

## **UN Volunteers at the forefront of gender-responsive peacebuilding**

November 3, 2016

Data supports the existence of a significant nexus between gender mainstreaming, sustaining peace, and civic and volunteer engagement. This was the topic of discussion at a side event organized on 27 October 2016 by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women) at the Permanent Mission of Germany to the UN in New York.

H.E. Mr. Heiko Thoms, Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, delivered opening remarks and welcomed participants to the event. He highlighted the long-standing history of volunteerism in Germany, and reassured continuous support from Germany to the cause of women, peace and volunteerism.

Held in commemoration of the 16th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325), the event celebrated the partnership between UNV, PBSO and UN women in the framework of the Peacebuilding Fund's Gender Promotion Initiative, which aims to accelerate progress towards the implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Seven-Point Action Plan on Gender-responsive Peacebuilding.

"UN Volunteers are ideal interlocutors to deliver constructive messages about participatory processes, building trust and promoting dialogue, civic responsibility, solidarity and compassion, because the underlying foundation of all these peace-related concepts is precisely voluntary engagement, which UN Volunteers embody and promote," said Toily Kurbanov, UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, during his opening remarks.

The 'Women, Peace and Volunteerism: Partnerships for Sustaining Peace' event was moderated by Henk-Jan Brinkman, Chief of the Policy, Planning and Application Branch of the PBSO. To highlight the work being carried out in gender-responsive peacebuilding, UN Volunteers presented case studies from different countries and regions.

Yaindy Nuesi Bautista (Germany/Dominican Republic), international UN Volunteer serving as Citizen Participation Specialist with UN Women in Guatemala, talked about the efforts of the last 30 years to make sexual violence a legally pursued crime in the country. UN Women and local NGOs partnered to launch the Gender Promotion Initiative, ensuring a change in legislation, the transformation of social norms, and equal access to services for women.

National UN Volunteer Gender Specialist with UNDP, Aichurek Kurmanbekova, and international UN Volunteer Vilja Liikanen (Finland), Monitoring and Evaluation Officer with UN Women, both serving in Kyrgyzstan, talked about the fight against bride kidnapping in the country, where 11,800 women are raped every year. They discussed the need to change mindsets as a prerequisite to end violence against women.

International UN Volunteer Programme Advisor Francesca De Antoni (Italy) and national UN Volunteer Programme Assistant Baba Koumaré, both with UN Women in Mali, discussed their work in the country, and emphasized the important role that women play in

the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and to achieve long lasting peace and prosperity.

Two international UN Volunteers with UN Women in Senegal – Angela Nhoko Mejane (Sweden), Gender Expert, and Silvia Olivotti (Italy), Women, Peace and Security Programme Assistant – discussed progress made in West and Central Africa to incorporate women's views in peace processes, thanks to policy developments brokered by UN Women and financial support from the Peacebuilding Fund.

Judith Otieno (Kenya) highlighted the conflicts and struggles Somali women have been going through for decades, and strongly advocated for the international community to come together to build peace in Somalia. Based with UNDP in Kenya, her work as a national UN Volunteer Gender Programme Analyst focuses on the reconciliation and reconstruction of local communities in Somalia.

Building peace is often driven by activists, advocates and practitioners, many of whom are volunteers – and very often women. Peace is being built every day by teachers in schools, traders in market, youth in sports clubs, social workers in community centres and employees in their offices.

UN Volunteers support that silent majority of women and men, often because they work and live within these very communities. This was highlighted by Ms. Päivi Kannisto, Chief of the Peace and Security Section of UN Women, in her closing remarks: “UN Volunteers are in a privileged position to be able to promote gender equality and women's empowerment”.