



SYRIA VOLUNTEERS

Dear Readers,

Ahlan wa Sahlan! This is the first issue of the newsletter for the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Programme in Syria!

This quarterly publication's fundamental aim is to present the work and the experiences of the UNVs providing an insight on issues of interest for the UNVs and for others working with them in Syria. We hope to reach out beyond the UN and give a comprehensive view of what volunteerism and UNV is about.

The UNV Programme in Syria has grown noticeably over years. This is largely due to the ever-growing need for UNV assistance in the various community development initiatives carried out by the UN system, the Government, NGOs, bilateral donors and the private sector. Syria's rich culture and diversity, along with its strategic position in the Middle East, provides remarkable potential for UN Volunteers' support to be helpful. These initiatives will include an association agreement with the EU, the 10th Five Year Plan, and an Economic Reform

Programme. In response to Syria's initiative, UNDP Syria has embarked on a comprehensive programme of new projects regarding economic governance and poverty alleviation. Because these projects require substantial contributions from the Syrian Country Office staff, **skilled and high-caliber UNVs are needed.** The scope of available resources for Volunteer actions and project activities in which UN Volunteers can play a pivotal role is unlimited.

Indeed the UNV Syria Programme's hand has touched so many sectors related to the country-building effort, yet we look forward to enhancing our service and improving our performance. Congratulations to all the UNVs for the excellent work — and to all those who volunteer in benefit of others, **you are truly a reflection of the spirit volunteerism in action!**

Ali Al-Za'tari
UNDP and UNV
Resident Representative

From the editors	pg1
UNV Programme in Syria	pg2
Our UNVs	pg3
UNVs' Voice: Shaza Hajali	pg4
Rehabilitation project of Zeyzoun disaster area	pg6
How to become a UNV	pg8
Need a Volunteer?	pg8

UNV Programme in Syria:



The UNV Programme has been present in Syria since 1979 when the first International UNV was recruited and in that time well over 137 International from and National UN Volunteers have been assigned to the country.

UN Volunteers have contributed to development in Syria day after day building the capacity of government and non-governmental organizations in order to better plan, implement and evaluate their projects. Skilled and high-caliber UNVs have given assistance in the various community development activities carried out by the UN system, the Government, NGOs, bilateral donors and the private sector.

At present there are around 40 National and International Volunteers assigned with UN agencies. UNVs are currently playing an active role within the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Country Office and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Their varied work includes: Field Officers, Water and Sanitation experts, Administration and Finance Officers, Legal Aid experts, Protection Assistants, Monitoring and Evaluation Officers, Technical Assistants and Education and Employment Advisors, among others.

In addition they provide expertise to the following UNDP projects:

- **National capacity building for disaster management;**
- **Rural community development project in Jabal Al-Hoss;**
- **Strengthening the institutional capacity of the People's Assembly of Syria;**
- **Supporting rehabilitation and sustainable livelihood in the Zeyzoun disaster area;**
- **Supporting the Syrian government in the Association Agreement with the European Union.**

Request

You're assistance and contribution could incredibly improve our issues!

If you have any publications, reports or other notices you would like to share with your colleagues, please send it to us, so that we can give it the attention it deserves.

And if you have planned any training, seminar or workshop, give us the dates so that we can publish it in the next issue.

Any contribution will be warmly welcomed!

Our UNVs

In every issue we will present our UNVs currently giving the UN System their invaluable support

ABIIR HUSSEIN ISKANDARANI



Abir is working for "UNHCR" in Damascus as a Durable Solution Clerk. She has been working for UNHCR since March 2002: *"My duties include maintaining the correct*

statistics of the unit's work and submitting monthly and quarterly reports. I'm responsible for processing the voluntary repatriation of refugees, processing the family reunification and scheduling the interviews for the unit. I also provide the refugees with durable solution counseling and follows up the departure procedures of the refugees departing for resettlement or repatriation".

LINA DEIRATANY AJI



Lina holds a BA in English Literature and a diploma in Literary English Studies. She is currently working as a UNV Programme Clerk at UNHCR in Damascus. *"My main duties and responsibilities are to*

collect information, and prepare periodic and ad-hoc reports on programme and project activities; keep regular record of the refugees in detention to be assisted financially on monthly basis, and medically if necessary; provide DAFI Scholarships to needy and deserving refugees for academic and professional studies. I really love my work and hope I can continue serving in such a field".

AMER GHRAWI



Amer joined as an UNV in August 2003 where he started working at the Ministry of Administration and Environment where he offered concrete solutions to improve the quality of services provided to people. He

also worked at State Planning Commission with experts from GTZ, and local managers to create new architecture that gives SPC, enough flexibility to be a think tank for the prime ministry.

"Determination is all a volunteer needs to succeed in his aims!"

HESHAM AL-NAGGAR



Hesham has a university degree in Telecommunication Engineering from his hometown in Egypt. This is not his first assignment with a UN agency as he worked as a National

UNV in his country for almost 3 years. On the 25th of April 2002 he became an international UNV in Damascus. At the beginning of his assignment he was working an IT specialist, IT support Focal Point, and Policy Advisor for IT. Currently he's working as an Information Management Team Leader.

"I'm so proud to be an UN Volunteer!"



A VOLUNTEER'S VOICE: Shaza Hajali



Shaza Hajali is a Syrian professional lawyer with a BA in Law. In July 2003, after almost 7 years in a private law office, she decided to join the UNV Programme: a turning point in her professional and personal life. As a UNV, she's now working for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees agency (UNHCR), in Damascus, where she faces the dramatic destinies of refugees coming from all over the world, helping them by providing humanitarian and legal support. She is the Focal Person for legal aid and she's also working as Protection Assistant. She kindly dedicated to us a bit of her precious time and we took that chance to ask her few questions about her interesting job.

What are your responsibilities as UNV?

I have studied law and now as an UNV I'm able to use my education; my work with UNHCR is to provide legal and humanitarian support to refugees who seek protection in Syria. I conduct interviews with asylum-seekers and prepare written legal assessments. As Syria has not ratified the 1951 Convention related to the status of refugees, every refugee needs to be resettled into another country. Therefore we prepare exit visas, help refugees in detention by conducting objective legal assessments, work on family union issues and register newborn refugee children. To achieve all this, I communicate with the governmental institutions on a daily basis as a lawyer, representing UNHCR. UNHCR Damascus works in close cooperation with our Headquarter in Geneva.

What makes your job interesting and what are the challenges you are facing?

As an UNV in UNHCR I have

experienced great challenges and at the same time enjoyed the fruits of rewarding work.

Refugees and asylum seekers in Syria belong to various countries and come from different continents of the world. It is a great challenge for them to be in a new country and different culture. Most of them come from Sudan, Somalia, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Afghanistan, Eritrea and they all need to be resettled.

I feel that we're helping people in real need; the poor and victims that are experiencing the worst aspects of the human tragedy. It is so fulfilling when one of these people is saved and begins a decent new life, all this while doing an incredibly interesting job. I know I will never want to quit this kind of job!

What are the main difficulties that you encounter in your work?

We continuously face difficulties, whether with administration issues or other procedures, sometimes even the refugees can be hard to deal with, but I'm lucky to work with such a great team within a helping environment, where everybody is working really hard to achieve things in the shortest time. During my work as a UNV I have seen that many Syrian institutions, including the government, are very helpful and keen to cooperate with the UNHCR and with all UN agencies. UNV Programme people from various sectors of society, such as non-governmental organizations, governments, the private sector, academia and the media, are brought together to provide support and relief to those in need. I experience examples of such efforts every day. Everybody understands the importance of what we're doing; we cannot quit and it's mandatory that we proceed and reach our aims because we're doing it for people who are really suffering. Nothing is impossible to achieve.



To which extent do you feel that working as a UN Volunteer contribute to your personal and professional growth?

Being an UN volunteer allows me to develop my professional knowledge and skills while helping to build my country. I never stop learning in this job: from all the professional experience I get both within and outside the office, from all the people I get to know on a daily basis, from all my colleagues, from the collaboration with international organizations and last but not least from all the refugees. It is very dramatic and sad to see many women, children, young and old experiencing terrible situations such as social exclusion, war, violence, discrimination and poverty. Due to their tragic experiences many are traumatized and many have lost their families and support. Dealing with such individuals is not easy, but it develops your compassion and sensitiveness. However, just feeling sad does not help; one has to develop the ability to respond. I have learned how to respond and be able to conduct objective legal assessments of the refugees' claims.

It goes without saying that the stories of many refugees have a great impact on me and I can vividly remember the traumatic experiences many of them have gone through. The strength they demonstrate by continuing their struggle for a better life taught me to be optimistic and also to work in a way that gives hope to others. It is so rewarding when a life is saved! I remember two Congolese children that were found alone without their family, probably victims of trafficking. UNHCR found their mother in another country and we struggled to provide them with passports and all the required documents. The Syrian government understood the

difficult situation and simplified the processes by cooperating. With the help of the Red Cross, they were finally reunited with their mother.

In which way do you think that the UNV Programme could be improved and better promoted?

By being an UNV I have been inspired to follow the traditions of engagement, trust, solidarity and reciprocity that exist in every society and I have realized that many young Syrians and people from other countries are very enthusiastic to take part in development of the social, educational, cultural and economic life of their people. Working as an UNV is incredibly fulfilling yet at the same time incredibly demanding. Some times I just wish we had more time and space to engage into other activities that could be helpful to refugees and to our job as is being an UNV.



Rehabilitation project of Zeyzoun disaster area

By Michael Elias Aried

I started my job as an UN National Volunteer in the Zeyzon Project in July 2004. This project, which aims to support and rehabilitate Zeyzon disaster area, started after the disaster of Zeyzon's dam. The number of people who live there and was affected exceeds 700,000 inhabitants.

The area is divided into five agricultural sectors; agriculture is the main resource for those people. When the dam, considered the main resource of water supply, collapsed the fertile fields were changed into dry farming; this changed people's life into a very poor one.

The disaster was tremendous. Within a few hours people lost everything they owned and they fled for their lives from the overwhelming water. The nearby villages were strongly affected by the flooding, especially Zeyzon which disappeared completely. Only the minaret of the mosque emerged from the floods as a clear evidence of the calamity.

Villages like Al-Mushek, Mazraat Al-Asi, Al-Zeara and others were strongly affected and the Syrian government dealt with the crisis as immediately as it possibly could.

The project was established with the help and support of the Italian Government and UNDP in Syria.

Five targets of the project were assigned as the basic procedures necessary to start the project:

1. To accumulate data for socio-economic development in the project area for baseline studies and policy purposes of the project management, local government and the donors' community;
2. To accumulate data for technical, economical and social studies of the mostly affected areas;
3. To establish small projects that will increase the income of the people who live in this area;
4. To enhance the local capacity and skills through the co-operation of international organizations;
5. To promote and enhance activities that would allow women to be more involved in economic activities and decision-making on the local level.





We started our job by visiting the affected villages. We met the people and explained to them the nature of our mission, while listening to their points of view about the projects and finding out what they may find more beneficial to improve their income. We began to establish local committees, composed by local leaders, mayors and teachers.

First, nine committees were founded. We focused our attention on the poorest families in nine villages, depending on the survey that included approximately 520 families out of the total 1,135 families. This was done in one of the five sectors affected by the disaster.

Once the survey was completed and the poorest families assigned, we began to distribute the survey table divided into four main categories (A, B, C and D):

- Category A consisted of those who lost everything they owned.
- Category B consisted of people who own only a house.
- Category C consisted of people who own a house and one resource (tractor, harvest machine, car, animals or others).
- Category D consisted of those who own fields in addition to a house or others.

After the committees' approval on the accuracy and truth of all information, a group of candidates was chosen and provided with loans. All candidates selected were from Category A.

On the fifth day of every month, the local committees present a monthly report to show how their work is going and to show the new changes of the debtor's project.

These committee reports kept us updated on all the projects in the area. We also continuously visited these families to make sure that those debtors settled in their villages and did not repeat patterns of leaving to seek employment in another area. During our several meetings with the local villagers everybody showed great happiness for such projects that urge individuals to improve their families' life.

All villagers were grateful to the continuous supervision carried out by the administration of the project, hoping that this supervision lasts until all poor villagers take benefit of the project.

We were highly aware of the hugely positive effects those small projects had on the villagers' life.



This was my first Volunteer mission and also the first field-job I carried out. It's a great opportunity for me to increase and enhance my ability and experience about Volunteer's life.

Living with people, listening to their problems and giving them a helping hand offers me a great feeling of happiness and adds a big value to everything I do!

Do you want to become an international UN Volunteer?



This is all you need:

- To be a professional with a university or technical degree, or equivalent in technical experience.
- To have, at least, 5 years of professional experience.
- To be at least 25 years old.
- To have initiative to help others and be willing to serve in difficult living conditions and hardship duty stations.
- To be ready and willing to share your expertise (mentoring) with your local counterparts.
- To be fluent in at least one of the official UN languages: English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Arabic.
- To have a great motivation to serve and help others that should not be driven by a financial interest.
- To be able to adapt to different lifestyles, cultures and traditions.
- To agree to and respect the UN Principles and guidelines of International Servants and the UNV Conditions of Service and its specific rules and regulations.

If you meet all these requirements, you can send your CV to stefano.cordella@undp.org or submit your registration form on our web site www.undp.org.sy/unv (subject: UNV on-line application). An acknowledgement will be sent to you and your information will be kept in our in-country database. When a request for a volunteer position has come in, the database will be screened to find the best matching candidates. Please note that inclusion in the database does not guarantee a UNV assignment with UNV. Candidates are welcomed to submit preferences for developing countries they believe they are most suitable for, but volunteer assignments are made primarily based on the best match between a country's needs and a volunteer's skills. Although UN Volunteers offer their services on a voluntary basis, they are supported through several benefits. UNVs are provided travel costs, a settling-in allowance and monthly living allowance, and a small resettlement allowance based on the number of months served. All UNVs are entitled to health and life insurance and are included in the UN medical and security evacuation plans. In case you have more questions, do not hesitate to contact us directly.

Need a UN Volunteer?

Are you a Government Ministry or other agency, in need of professionals with several years experience and skills? Then contact the UNV office in Syria for assistance. International

Organizations, NGOs and Private Sector Organizations, Entrepreneurs and Small Business are also welcome.

Annually, approximately 25,000 persons, from all over the world apply to UNV Headquarters and acceptance is highly selective. After a screening, about 10% are included in the computerized UNV roster. This roster presently includes more than 4,000 candidates, in 115 different professional categories!

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Special thanks to all contributors!!!