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UN VOLUNTEERS: A HELPING HAND

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The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program was established in 1970 by the United Nations General Assembly to promote peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. Headquartered in Bonn, Germany, UNV mobilizes thousands of volunteers each year to support UN missions and local development initiatives.

Since its inception, UNV has deployed over 50,000 volunteers to more than 150 countries. The program has played a vital role in supporting UN peacekeeping efforts, responding to humanitarian crises, and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UN volunteers have made meaningful contributions in areas such as electoral assistance in conflict-affected regions, public health campaigns, climate action, and education—demonstrating the powerful impact of volunteerism in driving sustainable change.

This issue of the magazine shines a spotlight on UNV's work through an exclusive interview with its Executive Coordinator, Mr. Toily Kurbanov. It also provides practical guidance on how to become a UN Volunteer. In addition, four individuals currently working for UNV share their motivations for joining the program and offer insights into their jobs.



Le programme des Volontaires des Nations Unies (VNU) a été créé en 1970 par l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies afin de promouvoir la paix et le développement à travers le volontariat dans le monde entier. Basé à Bonn, en Allemagne, le Programme des VNU mobilise chaque année des milliers de volontaires pour soutenir les missions des Nations Unies et des initiatives de développement local.

Depuis sa création, le programme des VNU a déployé plus de 50 000 volontaires dans plus de 150 pays. Il joue un rôle essentiel dans le soutien aux opérations de maintien de la paix, la réponse aux crises humanitaires, et la réalisation des Objectifs de Développement Durable (ODD). Les volontaires des Nations Unies ont contribué de manière significative à des domaines tels que l'assistance électorale dans les régions en conflit, les campagnes de santé publique, l'action climatique et l'éducation — illustrant ainsi le pouvoir du volontariat en tant que moteur de changements durables.

Ce numéro du magazine met en lumière le travail des VNU à travers une interview exclusive avec son Coordonnateur exécutif, M. Toily Kurbanov. Il contient également des conseils pratiques sur la manière de devenir volontaire des Nations Unies. Enfin, quatre personnes qui travaillent actuellement pour les VNU nous ont exposé les raisons qui les ont poussées à rejoindre le programme et nous ont expliqué en quoi consiste leur travail.

Prisca Chaoui

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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UNV: ensuring inclusion and growth

In conversation with the Executive Coordinator of United Nations Volunteers (UNV), Toily Kurbanov, on the future of volunteerism

MOLLIE FRASER-ANDREWS *

“My career led me to UNV in twists and turns,” begins Toily Kurbanov, Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV). Reflecting on his journey, he explains how he transitioned from financial services to national government before joining the UN, gaining over a decade of leadership experience at a national level before moving into the international sphere. “I started with UNV first as the Deputy Executive Coordinator, where there seemed to be some interest in having someone with broad field experience. Eventually, I took over as the Executive Coordinator in January 2021.”

▼
Toily Kurbanov
celebrates
International
Volunteer Day on
5 December 2024
in Bhutan

When asked about the future of volunteerism, he acknowledges the complexity of making predictions. “With all

humility, I would not profess that I have a particular view about the future of volunteerism, but I can speak about a couple of trends that are in play now.” One key trend is that volunteerism is not limited to youth but extending into mid-career, post-career, and retirement phases. “It is going to be an increasingly lifecycle activity,” he notes.

Another significant trend is the global nature of volunteerism. “It won’t be just north to south, or south to north. It will become part and parcel of societal life all across the globe.” He sees no reason why this evolution would not continue.

The structure of volunteerism is also shifting. Traditionally, it was community-based and informal, often through faith-based organizations or local networks. However, “increasingly, we’ll see this becoming more structured through organized groups and institutions such as UNV.” The digital age is also playing a role in transforming volunteerism. “For many volunteering activities today, you don’t need to pack and move across the globe. You can provide meaningful support online.” UNV’s online volunteering service has grown significantly, offering new ways for people to contribute.

Challenges in mobilizing volunteers

Volunteerism is often linked to unpaid labor, which can sometimes contradict the values upheld by the UN. Mr. Kurbanov explains that mobilizing volunteers involves both demand and supply. “There is a demand perspective—ensuring there is interest from UN partners and a supply



© UNV

perspective, so that there are volunteers willing to offer their time and skills.”

As UN programs evolve, there is an increasing demand for volunteers with technical expertise. “Volunteering used to be more about community-level projects, but now there is more interest in technical skills, from data scientists to epidemiologists.” On the supply side, the challenge is to create opportunities not just for community-level work, but also for professionals with specialized skills.

Another shift is the increasing reliance on national expertise rather than international volunteers. “There have been significant gains in human capital in the developing countries of the Global South, and there is a lot of interest in tapping into that talent.” Staying ahead of these changes and anticipating future demand is a crucial part of UNV’s work.

Lessons from volunteerism

“One lesson I’m learning every day is humility,” he shares. It is essential for volunteers and organizations alike to stay grounded and connected to the realities on the ground. “Every now and then, we have this perspective that we are here to change the world. But we must retain humility.”

Balancing idealism with realism is another crucial lesson. “Volunteerism attracts passionate, empathetic people, but we must ensure they don’t become disillusioned. We don’t want idealists turning into cynics.” Striking this balance is key to sustaining long-term engagement in volunteering.

Making a difference: UNV in action

Rather than singling out specific countries, Toily highlights impactful moments, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. “At the beginning of the pandemic, UN agencies couldn’t mobilize international specialists. They turned to UNV, and we recruited thousands of national volunteers to ensure UN programs continued.” These volunteers worked with WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, and other agencies to support pandemic responses globally.



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Another area of progress is disability inclusion. “Pre-COVID, there were only five UN volunteers with disabilities in the entire UN system. Last year, we had over 270. It’s still a work in progress, but we are moving towards making disability inclusion the new normal in the UNV sphere.”

Ensuring volunteer safety and well-being

When asked about safeguarding the well-being of volunteers in high-risk environments, he states unequivocally: “We apply the same standards for UN volunteers as we do for any other UN personnel.” This includes work-life balance, safety, and mental well-being. “It is a shared responsibility between UNV, the receiving office, and the volunteers themselves.” By ensuring equal standards and collaboration, UNV aims to create a safe and supportive environment for its volunteers worldwide.

Toily emphasizes the ongoing evolution of volunteerism: “Volunteerism is changing. It is becoming more structured, more digital, more inclusive. But at its core, it remains about people coming together to make a difference.” UNV continues to adapt, ensuring that volunteers remain a vital force for positive change across the globe. ■



Tree planting with volunteers in Somalia in 2023



VOLUNTEERISM IS CHANGING. IT IS BECOMING MORE STRUCTURED, MORE DIGITAL, MORE INCLUSIVE



Mollie Fraser-Andrews is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.



➤ Farmers in Sudan reap the benefits of the UNV Women farming project, 2024

A look at the history of United Nations Volunteers

In 1970, the United Nations General Assembly voted to establish a new age of volunteerism

AYESHA KHAN *

The history of United Nations Volunteers (UNV) starts from 1968 with its first mention, to present day in 2025 where it deploys thousands of UN Volunteers and Online Volunteers to support the United Nations system in peace and development worldwide. From one volunteer to thousands, here is how UNV evolved to the changing global landscape and expanded its scope of work.

In 1968, the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, made a visionary call for

the establishment of a formal United Nations Volunteers program. During an honorary speech at Harvard University, he emphasized the need for an international legion dedicated to combating the true enemies of humanity: poverty, hunger, and social injustice. His words resonated deeply, planting the seeds for a global volunteer movement.

Two years later, in 1970, the UN General Assembly responded to the Shah's call by voting to establish UNV through a UN General Assembly resolution. This new initiative was to be administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), marking the beginning of a

dedicated effort to harness volunteerism for development. The first UNV office opened in New York, led by its inaugural Coordinator, Assad K. Sadry of Iran.

By 1971, UNV had recruited its first cohort of 35 volunteers. These pioneers were dispatched to various countries, including Chad, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and the Yemen Arab Republic (now the Republic of Yemen). They worked with UN agencies such as UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the Food and Agriculture Organization, laying the groundwork for UNV's future endeavours. In 1972, UNV's headquarters were relocated from New York to Geneva, Switzerland. The mid 1970s saw UNV recruiting refugees from Rwanda as UN Volunteers and engaging youth in various international development projects, along with multiple UN General Assembly resolutions calling for an expanded role of UNV in sustainable development. By the end of 1976, 285 UN Volunteers were serving in 52 developing countries, with 65% of them working in the least developed countries. And by the late 1970s, the steady growth in volunteer assignments had risen to more than 600 UN Volunteers.

In 1985, a UN General Assembly resolution established 5 December as International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development. This resolution called upon governments to raise awareness

of the important contributions of volunteer service both domestically and internationally. The latter half of the 1980s saw a shift towards humanitarian efforts, influenced by global changes such as the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In the next decade (the 1990s), UNV participated in its first UN peace operation, deploying over 700 volunteers to the United Nations missions in Cambodia. Over 200 UN Volunteers were deployed with the United Nations Observer Mission in South Africa to monitor the electoral process and conduct demographic surveys. This mission was crucial for the first democratic elections in South Africa, which saw Nelson Mandela elected as President. The mid 1990's saw the relocation of UNV from Geneva, Switzerland, to Bonn, Germany, reflecting Germany's growing role in international diplomacy. In Timor-Leste, more than 500 UN Volunteers were recruited to assist the United Nations Mission in East Timor in organizing and implementing the August 1999 popular consultations.

