Volunteering with dedication to peace and development in South Sudan

The people of South Sudan deserve to enjoy life, deserve to have food, water, electricity, education and a prosperous future for their children. This is the spirit of volunteerism for me – volunteering to make people’s lives better. --Ia Saakadze, UN Volunteer Air Operations Assistant

UNV partners with UNMISS to advance peace and development in South Sudan. More than 400 UN Volunteers support UNMISS, and are crucial to the success of the mission in a wide range of professional areas. Every day, they go above and beyond in their assignments while enduring hardship.
Dzemal Calakovic is one of twenty UN Volunteers serving as Human Rights Officers throughout South Sudan, where they monitor, verify, report on and advocate for the promotion and protection of human rights. He arrived as a Human Rights Officer in Yambio in south-west Sudan in 2017 and expected a normal assignment with few surprises. "That is, until I came across the case of a person being sentenced for witchcraft", he says. Dzemal came across a man who had been detained for six months for practicing witchcraft and had been sentenced to three years in prison, and he wondered how he could help.

“While witchcraft is not an offense in South Sudanese legislation, witchcraft and fear of witchcraft is deeply rooted in South Sudanese culture and dealing with it falls under the Local Customary Courts and Chiefs who have the power to adjudicate on customary disputes”, explains Dzemal. However, such courts do not have the power to issue prison sentences. Dzemal knew that the three-year prison sentence for witchcraft was a human-rights violation and he worked with a local non-governmental organization to file an appeal with the County Court.

As neither the prison nor the court had means to transport the defendant to court for the appeal, Dzemal and his team came up with another plan to instead transport the County Judge from Yambio to Nzara in an UNMISS vehicle by signing a waiver. "We realized that state institutions simply cannot comply with Human Rights norms due to the economic constraints imposed by the conflict. So, we have to be innovative and find creative ways to ensure human rights are respected. (...) Now the defendant will get proper access to justice.”

I remember my former colleagues warning me that I should not lightly leave my career and sail into the waters of volunteerism but now I can say: The work has never been more satisfying. (…) We draw our commitment from our own will, unconstrained with the need to impress anyone else, except ourselves. -Dzemal Calakovic, UN Volunteer Human Rights Officer
Godwin Benson Mkamanga is from Malawi and works as a Fire Safety Officer in Rumbek, the capital of Lakes State. "I save the lives of people and protect their property from fire," he says. Godwin services and checks all fire fighting vehicles, fire extinguishers and rescue tools in the Mission. "I also train local communities in fire prevention," he adds. "We make sure people understand the dangers of fire and they know how to extinguish a fire if one breaks out."

Ia Saakadze supports the Aviation Section as an Air Operations Assistant in Juba. She ensures safe and professional conduct of ground activities, monitors all vehicle movement, fueling operations, and more. “The Mission would not be possible without the support of aviation,” says Ia. Ia is an example of how UN Volunteers remain committed to their assignments in dangerous situations.

In July 2016, a crisis broke out in Juba and heavy shooting occurred. A lot of staff got stuck around the country, on missions, in the city or in their own houses. It became so threatening that the mission offered to evacuate us. But not for a single moment did we hesitate to stay and continue our service to make sure the Mission could go on. --UN Volunteer Air Operations Assistant Ia Saakadze

Dzemal, Godwin and Ia are just a few examples. Many UN Volunteers support the back-operations of UNMISS as Vehicle Technicians, Air Operations Assistants, Fire Safety Officers, Meteorologist Assistants, and more. Without their support plans would not take off, cars would not start, computers would not turn on. These UN Volunteers are pivotal to the success of the Mission.

Our UN Volunteers: they not only hope, they not only dream, they do something 24/7 to bring peace and development to South Sudan. --UNV Deputy
Executive Coordinator Toily Kurbanov

Sub-Saharan Africa

- Peacekeeping operations
- Human Rights
- air operations
- Fire Safety
- DPKO
- UNMISS
- South Sudan
- Malawi
- Georgia
- Montenegro

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals