the mandate of the UN wherever we serve. It also requires us to take care of people, including peer UN Volunteers and, of course, ourselves. When volunteering, we are truly never alone; we are together with people—both local and foreign—and the interactions become deeply personal.

I consider my participation with UNV to be a truly unique experience and I invite anyone with an interest in volunteerism to join. UNV provides an excellent platform to further one's experience in the international arena and allows people of different age, skill, ethnic and cultural background to work for the common good—providing humanitarian assistance and getting involved in the lives of those who need it the most. I may be past retirement age, but my work is not yet done!

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Lauri Hukkanen (Finland) has a long record of service with UN peacekeeping operations:

### **Finnish Army and Air Force (1963-1986)**

United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), 1974 (Golan Heights)

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United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), 1974-75 (Golan Heights)

United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) II, 1978-79 (Sinai)

### **Finnish Military Reserves (1987-1992)**

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), 1987-88 and 1989-1991

United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), 1991-1992

United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), 1992 (Bosnia)

### **UN Civil Servant (1993-2009)**

United Nations Operation in Mozambique (UNOMOZ), 1993-95

United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM), 1995-98

United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA), 1995-98

United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Mine Action, 1998-2001 (Iraq)

United Nations Entebbe Support Base (UNESB), 2001-2002 (Italy)

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 2002-2006

United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), 2008-2009

### **UN Volunteer (2010-present)**

United Nations Mission in Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), 2010

United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), 2011

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