The turn of the millennium saw the launch of UNV Online Volunteering service, promoting a more inclusive form of volunteerism without barriers of time and place. In addition, a UN General Assembly declared 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers, designating UNV as the global



BY THE END OF 1976, 285 UN VOLUNTEERS WERE SERVING IN 52 DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



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A UN Volunteer assists with elections in Timor-Leste, 1999



© UNV

➤
UN Volunteers
in action around
the world

lead for the campaign. In 2008, the first reported UN Volunteer with disabilities began serving in the State of Palestine. From 2010 through 2015, UNV responded to the catastrophic natural disasters in Haiti, Nepal and the Philippines by deploying volunteers on the frontlines of crisis response. The decade also marks UN General Assembly resolutions calling for continued support for international development based on a people-centred approach and recognizing volunteerism as a powerful means of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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IN 2024, NEARLY
3,000 UN
VOLUNTEERS
SERVED IN
COUNTRIES
WITH UN
PEACEKEEPING
MISSIONS

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, as UN organizations navigated travel restrictions and other challenges, UNV became a vital gateway to national volunteer talent and Online Volunteers. In the first months alone, hundreds of national volunteers supported awareness campaigns, advocacy, elderly care, mental health services, and later, vaccine management. Online Volunteers contributed to system-wide response efforts through data mapping, analysis, and health messaging. These efforts highlighted the power of volunteerism in tackling global crises, demonstrating its critical role in emergency response and

resilience-building. Overall, not counting Online Volunteers, UNV mobilized more than 1,000 UN Volunteers in 105 countries working in 26 UN partner agencies.

In recent years, UNV has significantly expanded its role in emergency response and protracted humanitarian crises. The number of UN Volunteers has surged across all humanitarian agencies—twenty-fold with the International Organization for Migration, three-fold with the World Food Programme, and more—reflecting both growing demand and UNV’s deliberate, more effective response. Key efforts include strengthening outreach to critical national volunteer talent, streamlining procedures, and accelerating deployment of both national and international volunteers. In

For an in-depth look at the history of United Nation Volunteers, please read more here:

• bit.ly/3EgRFoN

or see UNV at 50 here:

• unv.org/unv-at-50

2024, nearly 3,000 UN Volunteers served in countries with UN peacekeeping and political missions, acting as frontline responders at the intersection of peace, development, and humanitarian action.

In 2023, the UN General Assembly adopted a historic resolution designating 2026 as the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development (IVY 2026) and tasked UNV with facilitating its implementation. UNV has welcomed this recognition of volunteerism's transformative impact, which will elevate its visibility both globally and at the country level. To support IVY 2026, UNV has established an international secretariat while encouraging Member States to lead national-level initiatives. Hosted by UNV, the IVY Secretariat will coordinate efforts, provide guidance, and foster knowledge sharing in the lead-up to and throughout the year. UNV plans to launch IVY 2026 with a special UN General Assembly event in December 2025.

At the end of 2024, there were over 14,600 UN Volunteers coming from over 180 nationalities and working in 170 countries with 59 UN agencies around the world. Last year alone, demand for Online Volunteers surged, with 23,000 engaged by UN organizations and partners—more than doubling from fewer than 10,000 in 2021. UNV has grown remarkably since its inception, showcasing the power of volunteerism in promoting global peace and development. From its early initiatives to its current efforts in addressing modern challenges, UNV continues to make a significant impact worldwide as well as including persons with disabilities as per the new normal in the UN system. ■

For more information on United Nations Volunteers, please visit the website here:

www.unv.org



Ayesha Khan is the Communications Specialist at United Nations Volunteers.



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Becoming a UN Volunteer and an Online Volunteer

Discover how you can join this global movement and support critical UN initiatives across the globe

VOLUNTEER SOLUTIONS SECTION *

Becoming a UN Volunteer is a journey filled with purpose and the promise of making a tangible difference in the world. UN Volunteer assignments support peace, development and humanitarian initiatives of the United Nations around the globe.

“
UN VOLUNTEERS
RECEIVE
ALLOWANCES
AND BENEFITS
TO SUSTAIN
THEM

The journey begins with understanding the different categories of UN Volunteers. You could serve as an international UN Volunteer, working in a country other than your own; or as a national UN Volunteer, contributing within your home country.

If you have less than three years of experience, you might consider becoming a youth or university volunteer. For those with more experience, there are roles as specialists or experts.



Create your profile on the UNV Unified Volunteering Platform (UVP) here: app.unv.org

For an in depth look at Online Volunteer stories, please visit our website: unv.org/tags/online-volunteers

Read more about how to become a UN Volunteer here: unv.org/become-volunteer/volunteer-abroad

Here's what UNV recommends:

You need to be at least 18 years old, possess relevant professional and academic experience, and be proficient in the relevant languages. For national UNV assignments, which represent around 70% of all assignments, you must be a national or legal resident of the country. Your commitment to UN values and principles is crucial, as is your ability to thrive in multicultural environments and adapt to challenging conditions.

With these requirements in mind, you create your profile in the UNV Global Talent Pool via the UNV Unified Volunteering Platform (UVP). This step involves detailing your skills, experiences, and preferences, painting a comprehensive picture of what you bring to the table.

You then browse through the available assignments on the UVP, carefully reviewing opportunities that align with your skills and interests. When you find a match, you submit your application through UVP. All assignments have additional criteria, so please ensure you meet all the specified requirements.

As you prepare for your assignment, you brace yourself for the adventure ahead. You know you'll need to adjust to different living conditions and develop strong interpersonal and organizational skills. Assignments are full-time and can range from three to 24 months, with the possibility of extensions.

The benefits of being a UN Volunteer are immense. Professionally, you gain



PROFESSIONALLY, YOU GAIN VALUABLE EXPERIENCE AND EXPAND YOUR NETWORK

valuable experience and expand your network. Culturally, you immerse yourself in new environments, whether it's learning about a new culture or sharing something about yours. Most importantly, you make a lasting impact on communities around the world. UN Volunteers receive allowances and benefits to sustain them during their volunteer assignments.

Some of the recent UN Volunteer assignments include—crisis and emergency response for the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, frontline response for cyclones, floods, pandemics, and more.

This journey is about growing, learning, and contributing to a better world. And as UNV puts it— inspiration in action!

Becoming an Online Volunteer with the United Nations Volunteers allows you to contribute to global peace and development from the comfort of your own home. All you need is a device and a connection to the internet. Online Volunteering assignments exemplify UNV's forward-thinking in an increasingly digital world, where volunteers contribute their skills and expertise virtually from anywhere in the world.

Here's what UNV recommends:

- Please check the eligibility requirements. You need to be at least 18 years old, but there is no specific background required.
- Each assignment has its own set of requirements, tailored to the needs of the host organization.

With this knowledge, on the app, you carefully fill out your profile, detailing your skills, experiences, and preferences. This step is crucial as it helps match you with the most suitable assignments. You then browse through the available online assignments on UVP and using filters, you distinguish online opportunities from onsite ones. When you find an assignment that aligns



© UNV

with your skills and interests, you submit your application through the UVP.

Online volunteering assignment gives you flexibility to balance your volunteering with other commitments, making it an ideal way to give back. Online Volunteers do not receive financial compensation and don't sign a contract; however, they receive certificate of appreciation upon the successful completion of their assignments it offers.

Online Volunteering assignments have evolved from traditional roles like document editing and translation to cutting-edge tasks such as AI machine learning to data analysis during crises, creating impactful social media campaigns, and developing innovative climate solutions.

Some of the recent online volunteering assignments include: energy access initiatives where volunteers used open-source machine-learning software to develop algorithms and support mini-grid installations; social media messages for awareness campaigns on climate change's impact on health, water, and food safety, chronic illness management, and infection prevention; voting education and civic participation; data sets on green economic growth; and many more innovative online assignments. ■



UN Volunteers helping to register people affected by floods in Larkana, 2023



Volunteer Solutions Section (VSS)

is responsible for developing and implementing policies and procedures for UN Volunteers.

UNV staff in the spotlight

Inspiring journeys of service and leadership that drive global change

ADJOA SIKA **AHAWO**, INAS TAHA **ABBAS HAMAD**,
TAPIWA **KAMURUKO** AND BISAM **GYAWALI** *



United Nations Volunteers (UNV) are at the heart of global change, from grassroots activism to

international policy. Read how these staff members lead with resilience and collaboration. ■

“
I’VE SEEN
VOLUNTEERISM’S
POWER
FIRST HAND



© UNV

I led in Zimbabwe would spark a continent-wide movement. Fresh out of university, I organized the first COP@Home in Zimbabwe in 2011. Reporting live from COP17 in Durban to youth in Zimbabwe, I witnessed their thirst for knowledge, and that ignited my passion for ensuring young people have platforms where their voices matter.

I started as an unpaid volunteer for DRI, a climate-focused NGO in Zimbabwe. I didn’t realize then that volunteerism would shape my career, but becoming a UN Volunteer in 2012 clarified my path.

ADJOA SIKA AHAWO

REGIONAL PORTFOLIO SPECIALIST FOR EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA, NAIROBI, KENYA

Working with United Nations Volunteers (UNV) since 2012 has taken me across Southern, West, Central, and now East Africa, collaborating with young changemakers. I’ve seen volunteerism’s power firsthand—not just in creating opportunities, but in shaping leaders and strengthening communities.

Fifteen years ago, I wouldn’t have believed that the grassroots initiatives

One defining experience was my first assignment with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) volunteers program, an African Development Bank-funded initiative, in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and UNV. The program created a network of young professionals supporting peace and development in West Africa. Their determination, adaptability, and commitment, even during the worst Ebola outbreak,

reinforced my belief that Africa's greatest resource is its people.

Today, as a Regional Portfolio Specialist for UNV East and Southern Africa, I champion volunteerism as a powerful force for peace and development. My role is to forge partnerships, innovate solutions, and mobilize resources. I have lead initiatives such as Africa Women Health Champions with the World Health Organization (WHO), where African women took on

public health roles across 47 countries, and the Young Talent Pipeline with the United Nations Environment Programme, aimed at preparing future environmental leaders. All these initiatives show how actively engaged Africa's youth is in creating change, not waiting for it.

The journey ahead is long but filled with promise—we are not just shaping a stronger, more resilient continent, but we are building a brighter future for all.



INAS TAHA ABBAS HAMAD

REGIONAL PORTFOLIO SPECIALIST FOR
THE ARAB STATES, AMMAN, JORDAN

As a girl from Egypt, I found myself constantly reminded of the challenges of sustainable development and the role of women, in particular, in bringing about positive change. This awareness has motivated me to take over advocacy for equitable access and opportunities for all.

