Giving hope to vulnerable groups affected by armed conflict in South Sudan

The United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) was established in 2011 and since the outbreak of conflict in 2013 its mandate has evolved to include the protection of civilians the monitoring and investigating of human rights abuses, support to the South Sudanese–led peace process and support for the delivery of vital humanitarian assistance. Some 440 UN Volunteers, such as myself, are on location supporting mission objectives and assisting local communities.

My experience serving with UNMISS in the context of intercommunal armed conflict in South Sudan is for me unmatched. The Civil Affairs Section plays a pivotal role as it contributes to the implementation of the mission’s mandate in the context of intercommunical and armed conflicts, working mainly in conflict management, support to social cohesion, reconciliation efforts among conflict parties and early warning capabilities.

I am proud to have contributed throughout my six month assignment as a UN Volunteer to the activities of the Civil Affairs Division, participating in information-gathering, providing timely reports on conflict management, protection of civilians and peace process activities. My role required that I
map key actors and stakeholders and maintain contacts with local
government authorities, political, traditional and religious leaders as well as
civil society groups, briefing them on the mission’s mandate and activities in
my area of assignment.

UN Volunteers make up about half of the civil affairs
personnel in UNMISS. They play an invaluable role in
ensuring day-to-day operations. It is an honour to
have served as a UN Volunteer with them and to
know that, most importantly, local communities in the
field were happy with the work we did.

In May 2017, I was involved in organizing a peace forum in Rimenze, a
remote area 35 kilometers from Yambio, in Western Equatoria. In this area,
over 6,600 internally-displaced persons (IDPs) were registered and
sheltering in a Catholic Church compound during more than four months
without any humanitarian assistance. Circumstances in the field can be
incredibly difficult at times. These IDPs, mostly women and children, were
traumatized by the effects of the violence that resulted in the killing, looting
and beating of civilians. This breached the trust and confidence between
parties. These communities remained concerned for their safety and
protection, losing hope after having experienced all sorts of abuse.

This peace forum aimed at providing a platform for community, religious,
political and traditional leaders, along with the UNMISS team, to spread a
message of peace and engage with the IDP community, advocating the
need for forgiveness and peaceful coexistence. My role was to identify and
mobilize key actors and stakeholders, including both state and non-state
actors. This was crucial to the success of the forum. In the end, I was happy
with the positive feedback received from the local population, especially
from some church leaders, regarding their sense of the chances for peaceful
coexistence in the area.

Today, I am glad because I know I have brought hope to these vulnerable
groups while improving the confidence in peace efforts deployed by
UNMISS. My experience as a UN Volunteer has allowed me to contribute
directly to the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan. This experience
has radically changed my views and opened me to new perspectives. I am
delighted to have been part of an incredibly committed team that works hard to bring peace in this challenging environment. I have seen how, as long as the work is done alongside local communities, people will help each other and contribute to peace.

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions