



UN Volunteer Air Operations Assistant Ia Sakaadze serves with UNMISS in South Sudan, controlling safe ground operations on the airfield.

"There is no way to peace, peace is the way"

During 2018, 579 UN Volunteers, 34 per cent of them women, supported the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), which supports the youngest nation in the world. One of these volunteers is Ia Saakadze from Georgia, who has served as an international UN Volunteer Air Operations Assistant with UNMISS since April 2014. Here, Ia shares her experience as a woman in peacekeeping in a volatile working environment.

In my youth, I often volunteered with orphanages and animal rescue organizations in my country. Although I felt that I could and should do more to help build a better world, I didn't know where to start. This was until I delved into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I then realized that what I wanted was a volunteer assignment within the United Nations system, particularly in a place where I could advocate for equality, respect for diversity and peace and development. I applied for a UNV assignment and was accepted as an Air Operations Assistant with UNMISS.

In our daily work we provide flight services to facilitate the work of the peacekeeping mission. In a country with harsh climate conditions, there is no railway and a limited road network in very bad condition. Air transportation is often the only means of getting our peacekeepers to and from their duty stations.

The moments when I truly realize what an impact my work has on people's lives is when we deal with emergency situations, such as medical and emergency evacuations, and the recovery of people in cases of accidents, clashes and other casualties.

“ My greatest motivation is to save lives, be it that of a mother with a one-week-old baby to be urgently airlifted from a remote area of South Sudan, or the life of a soldier who has been ambushed during a patrol. –la Sakaadze, UN Volunteer Air Operations Assistant with UNMISS, South Sudan

I have had multiple cases that required an immediate response and collective coordinated action to save lives. I have come to appreciate the essence and spirit of team work in those moments when it is most needed.

Immediate response to emergency requests requires thorough planning and preparation of crews, assets and necessary facilities to accommodate patients and deliver them safely to the destinations where they can be taken care of.

One needs to take into consideration factors such as weather conditions, time of day, the security situation in the region and the availability of assets, or lack thereof.

The biggest challenge I faced while serving as a UN Volunteer was during the July 2016 crisis, when South Sudan's capital Juba was rocked by violence. Following continuous heavy gunfire for several days, the decision was taken to evacuate most UNMISS civilian staff. My name was on the list of personnel to be evacuated.

“ When I was informed that I was to be evacuated, I took some moments to reflect on my life and on the sources of motivation that brought me to this country, and I realized that I didn’t want to be evacuated. I understood that if I had come with the intention to make this world better, to contribute to peace and security, to help vulnerable people who deserve decent lives and a bright future for themselves and their children, I should stay and continue my daily work. --Ia Sakaadze

I requested to stay and asked to return to my duties. My wish was granted. In hindsight, I believe I did the right thing. I was in the right place, at the right time. I am still here in South Sudan, supporting humanity and seeking peace, because I believe that there is no way to peace, peace is the way.

 Sub-Saharan Africa

• UNMISS • Georgia • women in peacekeeping • air operations

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