Over the years, I made a concerted effort to involve myself in my local community and volunteer at various development associations. These experiences allowed me to explore and enjoy different aspects of community development.

My journey took me through several United Nations offices and agencies, including the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the World Bank Regional Office for the

Middle East and North Africa. In 2018, I joined the United Nations Volunteers Regional Office for Arab States, first as Egypt Country Coordinator and later as Regional Portfolio Specialist. Here, I engage with passionate and motivated volunteers from around the globe.

The efforts of UN Volunteers in supporting development programs are evident in numerous ways. They are present in every corner of Azraq refugee camp in Jordan, delivering services and ensuring the well-being of refugees. They are doctors, nurses, engineers, youth, and experts. You can find them in the Marine Reserve in Aqaba, diving to protect the environment, and raising awareness in Iraq about health and environmental issues. A recent highlight was COP16 in Riyadh where I worked with around 700 volunteers who brought the magnitude of such a large global conference to fruition. Inspiration in action—that's how I would coin it!

The Arab States have witnessed massive destruction in the past year alone and UN Volunteers actively supported United Nations operations in crisis contexts in Gaza and the West Bank, Yemen, and Sudan. The spirit of volunteerism remains unbroken, even in the face of war. I am incredibly proud of every volunteer and confident that volunteerism can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. My passion drives me to see this through, and the efforts of these volunteers will lead to the future I have long worked for and awaited.

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THE SPIRIT OF
VOLUNTEERISM
REMAINS
UNBROKEN,
EVEN IN THE
FACE OF WAR

“
REAL CHANGE
HAPPENS WHEN
COMMUNITIES
ARE EMPOWERED



TAPIWA KAMURUKO

CHIEF OF VOLUNTEER ADVISORY SERVICES,
UNV HEADQUARTERS, GERMANY

I never set out with a grand plan to work for the United Nations. My journey began with a simple belief: development is about people, and real change happens when communities are empowered to shape their own futures.

My career started in Zimbabwe, working in civil society and then with the government as a National Coordinator for a population information, education, and communication program funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This role laid the foundation for my work in international development, eventually leading me to Uganda, where I joined the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as an international

Volunteer. This role made me truly value the power of volunteerism in effecting change.

After several roles, my transition to Regional Manager for East and Southern Africa in 2014 marked a new chapter. Tasked with setting up a regional office from scratch, I recruited a dedicated team, established crucial networks, and strengthened UNV's presence within regional UN entities and government offices. This decentralization brought UNV's services closer to the people it served, reinforcing the UN's grassroots impact.

In my current role as Chief of the Volunteer Advisory Services Section at UNV Headquarters, my primary responsibility is the strategic promotion of volunteerism as a core development asset.

My work involves generating evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of volunteerism in sustainable development, integrating volunteerism into national and UN strategic documents, and advocating for its inclusion in national development policies and strategies.

A significant part of my role includes leading the preparation of the flagship State of the World's Volunteerism Report, which provides critical insights into global volunteering trends. Currently, I am leading an ambitious project aimed at standardizing the measurement of volunteer contributions through the development of a global volunteer index.

The legacy I hope to leave is a consolidated, evidence-based understanding of volunteerism's scale and impact. I want to see it move beyond anecdotal appreciation to being recognized as a measurable, strategic force in development. The establishment of a global volunteer index is a step in that direction—one that will enable policymakers, governments, and development practitioners to assess and harness volunteerism's power effectively.



BISAM GYAWALI

PARTNERSHIPS DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST
(UN SYSTEM – EUROPE), UNV NEW YORK
OFFICE IN GERMANY

In our professional lives, we all face highs and lows. For me, the drive to test, try, and keep believing has fueled my journey through challenges and successes.

At the young age of 23, I began as a UN Volunteer for youth engagement at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Nepal. Over two years, my eagerness to learn and confidence in my abilities led to many achievements. I helped the Country Office develop its first Youth Strategy, collaborating with stakeholders like the Ministry of Youth and Sports. By 2019, I became a national staff member at UNDP Nepal, serving as Head of Experimentation, embracing trial and error.

In 2021 during the challenging pandemic era, I became Country Coordinator for the UNV Nepal Office, leading partnerships for mobilizing UN Volunteers.

Mid-2023 marked a new chapter as I joined UNV Headquarters in Bonn,

focusing on partnerships—leaving my home country Nepal behind.

As Partnerships Development Specialist, I manage partnerships with UN headquarters in Europe to mobilize UN Volunteers. While partnerships are often fun, they are rarely straightforward. Working with UN partners in Europe, I've learned about their missions—from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)'s protection of refugees and stateless people to the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s assistance to migrants and internally displaced populations.

Elements such as communication, coordination, and negotiation are crucial in forming partnerships. However, what truly drove me was UNV's philosophy of prioritizing the 'needs' and 'wants' of our partners, along with the meaningful mandate of our UN partners. Beyond learning from our partners, I have actively listened to their needs and proposed talent solutions.

In today's evolving international development context and global conflicts, volunteerism is more crucial than ever and stands as a beacon of hope. UNV can't do it alone; solution-driven collaborations with our partners are essential. Despite life's uncertainties, I am confident that the UN's resilience and optimism will drive us to fulfill our mission and create a brighter future for all.

At UNV, we believe in the power of volunteerism to drive sustainable progress. By working together with our partners, we can build a world where every community is empowered, and every voice is heard.



Adjoa Sika Ahawo is Regional Portfolio Specialist, **Inas Taha Abbas Hamad** is Regional Portfolio Specialist, **Tapiwa Kamuruko** is Chief of Volunteer Advisory Services and **Bisam Gyawali** is Partnerships Development Specialist at UNV.



WE BELIEVE IN
THE POWER OF
VOLUNTEERISM
TO DRIVE
SUSTAINABLE
PROGRESS

>
Marian Otamendi at
the World Football
Summit Europe
2024 Female
Leaders gathering,
September 2024



The future of global football

Marking World Football Day on 25 May
with Marian Otamendi, Co-Founder
and Director of World Football Summit

JAIME DOMINGUEZ *

At the helm of the global football dialogue, Marian Otamendi is the Co-Founder and Director of World Football Summit, shaping football's future.

What inspires the mission and evolution of the World Football Summit?

Football is more than a sport—it's a universal language that transcends borders, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The mission of World Football Summit (WFS) is to embrace this global influence

to shape a sustainable and inclusive future for the game. We bring together decision-makers from across the football ecosystem—governing bodies, clubs, brands, investors, and policymakers—to collaborate on the challenges and opportunities that will define the next era of football.

Our evolution is driven by a belief that football has the responsibility, but also the opportunity, to contribute beyond the pitch—to areas like social impact, governance, technology, and environmental sustainability. The question we ask ourselves is: how can football become a vehicle for positive global change?

What role does World Football Summit play in shaping the future of football beyond just networking?

At its core, WFS is a platform for impact. Yes, we create networking opportunities, but our goal is to drive tangible change by bringing together the right stakeholders to discuss solutions for the sport's most pressing issues. Whether it's tackling financial sustainability, improving governance, empowering female leadership in football, or leveraging sport for social development, WFS is where these discussions happen, and more importantly, where partnerships are forged to implement them.

For example, our work in fostering conversations around sustainability in football has led to direct initiatives for more environmentally responsible sporting events. We are an active collaborator in Real Betis' 'Forever Green' campaign and our platform has helped them connect with other clubs from around the world to develop joint initiatives.

Similarly, our discussions on inclusivity have led to projects that improve access for underrepresented groups. Proof of this is the 'Most Inclusive Match in the World' initiative that we carry out with Integrated Dreams, that has enabled us to organize such matches with top tier clubs like Real Betis (even breaking a Guinness World Record), Atlético de Madrid, and others we cannot mention yet...

We're not just a meeting place; we are a catalyst for action in the football industry.

Are innovations in sports technology driving commercial success in football?

Absolutely. The intersection of technology and football is not just reshaping the fan experience but also driving new economic models for the sport. Innovations in data analytics, AI-driven performance insights, fan engagement platforms, and blockchain technology are creating new revenue streams while improving the integrity and inclusivity of the game.

For instance, AI and biometric data are revolutionizing player performance and injury prevention, leading to longer and healthier careers. Meanwhile, blockchain and digital collectibles are redefining how fans engage with clubs, offering new commercial opportunities beyond traditional sponsorships and broadcasting.

However, with innovation comes responsibility. As football embraces these technologies, we must also ensure ethical governance, data privacy, and accessibility, ensuring that technology serves all stakeholders, not just the privileged few.

How does World Football Summit play a role in fostering diversity and inclusion in the football industry?

Diversity and inclusion are no longer optional; they are fundamental to the long-term sustainability of football. At WFS, we actively amplify diverse voices within the industry by ensuring that our panels and discussions reflect the broadest range of perspectives—from gender equality in leadership to accessibility in stadiums. We actually commit to having at least 30% of women in our panels at each event and organize dedicated gatherings for Female Leaders in Football.

We recognize that inclusion is not just about representation—it's about systemic change. This means ensuring equal economic opportunities, fostering female leadership, and making sure that underprivileged communities are not left behind in football's rapid commercial growth.

What are the biggest challenges facing football governance today?

Football is at a crossroads. While its global reach has never been greater, the sport is also facing critical governance challenges that will determine its long-term sustainability. Among them:

1. Financial sustainability.

Many clubs operate on risky economic models. Ensuring financial fair play and long-term investment strategies is critical.

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FOOTBALL HAS A UNIQUE ROLE IN TACKLING SOME OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST CHALLENGES



© WORLD FOOTBALL SUMMIT

▲
La Menina World
Football Summit—
“Las 3 Mil Viviendas”

2. Regulatory transparency.

There is increasing scrutiny on how decisions are made at the highest levels, from player transfers to competition structures.

3. Human rights and ethical responsibility.

With football’s growing presence in emerging markets, there is a responsibility to uphold ethical labor practices, ensure fair wages, and guarantee safe working conditions in the construction of stadiums and infrastructure.

4. Match-fixing and integrity issues.

As betting markets expand, safeguarding the credibility of competitions is a constant challenge.

5. Environmental responsibility.

Football must embrace sustainable event management, from reducing carbon footprints to responsible travel policies.

Governance in football is no longer just about running a league or a federation—it’s about leading responsibly on the world stage.

In the upcoming World Football Summits in Monterrey and Hong Kong, what do you aim to achieve?

Each World Football Summit is designed to be locally relevant but globally impactful.

In Monterrey (9-10 June), we aim to accelerate the growth of football in North and Latin America, leveraging the momentum of the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup. This includes discussions on investment opportunities, commercial growth, and cross-border collaborations between Mexico, the LatAm region, the U.S., and Canada.

In Hong Kong (3-4 September), our focus will be on the future of football in Asia. This means exploring:

- The commercialization of football in China and Southeast Asia.
- The rise of Asian leagues and their global competitiveness.
- The role of technology in shaping the sport’s evolution in the region.

Both summits will also emphasize how football can be a force for positive change as we have discussed, whether through youth development, environmental sustainability, or gender equality.

How can football contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Football has a unique role in tackling some of the world’s biggest challenges. Whether it’s climate action through more sustainable stadiums, quality education via grassroots programs, or reducing inequalities by providing opportunities for underserved communities, the sport has the power to make a real difference.

At WFS, we believe that football’s legacy should not be measured only in trophies and sponsorship deals, but also in its impact on society. This is a conversation we are committed to leading. ■



Jaime Dominguez is Content and Communications Director at World Football Summit.

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BIOMETRIC
DATA ARE
REVOLUTIONIZING
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Steering towards tuna sustainability

World Tuna Day on 2 May gives us an opportunity to see how we can support a sustainable future for our oceans

ALAN WANG *

To celebrate World Tuna Day in 2025, this article details the risks and challenges facing the species and how sustainable consumer choices can help moving forwards.

Tuna is a valuable and widely consumed fish, rich in essential nutrients including omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin B12, vitamin D, selenium, iodine, and high-quality proteins. It plays a crucial role in the diet of millions of people worldwide.

However, tuna faces numerous challenges, including:

The rising demand

The annual global production of tuna and tuna-like species has surged from less than 0.6 million metric tons in 1950 to approximately seven million metric tons in recent years. Population growth has primarily driven this increase. As the global population continues to expand,

the demand for tuna keeps rising, placing considerable pressure on tuna fisheries and leading to potential over-exploitation of tuna stocks.

Furthermore, the aging population in many parts of the world affects consumption patterns. Older adults often prioritize healthier diets and choose tuna for its omega-3 fatty acids, high protein content, and low calories and fat. This shift in dietary preferences can further amplify the demand for tuna, straining fisheries further.

Climate warming

As global climate change accelerates, the average global temperature rise has surpassed 1.5°C since 2023, compared to pre-industrial levels. The IPCC projects a possible rise of over 3°C above the 1850-1900 average by the end of the century.

This warming trend has significant implications for marine ecosystems and tuna populations, including:

- Forced migration to cooler waters, increasing operational costs and potential economic strain on fisheries.
- Disruption of spawning and feeding habitats, resulting in reduced reproductive success and tuna biomass size.
- Disruption of plankton and other essential food sources, affecting tuna growth rates and reproductive capacities.
- Increased vulnerability to overfishing due to combined effects of disrupted spawning, shifting distributions, and altered food availability, potentially leading to further declines in tuna stocks.

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THE DEMAND
FOR TUNA KEEPS
RISING, PLACING
CONSIDERABLE
PRESSURE ON
TUNA FISHERIES

▼
Healthy tuna
populations are
essential for
marine biodiversity



© SHUTTERSTOCK

Ocean pollution

Ocean pollution is a growing concern for tuna and other marine life. As a migratory species, tuna may encounter various pollutants throughout their vast range, making them susceptible to several adverse effects: 1). Ingesting plastic particles can lead to malnutrition, decreased population sizes, and higher mortality rates. 2). Accumulating heavy metals such as mercury and cadmium through the food chain can reduce spawning success. 3). Exposure to chemical pollutants, including industrial chemicals and oil spills, can disrupt endocrine functions and diminish the overall fitness of tuna.

Unsustainable fishing practice

Common unsustainable fishing practices include overfishing and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Due to their high market value and global demand, tuna populations have been subjected to intense fishing pressure, which can lead to a significant decline in their numbers and disrupt the balance of marine ecosystems. IUU fishing not only depletes tuna stocks, but also undermines the effectiveness of management measures and conservation efforts, posing a threat to tuna populations.

Sustainable tuna conservation strategies

To address the challenges faced by tuna, various sustainable conservation and management strategies have been implemented, although their coverage and effectiveness need to be further improved.

These efforts include:

1. Establishing marine protected areas to safeguard critical habitats.
2. Implementing science-based harvest strategies, such as setting catch limits and adjusting fishing efforts, to promote sustainable fishing practices.
3. Utilizing technologies to monitor fishing activities, enhance management practices, and reduce IUU fishing.
4. Raising public awareness about the importance of sustainable tuna fisheries.

Sustainable consumer choices

Here are some guidelines on sustainable consumer choices for tuna:



1. Look for MSC certification. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification signifies that the tuna has been sourced from a sustainable fishery. Choosing tuna with the MSC blue label is an environmentally responsible option.

2. Avoid overfished species. Some tuna species, like bluefin, are critically overfished and should be avoided. Instead, skipjack and albacore tuna are considered more sustainable options due to their shorter lifespans and faster reproduction rates.

3. Limit consumption of larger tuna species. Larger tuna species, such as albacore and bluefin, tend to accumulate higher levels of mercury in their tissues. To minimize health risks, it is advisable to choose smaller tuna varieties like skipjack.

4. Prioritize fresh or frozen tuna. Fresh or frozen tuna is a better choice than canned tuna in terms of both quality and nutritional value. Additionally, these forms of tuna are less likely to contain contaminants found in canned products.

5. Avoid overconsumption. While tuna is a nutritious food, overconsumption can lead to an excessive intake of mercury and other contaminants. Therefore, it is important to balance tuna consumption with other protein sources.

Adopting these practices not only fosters a healthier diet but also helps to safeguard tuna populations and support the sustainability of marine ecosystems. ■



A day to honor one of the ocean's most valuable and vulnerable species



OCEAN POLLUTION IS A GROWING CONCERN FOR TUNA AND OTHER MARINE LIFE



Alan Wang is the Founder of CareOurEarth.com

Chronicles of Everyday Diplomacy

ANTOINE **TARDY** *

“ **W** hen required to step out of their comfort zone, the UN can sometimes show up a little unprepared.

Suffice to say that the current seismic shift in geopolitics is no day at the beach. Our multilateral system is left with no other choice but to jump into deep water and swim.” ■



PHOTO
ANTOINE TARDY



* **Antoine Tardy** is a freelance photographer based in Geneva. **Web:** antoinetardy.com **Instagram:** [@antoinetardyphoto](https://www.instagram.com/antoinetardyphoto)

UN80 and the role of education in a resilient UN

In uncertain times, empowering professionals through education is not just an investment, it's the cornerstone of a future-ready UN

ALICIA GÖCKEL *

As the United Nations marks its 80th anniversary, Secretary-General António Guterres has announced the UN80 Initiative, underscoring the urgent need for a more effective, adaptable, and efficient UN system. In a world facing mounting crises and rapid change, the call for reform is clear: the UN must modernize to continue delivering on its mission. Lifelong education is central to this transformation, preparing professionals to tackle 21st-century challenges and keeping the UN agile and forward-thinking.

V A strong UN requires well-trained experts who can navigate the evolving landscape of multilateral diplomacy, international law,

and peacebuilding. Investing in education is not only about enhancing the skills of current and future UN civil servants—it is a strategic necessity for strengthening the organization as a whole. As the Secretary-General recently noted in the UN80 press briefing, “the UN is resilient. The UN can adapt itself to the circumstances.” This resilience, however, has to be continually rebuilt and reinforced through education. Continued training is thus essential within the UN system to build the nuanced, responsive expertise needed for effective global governance. And strong, strategic partnerships—both among UN entities and with academia—are key to making this happen.

Recognizing this need, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), a project-funded institution, has long built its mandate on partnerships with academia, Member States, other UN entities, and the private sector. In today's geopolitically complex environment, these collaborations are critical to ensuring international institutions remain responsive and resilient. In building global academic partnerships, the UN contributes to the expansion of the educational market, placing global perspectives and cross-cultural academia at the forefront of education. Especially as external pressures intensify, strong partnerships within the UN system are essential for driving innovation and adaptability, safeguarding the organization's survival and ensuring its mandates are upheld.



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One example of collaboration between the UN and leading academic institutions in the field of education is the UNITAR–University for Peace partnership, which is designed to offer joint Master’s and Certificate programs that blend the expertise of these two leading entities in the field of education and training. As the training arm of the UN, UNITAR provides innovative learning solutions to individuals, organizations, and institutions to enhance global decision-making and support country-level action for shaping a better future. UPEACE is a unique global academic institution which was created in pursuance of UN General Assembly Resolution 35/55 in 1980 to train leaders for peace.

The programs offered through this partnership, which cover key areas such as gender, diplomacy, development studies, and international law, equip professionals with the expertise needed to build a more modern and effective multilateral system.

To this end, UN staff members benefit from up to 50% tuition discount for UPEACE–UNITAR programs, making these learning opportunities for career progression more accessible to those already serving within the system. By seizing opportunities like

these, professionals can enhance their skills and knowledge, contribute to a more efficient multilateral system, and be better prepared to meet emerging challenges. In a climate where budget cuts and financial pressures are affecting many within the UN system, educational programs like these might represent not only a pathway for career advancement, but also a timely opportunity for professionals to upskill and reposition themselves.

As the UN80 Initiative progresses, it is critical to view education as a strategic imperative, focused on ensuring that the next and current generations of international civil servants are prepared for shaping a more effective and responsive United Nations. In challenging periods, strengthening the capabilities of professionals through learning is essential—not just as a commitment, but as the bedrock of a strong and forward-looking United Nations. ■



Turning global challenges into opportunities for change



THE CALL FOR REFORM IS CLEAR: THE UN MUST MODERNIZE TO CONTINUE DELIVERING ON ITS MISSION



Alicia Göckel is the Communications Focal Point for the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy at UNITAR.

One UN, one ID: how digital ID is uniting the UN

How do you belong to something as vast as the UN and have a shared identity for its global workforce?

VIVIAN LEUNG *

“
IT'S ABOUT
REDEFINING
WHAT IT MEANS
TO BE PART OF
THE UN FAMILY



Digital connection
has the power to
unite and strengthen
the UN workforce

For the thousands of people who work across the UN system globally, the idea of a single, unified identity has always been more abstract than reality. With over 30 organizations, independent processes, and different operational frameworks, forging a true sense of belonging—or even navigating basic administrative tasks—has been a complex and often disjointed experience. From onboarding to separation to simply visiting a colleague working for another organization, the lack of a shared identity framework has created inefficiencies and data fragmentation that stand in contrast to the vision of coherence and unity.

But what if this could change? What if your identity could be instantly and securely verified no matter where you were stationed, or which UN entity you worked for?

From an idea to a revolution

The UN Digital ID was born from an idea pitched by staff for staff—a bold vision submitted during the “Reimagine the UN Together Challenge” in 2020. In a compelling three-minute presentation, Massimiliano Merelli, then team lead at the World Food Programme (WFP) and now UN Digital ID Programme Director, unveiled a proposal for a system-wide digital identity. That idea didn’t just win—it sparked a digital transformation.

Sponsored by the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) and championed under the UN Secretary-General’s UN80 and UN 2.0 vision, the UN Digital ID is designed to be secure, portable, and interoperable across organizations. The UN Digital ID integrates blockchain, biometrics, and mobile-first design to offer staff a seamless experience in managing and sharing their verified personal data.

Following the success of the innovation challenge, the initiative evolved into a fully chartered program. This was made possible through the invaluable support of six founding organizations – UN Secretariat, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNJSPF, and WFP. The first phase delivered its minimum viable product in mid-2024, with a successful first-use case enabling retiring staff to



instantly share verified data with the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund—significantly speeding up pension processing.

Since then, the program has gained momentum. The goal is to expand it across the entire UN system. Two additional use cases—verification of the BSAFE mandatory training and inter-agency movement entitlements—are being implemented and set to go live in mid-2025.

Looking ahead: What the future holds for the UN Digital ID

As the UN Digital ID program prepares to realize phase 2, excitement is building—not just because of the new use cases, but because of what’s on the horizon. Phase 3 is already in the works, with brainstorming underway. The next generation of use cases is expected to unlock even more value—from enabling direct payments via digital wallets, to providing secure access to UN buildings, and streamlining single sign-on for shared

UN digital platforms. These are just some far-reaching ideas that will be considered by the program’s governance stakeholders.

This isn’t just about simplifying admin work. It’s about redefining what it means to be part of the UN family. It’s about creating a truly borderless digital ecosystem for a global workforce.

As Catherine Pollard, Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and Executive Sponsor of the UN Digital ID Programme, reflects: “We’re not just building a tool—we’re building the foundation for a smarter, more connected UN.” ■



Vivian Leung is the Coordination Officer of the UN Digital ID Programme, UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination Secretariat.



▼
UN Digital ID app



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Reflections of a peacekeeper

Highlighting the challenges, resilience and humanity amidst the horrors of violence in Central African Republic on World Peacekeeping day on 29 May

B M **GOLAM KIBRIA** *



One date I will never forget is 21 December, 2023. News of a massacre in Nzakoundou sent shockwaves through our ranks, and the next day we were deployed. As per the report, 23 civilians and one FACA soldier were killed, with several others injured. However, no report could truly capture the horror that lay before us.

The village was eerily silent, its homes abandoned in terror. Doors hung open, revealing empty rooms that once held life. Only the dead remained, and a few wounded too weak to flee. The smell of death filled the air. Fear had driven the living away, leaving behind a ghost town. We began burying the dead, but the real challenge was where and how to identify them. With no one to verify, I took photos for later identification. A year later, those photos resurfaced, bringing back the haunting memory. War never lets go.

I write this to ensure the world remembers, to remind people of the fragility of life. In war-torn lands, suffering is real and relentless. These lives, lost and unclaimed, must not be reduced to numbers. Their pain and final moments should not be forgotten.

Challenges on the ground

Our mission was clear—stabilize the region and restore security. But in Nzakoundou, peacekeeping was not just about maintaining order; it was about survival. Food, water, and medical supplies were scarce. It was 424 kilometers away from the headquarters and the road was non-plyable

due to broken bridges. Helicopter resupply missions were irregular, forcing us to measure every meal, every sip of water. Some days, we simply went without. The most agonizing part was communication with our families. There was no mobile tower, leaving us completely cut off. The only way to reach home was through headquarters—they would receive our messages and relay them back to our loved ones.

But I avoided it. What could I say? That we were rationing food, living under constant threat, and bracing for danger every night? That survival was uncertain? I knew any message, no matter how carefully framed, would only bring them sleepless nights. So, I chose silence. I simply told them, I'll be out of network for a few days.

In Nzakoundou, danger was constant, lurking beyond the perimeter. One night, several motorcycles encircled the village, their headlights slicing through the darkness, sending an unspoken warning. Another night, continuous gunfire shattered the silence, forcing us into defensive positions, weapons ready, nerves frayed. We slept in shifts, knowing the line between vigilance and disaster was razor-thin. Each day tested our limits—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

The people who changed everything

Yet, amidst the uncertainty, it was the people of Nzakoundou who left the deepest mark. None more than Alge—a 13-year-old boy who had lost everything. His entire family was massacred, his home reduced to ashes. Yet every morning, he would appear, sitting under a mango tree near

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THE GREATEST
BATTLES ARE
NOT FOUGHT
WITH WEAPONS
BUT WITH
COMPASSION
AND RESILIENCE



© MAJOR B M GOLAM KIBRIA

our camp, watching us work as if it were a performance, a distraction from his own reality. He always wore a monkey cap, never taking it off. I later learned why—the armed elements had cut off both his ears. A brutal, senseless act of cruelty. And yet, despite it all, Alge never stopped smiling. His laughter, defiant in the face of tragedy, echoed through the ruins of his village. He helped wherever he could, carrying water, assisting the elderly, doing whatever small acts of kindness his young hands could manage.

He was the first villager to return, stepping into the silence where others dared not go. I have undergone military training, learned the art of survival, of confidence, of resilience. But the courage I saw in that boy—stripped of everything, yet unbroken—was beyond all limits. Alge was not just surviving. He was teaching us what it truly meant to be brave.

Then there was Dr. Jatala—a man who could have left, who could have built a life of comfort elsewhere, but instead chose to stay. A physician with a degree from abroad, he remained in his war-ravaged village, running a makeshift clinic with almost no medical supplies, treating thousands with little more than his own determination. One day, he came to our camp, desperately seeking medicine. His patients were suffering, and he would not abandon them.

Before handing over the supplies, I asked him a simple question: “What did you eat this morning?” He just smiled. That smile held a truth more painful than words—he hadn’t eaten in two days. Yet hunger hadn’t stopped him. He had come running, alone, not for himself, but for his people. If angels were real, I might have seen one in Nzakoundou. His name was Jatala. When a helicopter finally arrived with aid from International NGOs, he stood there, waiting. Not to take food for himself, not to claim relief—he was there for his patients. His selflessness was humbling, a stark reminder that peacekeeping isn’t just about security. It’s about humanity. And in the darkest corners of war, people like Jatala shine the brightest.

Slowly, trust began to take root between us and the villagers. The breakthrough came in the form of a football match. What was once just a dusty helipad became a field of laughter, where boots and bare feet kicked up clouds of red earth. For a brief moment, there was no war, no fear—just the pure, unfiltered joy of a game. It was fleeting, but at that moment, we were not soldiers and villagers. We were just people, sharing something beyond the chaos around us. And sometimes, that is where peace truly begins.

What peacekeeping truly means

Nzakoundou was not just a mission; it was a lesson in humanity. It taught me that peace is fragile, that trust must be earned, and that sometimes, the greatest battles are not fought with weapons but with compassion and resilience.

As I reflect, I do so with the knowledge that somewhere, another team is facing similar challenges. And to them, I say this: you are more than just soldiers under a UN flag. You are symbols of hope in places where hope is hard to find. And that, more than anything, is what peacekeeping is all about. ■



B M Golam Kibria is the Company Commander of Bangladesh Battalion, MINUSCA, Central African Republic.



MINUSCA troops
on ground



© MINUSCA



Heli Insertion
Operation at
Nzakoundou,
December, 2023



**ALGE WAS NOT
JUST SURVIVING.
HE WAS
TEACHING US
WHAT IT TRULY
MEANT TO BE
BRAVE**

Indonesia at the heart of global dialogue

How one of Southeast Asia's most influential nations navigates complex issues and amplifies its voice on the international stage

MOLLIE FRASER-ANDREWS *

Permanent Representative, His Excellency Achsanul Habib and the team at the Indonesian Mission on how Indonesia plays a vital role in multilateral diplomacy to the United Nations in Geneva.

What are the main priorities of Indonesia's Mission to the UN Office in Geneva?

Indonesia's Permanent Mission to the United Nations, WTO, and other International Organizations in Geneva represents Indonesia's interests on global issues. Led by chargé d'affaires ad interim, Ambassador Achsanul Habib, the Mission ensures Indonesia's priorities are promoted in international policy discussions and decision-making processes.

One key area is trade diplomacy. As coordinator of the G-33 group at the WTO, Indonesia advocates for fairer trade rules that protect the interests of developing countries, especially in agriculture. It also supports reforms in dispute settlement and promotes digital trade. Within UNCTAD, Indonesia highlights the importance of inclusive trade, fair market access, and South-South cooperation to reduce inequality.



INDONESIA HAS INTEGRATED THE SDGS INTO NATIONAL POLICY

Indonesia contributes to international peace and security through its active role in disarmament forums, particularly the Conference on Disarmament, in line with the national constitution's mandate for maintaining a world order based on freedom, lasting peace, and social justice.

Indonesia also champions human rights in a balanced and constructive way. It supports the right to development, religious freedom, and anti-discrimination, and consistently voices support for the rights of the Palestinian people. It encourages constructive dialogue instead of politicizing human rights issues.

Health diplomacy is a top priority. In 2024, Indonesia pledged \$30 million each to WHO and Gavi to improve access to vaccines and medical tools. It is also involved in negotiating the new Pandemic Agreement to strengthen global health systems and preparedness.

In digital diplomacy, Indonesia chairs the G77 and China Digital Working Group and bridges international discussions on the Global Digital Compact, ensuring developing countries are not left behind in the digital era.

On environmental issues, Indonesia participates in international agreements such as the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions. It promotes the principles of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and the Right to Development, ensuring environmental policies remain fair and inclusive.



> The Raja Ampat islands, Indonesia, are known for their tropical beaches and marine life

How has Indonesia shown leadership in multilateral forums in Geneva?

Indonesia has consistently taken leadership roles in Geneva's multilateral institutions, showing its active role in shaping global policies.

As President of UNCTAD, Indonesia promoted trade policies that empower developing nations and close economic gaps. In 2024, Indonesia chaired the Conference on Disarmament, and with the support of UNODA, initiated thematic discussions on the effective functioning of the Conference and measures to reduce distrust and build confidence—a historic first that helped restart meaningful dialogue.

As Vice President of the Human Rights Council in 2024, Indonesia supported resolutions that protect labor rights, peaceful protest, anti-corruption efforts, and access to medicines. It promotes capacity-building and collaboration instead of confrontation.

Indonesia led negotiations to update the International Health Regulations, adopted in 2024, and continues to contribute to the new Pandemic Agreement. These efforts aim to make the world better prepared for future health emergencies.

In humanitarian law, Indonesia co-chairs efforts to modernize rules on naval warfare. At WIPO, it led the Like-Minded Countries in reaching consensus on the 2024 GRATK Treaty, which protects traditional knowledge and genetic resources.

At the ILO, Indonesia advocates democratic reforms and equal rights and has contributed to labor support in Palestine through the Emergency Program Response. These roles demonstrate Indonesia's commitment to fairness, peace, and inclusive diplomacy.

How is Indonesia supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Indonesia has integrated the SDGs into national policy through the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) and Presidential Regulation No. 59/2017. These frameworks guide development efforts aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

In collaboration with the UN, especially UNDP, Indonesia runs programs that support multiple SDGs. 'Makan Bergizi Gratis,' or MBG (free nutritious meal), improves child nutrition, enhances learning, and reduces family costs (SDGs 1, 2, 4). 'Cek Kesehatan Gratis,' or 'CKG' (free health check-up) program, improves access to early health detection (SDG 3), especially in remote and under-resourced areas.

Indonesia is also a pioneer in sustainable finance. It issued Southeast Asia's first SDG Bond in 2021 and launched Blue Bonds to support marine conservation and sustainable development. These tools help mobilize resources for social and environmental progress.

Despite global setbacks in achieving the SDGs, Indonesia continues to show leadership through innovation, inclusive programs, and global partnerships.

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INDONESIA
CONTRIBUTES
TO
INTERNATIONAL
PEACE AND
SECURITY
THROUGH ITS
ACTIVE ROLE IN
DISARMAMENT
FORUMS

What is Indonesia's role in ASEAN diplomacy and regional peace?

Indonesia plays a central role in ASEAN, supporting peace, security, and integration in Southeast Asia. Its foreign policy emphasizes independence, active engagement, and regional leadership.

As ASEAN Chair in 2023, Indonesia promoted institutional reform and better crisis response, focusing on regional unity in the face of global challenges. It also supports peaceful resolution of disputes through the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC).

Indonesia consistently pushes for nuclear disarmament through the SEANWFZ Treaty and encourages nuclear weapons states to sign its protocol. These efforts reflect its commitment to a peaceful Indo-Pacific region.

In Geneva, Indonesia represents ASEAN in labor-related discussions. With the ILO, it works to improve worker protection, safety standards, and skills development, especially for migrant workers. Indonesia's leadership ensures ASEAN speaks with one voice and contributes actively in multilateral forums.

How is Indonesia balancing development with sustainability?

To support its Vision 2045 goals, Indonesia is adopting a sustainable growth strategy that includes green, blue, and circular economies. These approaches are designed to reduce emissions, protect resources, and ensure long-term prosperity.

The green economy supports renewable energy, low-carbon industries, and the creation of green jobs. The Blue Economy Roadmap encourages the sustainable use of ocean resources, marine protection, and eco-tourism. Circular economy principles reduce waste and encourage reuse and recycling.

To finance these efforts, Indonesia has issued SDG and Blue Bonds to attract investments for climate

resilience, biodiversity, and sustainable infrastructure. These instruments help drive growth while also ensuring transparency and accountability in development finance.

By aligning growth with sustainability, Indonesia is building a resilient, fair, and environmentally friendly economy.

How does Indonesia support gender equality and women's empowerment at the UN?

Indonesia is a strong voice for gender equality and the rights of women and girls. It upholds its international commitments, including CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration, and translates them into real action.

Indonesia actively contributes to the UN Commission on the Status of Women and supports UN Women's work. It promotes gender equality across peacebuilding, development, humanitarian response, and climate action.

Through the Women, Peace and Security agenda, Indonesia supports women's leadership in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. It emphasizes protecting women during crises and promoting their roles in recovery efforts.

Indonesia also promotes economic empowerment through education, entrepreneurship, and improved access to finance. Programs support women-led businesses, especially in rural and digital sectors, and advocate for more women in STEM fields.

Its diplomatic style is inclusive and respectful. By building consensus and understanding, Indonesia helps ensure gender equality stays at the heart of global efforts and supports broader goals of sustainable development. ■



Mollie Fraser-Andrews is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.

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Is your gut the secret to long-term health and happiness?

Awareness around the importance of the gut is gaining momentum globally, and this is being fueled by a landmark scientific discovery

MEGAN ROSSI *

When you hear the term gut health, what's the first thought that comes to mind? Most people will say digestive health. But the latest science tells us that your gut influences all your organs and pretty much every bodily function, from hormonal health to your skin and mental wellbeing, too. This powerful organ can even influence longevity and has been linked with lowering the risk of over 70 chronic diseases.

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THIS POWERFUL
ORGAN HAS
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WITH LOWERING
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70+ CHRONIC
DISEASES

This is, in part, thanks to the trillions of bacteria that live in the gut, which we call the gut microbiota (GM). This community of bacteria is in constant communication with other bodily systems and functions. The empowering thing is that, unlike your genetic makeup, your GM can be shaped simply by how you treat it, which means that a big part of your health is in your hands.

As interest in the gut continues to gain momentum globally, let's break down the latest science and actionable tips that you can implement to maximise your gut and, therefore, overall health.

Why is having a healthy gut so important?

The gut-immune connection

Around 70% of immune cells exist in your gut (alongside your GM), meaning the gut plays a key role in your immunity. Your

microbes teach your immune cells what they need to protect you against (e.g., flu-causing viruses) and what is safe (e.g., the protein in milk). My colleagues at King's College London found that people who ate a more varied diet full of plants—which nourish your gut bacteria—had a 40% lower risk of becoming unwell with COVID-19. We also see this with cold and flu, where coadministration of specific live bacteria (*Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, LGG and *Bifidobacterium lactis*, BB12) have been shown to reduce the duration by two days and severity of symptoms by over 30% compared to placebo.

The gut-metabolism connection

There is a strong connection between your GM and your metabolism, which is a key target to help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight. One study found that increased fiber intake (which is essentially food for your gut bacteria, as we explore below), regardless of calorie intake or type of diet, resulted in a healthier weight for participants. With worldwide obesity rates more than doubling since 1990, focus on the gut could be transformative for this complex health area.

The gut-skin connection

Did you know that the microbes in our gut and on our skin can communicate? This may explain why many skin conditions, such as eczema and even premature aging, have been linked to gut health. That being said, the skin microbiome research (yes, we have billions of bacteria that call our skin

© THE GUT HEALTH DOCTOR



▲
Dr Megan Rossi is a
leading Research
Fellow at King's
College London

rather than restriction is key to my food philosophy and a more enjoyable and sustainable diet, long-term.

- Unnecessarily cutting out food groups (like gluten) can have unexpected consequences like starving your gut bacteria. For example, a study of nearly 200,000 people by Harvard University in the US, found that those who consumed the most gluten had a 20% lower risk of type 2 diabetes compared with those who had the lowest gluten intake. This is not because gluten itself is protective, but it's found in foods that can be, such as barley and rye, for example.
- The more you restrict, the more likely you are to overeat those banished foods when you can. Researchers from the University of Toronto found volunteers who had been told they weren't allowed chocolate for a week had more cravings than those who could eat whatever they fancied. Those with restrictive tendencies in the 'no chocolate' group also ate more chocolate than those who weren't restrictive when given the opportunity.

3. Try to bring the Mediterranean way of eating to your home

- Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO): When it comes to choosing oils to use in your cooking, this is hands-down the winning oil in terms of research into health benefits. I even replace butter with this in most of my cooking for extra health benefits. And despite what you may have heard, you can safely cook with good quality EVOO up to 200 degrees.
- Oily fish (sardines, salmon, mackerel, herring and anchovies): Including two portions of omega-3-rich oily fish a week can help ensure good communication between brain cells (research has even found that people with depression tend to have lower levels of omega-3 in their blood). If you don't eat fish or are concerned about the environmental aspects, then it might be worth considering an algae oil supplement to make sure you're getting enough omega-3.
- Fermented dairy: Swap standard dairy for fermented varieties, such as live yogurt, kefir and 'aged' (i.e., not mass-produced) cheese, such as Parmesan.

4. Get specific with your supplements

- As with any other medication, it's essential to take a targeted approach to supplements rather than a 'just-in-case' approach. More doesn't always mean better; many supplements can counteract each other, e.g., magnesium supplements can impact iron absorption. While most people don't need supplements, there are two key situations where taking a supplement can be beneficial.
- The first is when you have a deficiency—this is where a blood test or guidance from a medical professional comes in. Common deficiencies include vitamin D and iron, and they require specific supplements to correct.
- The second is when you're looking for a targeted effect. For example, taking the probiotic strain *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* (LGG) alongside antibiotics usage has been shown to reduce your risk of antibiotic associated diarrhoea (AAD) by 70%. For this reason, the World Gastroenterology Organisation guidelines on probiotics recommend everyone take this specific bacteria (dose ten billion twice per day) throughout their antibiotic course, given AAD can affect up to one in three people on antibiotics.

5. Chew your food well

- It might sound simple, but there's strong science behind it. Chewing thoroughly essentially 'activates' enzymes in your saliva, helping your body break down food and absorb nutrients more effectively.
- Aim for 20–30 chews per bite, depending on texture or start small by adding just two extra chews per week and building from there.

While focusing on the above, don't forget other foundations of health, including sleep, stress management and movement, which can also directly impact the healthy functioning of your gut. ■



Dr Megan Rossi (PhD, RD) is Research Fellow at KCL & founder of The Gut Health Doctor, The Gut Health Clinic, Bio&Me & SMART STRAINS.

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THINK OF
EACH PLANT
AS A UNIQUE
FERTILIZER,
FEEDING THE
DIFFERENT
TYPES OF GUT
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THE LEADING HOTELS
OF THE WORLD



> Carmen Mola is a collective pseudonym of three Spanish writers: Jorge Díaz, Agustín Martínez and Antonio Mercero

Carmen Mola: a genuine thriller-writing phenomenon

Magnificent, brutal and hugely addictive, this book does not disappoint in the long-awaited denouement of the police inspector Elena Blanco series

GEMMA **CAPELLAS ESPUNY**
AND JESÚS **GUERRERO BUITRAGO** *



Carmen Mola is the collective pseudonym of three Spanish writers of ultra-violent Spanish

crime thrillers. The real authors are Jorge Díaz, Agustín Martínez and Antonio Mercero, better known as television script writers. In 2021, the authors won the Premio Planeta de Novela, the most financially valuable literary prize in the world, after the Nobel Prize.

In this final novel, *El Clan*, Carmen Mola closes the circle and grips readers once again. The saga of police inspector Elena Blanco comes to an end. It all began in 2017, when the authors came together under the pseudonym of Carmen Mola to create a universe around the police



MORE INFORMATION

Association website: afie.es

Instagram: [@palabras_mas](https://www.instagram.com/palabras_mas) / [@espera_que_te_lo_cuento](https://www.instagram.com/espera_que_te_lo_cuento)

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inspector Elena Blanco: a strong and intelligent woman, a workaholic with a complex and tormented personality marked by a past which hides numerous tragedies and secrets that influence her life. With an enormous capacity to overcome extreme situations and solve difficult cases, Elena is also a vulnerable woman who presents herself as a profoundly emotional human being. She has always paid a very high price to be immersed in the world of violence and crime.

Carmen Mola's saga was a genuine publishing phenomenon all over the world, thanks to the authors' extraordinary ability to elicit and provoke strong emotions in the readers, the fast pace of each of the plots and its implacable approach to the most extreme and savage violence. *El Clan* will not disappoint fans of Carmen Mola's narrative, who has also been successful with historical thrillers.

When dying doesn't matter, everything is permitted. Elena Blanco, police inspector of the Brigada de Análisis de Casos (BAC), a police brigade created to solve the most horrifying crimes, accustomed to its own methods and to acting, all too often, outside the law, faces her worst enemy: a powerful organization made up of personalities from the world of business, politics, the judiciary and the police: 'the Clan'—if you cross them, you will end up dead. Even so, the BAC rises to the challenge of confronting a powerful family involved in illegal activities, including bribery and concealed crimes, which have sustained their influence and wealth over generations.

The investigation uncovers the Clan's darkest secrets, leading to internal conflicts and exposing their criminal network. Throughout the narrative, readers are immersed in a world of mysterious murders, unexpected plot twists, and intense brutality, all hallmarks of the series.

Police inspector Elena Blanco, who has been part of the reader's life in the four previous novels, receives images of her



FOR YOUR DIARY

Jorge Díaz, Agustín Martínez and Antonio Mercero will present *El Clan* in Geneva on Friday 16 May 2025, at 1830, at the Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie du Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (Promenade du Pin 5, 3rd floor, 1204 Genève).

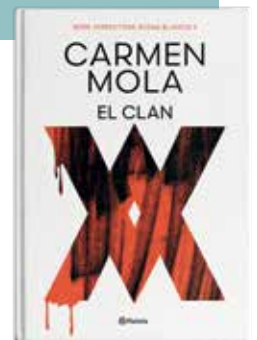
This event is organized by the Association of Spanish International Civil Servants and Palabras+ in the context of the 2025 Week of the Spanish Language and will be moderated by Gemma Capellas Espuny and Jesús Guerrero Buitrago.

colleague and friend Zárate lying in a pool of blood, and she makes an unforgivable mistake. With the inspector wanted by the police, accused of the murder of a policeman, and her colleague Zárate missing, her other colleagues wage war on their own. The arrival of a new inspector to replace Elena worsens the situation: she seems to have been sent by the Clan with the mission of bringing down the BAC and putting Blanco in jail.

However, the discovery of some disemboweled corpses means Elena must fight to save her Brigade and find Zárate, without knowing if he is dead or alive. It is the beginning of the end for the BAC. None of its members have ever faced killers as ruthless as the Clan.

The novel delves into themes of corruption, morality, and the complexities of human nature, providing a gripping conclusion to Elena Blanco's journey in the police. The authors Díaz, Martínez and Mercero have stated that this novel is their most realistic and disturbing work, reflecting on the pervasive presence of evil from birth. ■

Special thanks to Isabel Santos Peralta from Planeta Editorial House.



El Clan: the long-awaited denouement of the police inspector Elena Blanco series



AFTER THESE NOVELS, NO ONE WILL EVER LOOK AT THE PLAZA MAYOR IN MADRID THE SAME WAY AGAIN



Gemma Capellas is Head of Linguistic Production at WMO. **Jesús Guerrero** is Chief, Management and Communications Unit at CLM, UNOG.

When discrimination and marginalization collide

Robert Vaughan weaves a gripping tale of prejudice, discrimination, and the haunting consequences of unchecked power in a divided world

ANYULI MERCEDES **GONZALEZ-OLIVER** *

Throughout *The Eagles Favour*, Robert Vaughan tackles themes of prejudice, discrimination, and the dangerous path from exclusion to violence. Drawing from his personal experiences in the United Nations and a deep sense of humanity, Vaughan

explores the subtle ways biases can shape our world, making this story both timeless and timely.

The Eagle's Favour by Robert Vaughan is a historical fiction set in the 1940s that feels unsettlingly familiar in today's divided world. It delves into the human psyche, following its characters through a brutal journey that reveals how discrimination—once normalized—can quietly take root, growing from exclusion to hate and ultimately to violence. The novel also explores what it means to go through suffering yet still emerge with a soul.

Robert Vaughan is a native of Yorkshire, who has lived, visited, and worked in numerous countries around the world. These experiences have shaped his love for cultural diversity, open-mindedness, and for the dignity of all members of the human family. He has worked for many years as a Human Rights Officer with the United Nations and these experiences have helped shape his perspectives and this book. Below he reveals that a firm belief that with imagination, and political will, a better world is possible.

What inspired you to write this book on the topic of discrimination?

I started writing this book over ten years ago. I had just started my career at the UN, and was dealing with multiple human rights violations daily, so these experiences helped shape my inspiration, but also,

▼
Robert Vaughan
at his local coffee
shop in Plainpalais

© ROBERT VAUGHAN



“

WE ARE NOT A LINEAR SPECIES AND HAVING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS ARE PART OF BEING HUMAN

I think inspiration comes from inside oneself. I know that was the case for me, having had difficulties with English all my life, I often shied away from writing, so this was something I wanted to achieve.

The main themes are prejudice, and discrimination and the subtle ways our biases seep into everyday life. It reveals how, often without thinking, we silence or push certain voices to the margins, and how those small, overlooked moments can snowball into something far more dangerous. The book also examines the power of government—like an eagle poised to strike—showing how, when turned against a group, it can have devastating consequences. Sadly, I see a lot of similarities today to when I wrote the book.

What were the biggest challenges you faced while writing this book and what was the process?

I went to my local library, the same one I went to as a boy in Headingley, Leeds, every day for about three months and wrote on average about 2000 words a day. Luckily the library had no Wi-Fi and I would purposely leave my phone at home.

Which character was the most enjoyable to write and do you see yourself in any of them?

I have to say, I enjoyed writing the character of Helmet as I feel I've met this person in many countries, in many bars. He was partly inspired by a friend of my fathers who died climbing Mont Blanc many years ago — he always had something witty to say. Even though some of the characters can have truly awful views, which was at times tough to write, I think there's a bit of them in all of us. We are not a linear species and having negative emotions are part of being human. What

MORE INFORMATION

The Eagle's Favour is available now on Kindle and paperback, you can find out more here: amzn.eu/d/hPsgj8C



really matters is how we handle those emotions and how they shape our actions. I should note that my wife loved the story but hated the characters because of their views.

How has the response been, and what surprised you most about the publishing process?

I have to say that the response to the book has been positive on the whole, but also slow in getting the word out. The book includes torture, sexual violence and strong and controversial language from the start, so it can easily be to not everyone's taste. Even the editor said she needed to take a break whilst reading it. The publishing process for any book I feel is a minefield, which really is a full-time job, and requires employing literary agents and sending copies to Instagram influencers. When you are working and have a young family, this is hard work but you have to do it to hopefully reap the rewards.

What books or authors have influenced your writing style?

I'm not sure I would say I have a writing style or have been influenced by any specific author, I read everything by George Orwell a longtime ago, but as I mentioned I have always found both reading and writing English difficult (I was tested for dyslexia as a child) and this unfortunately had a negative affect on my love for books. Nowadays, like everyone, it's more about finding the time to sit and open a book and avoid doomscrolling than anything else. ■



 FIND IT HERE

*

Anyuli Mercedes Gonzalez-Oliver is a Spanish Conference Interpreter at UNHQ.

Samba for all: how Rio's Carnival is embracing inclusion

The quiet revolution for making the world-famous celebration more accessible

CÍNTIA DE LIMA CARDOSO *

Rio de Janeiro's Carnival is famous for its dazzling parades, electrifying street parties, and unbridled joy. But beyond the glitter and samba beats, a quieter revolution is happening—one that is making Carnival more inclusive for people with disabilities.

For over two decades, the bloco named Loucura Suburbana has been a driving force in bringing the disability inclusion agenda to Carnival. A bloco—one of the hundreds of street bands that define Rio's grassroots Carnival—Loucura Suburbana emerged from a mental health initiative at the former Pedro II Psychiatric Centre, now the Nise da Silveira Municipal Institute of Health Assistance.

Founded in the early 2000s, Loucura Suburbana has become one of the strongest symbols of the anti-asylum movement

in Brazil. It was conceived as a way to reintegrate psychiatric patients into public life and challenge the institutionalized isolation they had long endured. “In 2000, we created an arts workshop, and from there came the idea of a Carnival ball,” recalls Ariadne de Moura Mendes, a psychologist and former Ministry of Health employee who was involved in the initiative's early days. “At the time, everything took place within psychiatric hospitals, where thousands of patients lived cut off from society.”

Determined to change this, the bloco began taking patients to the streets, turning Carnival into a platform for social reintegration. What started as an internal event soon gained momentum, transforming a former garage into a bustling workshop for costume-making and samba rehearsals. Musicians from Rio's renowned samba schools, such as Unidos da Tijuca and Caprichosos de Pilares, lent their talents to help bring the parade to life. “The parade not only changed the lives of the patients but also transformed the institution's dynamics,” says Ariadne.

However, the debut was not without its challenges. “The local residents were afraid of the patients,” Mendes explains. “At first, the neighborhood of Engenho de Dentro was uneasy about seeing people who had previously been institutionalized now dancing in the streets.” But as the years went by, the parade became a beloved fixture of the community, a symbol of resilience and a challenge to the stigma surrounding mental illness.

▼
The bloco Gigantes da Lira gathers hundreds of participants, including children, every year during Carnival in Rio



© ALEXANDRE MACIEIRA-RIOTUR

© ALEX FERRO- RIOTUR



The success of Loucura Suburbana inspired similar initiatives, such as Tá Pirando and Loucos pela Vida, further integrating mental health advocacy into Rio's Carnival traditions.

Samba schools embracing accessibility

Beyond the street parades, Rio's famed Sambadrome—a vast arena designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer—has also been making strides toward inclusivity. While it is not uncommon to see dancers and musicians in wheelchairs performing in major samba schools, Embaixadores da Alegria is the first samba school explicitly dedicated to people with disabilities.

Founded in 2006, Embaixadores da Alegria aims to use samba, art, and education as tools for social inclusion. The school has now participated in 16 consecutive parades at the Sambadrome, engaging with over 80 institutions and reaching more than 19,500 people through accessible events, workshops, and performances.

On 8 March, they took to Avenida Marquês de Sapucaí to open the Champions Parade, bringing together around a thousand revelers to celebrate both Carnival and the rights of people with disabilities.

“Culture and samba are bridges to inclusion, bringing people together and breaking down barriers,” the association emphasizes.

Despite these strides, accessibility remains a challenge at the Sambadrome. While some areas feature accommodations such

as ramps and designated seating, other sections lack elevators, making it difficult for those with mobility issues to move freely. Equally, the intense lighting effects of the parade can also be problematic for people with sensory sensitivities or visual impairments.

In an effort to address these concerns, Rio's Municipal Secretariat for People with Disabilities (SMPD) provided 3,600 free tickets to people with disabilities and their companions for the days of parades. They also introduced noise-canceling headphones for attendees with sensory processing challenges, as well as audio descriptions for visually impaired spectators and Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) interpreters.

Honoring a legacy of resilience

This year's Carnival also paid tribute to a remarkable figure in Brazilian music. The traditional samba school Império Serrano honoured Beto Sem Braço (born Laudeni Casemiro in 1940), a prolific composer who turned the loss of his right arm as a child into his stage name—sem braço in Portuguese means ‘without an arm.’ He went on to become one of the most celebrated figures in Brazilian Carnival history.

His song ‘Bum Bum Patitumbum Prugurundum’ propelled Império Serrano to victory in 1982 and remains one of Carnival's most iconic anthems. As the lyrics declare: *“Come, my love, send the sadness away / It's Carnival, it's revelry, no one cries today.”*

As Brazilians say, the year only truly begins after Carnival. And in this new year, advocates for disability inclusion will continue working to ensure that Carnival is more than just a party—it is a stage for transformation, making its joy truly universal. ■



Cíntia de Lima Cardoso is Focal Point for Disability and Accessibility and Communications Assistant at ITC.



A samba dancer participates in the parade of Embaixadores da Alegria, a samba school dedicated to celebrating diversity



THE PARADE NOT ONLY CHANGED THE LIVES OF THE PATIENTS BUT ALSO TRANSFORMED THE INSTITUTION



CULTURE AND SAMBA ARE BRIDGES TO INCLUSION

Legends of Lake Lucerne

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KATJA ZUMBÜHL *

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await you at the
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“

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Immerse yourself in an atmosphere where elegance, gastronomy, and relaxation blend seamlessly. ■



Katja Zumbühl is an employee of the Lake Lucerne Navigation Company.



The steamboat Gallia on Lake Lucerne with a view of Mount Pilatus



MORE INFO

For more information and reservations visit:

legends-of-lakelucerne.com



A view fit for a postcard from the picturesque beach

Barbados: the gem of the Caribbean Sea

What makes this tiny island so captivating?
Allow Barbados to introduce itself to you

JIHANE **SFEIR***

I am Barbados, a single island despite my plural English name (but in French, La Barbade). The Portuguese, who first arrived in the 16th century, named me Barbudos (the bearded ones) after the huge liana trees that reached down to the ground (the bearded fig trees), hence my name. I must claim with all modesty, in those days I was a stunning paradise with lush forests, white sands and ethereal turquoise waters.

The Portuguese moved on, and in 1627, the English arrived. Recognizing my

potential, they transformed me into the 'Jewel of the British Empire.' This title highlights the economic success of sugar cane and rum but reveals little of the suffering of my soil and the plight of enslaved Africans. For over three centuries, the British garrison based on my land prevented rebellion and foreign occupation. Unlike my sister Caribbean islands, I've always had one master: the British Crown. English is my native language, along with my 'Bajan' English dialect, and many localities bear English names, earning me my nickname 'Little England.' My 11 administrative districts are called 'Parishes,' echoing England's 'civil parish.'

Slavery was abolished in 1838 at great cost for the Crown, incurred to compensate, of all people, the former slave owners. I gained independence in 1966 and became a constitutional monarchy. In 2021, I declared myself a Republic within the Commonwealth, in a strengthened resolve to be “Firm craftsmen of our fate” as my national anthem says.

Though small (166 square miles), I offer plenty to entertain you during your chilly winters, thanks to my diverse attractions and my many faces.

So let me describe myself to you in these few adjectives:

Stunning

Not to boast, being the only coral island in the Caribbean, my beaches are as gorgeous as the postcards suggest. I proudly embrace tropical clichés: turquoise waters, white sands, coconut palms, rum punch, breathtaking sunsets—pure paradise! From the South to the West Coasts, my beaches welcome you, each with its unique character and activities. My favorites are secluded coves, also cherished by sea turtles.

Vibrant

The South Coast of Christ Church Parish is where the vibe is, especially during the Friday night Fish Fry at Oistins

fish market. Nearby, in the lively St. Lawrence Gap, it's always “Rum o'clock,” time for ‘liming’ (gathering) or “Fêting” (partying). At Worthing Court Food Plaza, rum and music pair perfectly with fish cakes, breadfruit chips, Indian rotis, or Jamaican jerk chicken. Along the Boardwalk from Accra Beach, bars and restaurants compete with cocktails galore. And don't miss out on my magnificent Carlisle Bay beach!

Further down on the South-East Coast, watch kite surfers dance above the windy sea of Silver Sands near the colourful De Action surf center. In St. Philip Parish, meet my rural communities and stroll along the more secluded yet majestic beaches of Long Bay, The Crane, Fowl Bay...

Cultural events are plentiful year-round, but Crop-Over season is when I truly shine. From June onwards, my entire land buzzes with excitement, culminating in the Kadooment Day carnival on the first Monday of August.

Glamorous

My worldwide fame stems from my luxurious ‘Platinum’ West Coast, in St. James and St. Peter Parishes. Here, I indulge in unabashed opulence. Five- star hotels and glamorous residences compete for celebrities and wealthy guests. For this elite class, golf,

“

I OFFER PLENTY TO ENTERTAIN YOU DURING YOUR CHILLY WINTERS, THANKS TO MY MANY ATTRACTIONS



© JIHANE SFEIR



Sunset on the beach

© JIHANE SFEIR



▲
Animal
Flower Cave

cricket, polo, private cruises, horse races, shopping in Holetown's boutiques and fine dining are on the agenda. This is also where my most famous citizen, Rihanna, frequently returns.

Further north, the quaint town of Speightstown showcases my Caribbean charm with quiet beaches, art galleries, and colorful food stalls.

Soothing

While my West and South Coasts border the calm Caribbean Sea, my East Coast faces the powerful Atlantic Ocean. This is where you should come for a restorative stay. In St. John Parish, I reveal my untamed beauty on the rugged shores where the majestic Bathsheba rocks stand. Swimming is prohibited there, but surfers find their haven, while botanical gardens lovers take a stroll in Andromeda Gardens. Further along, in St. Andrew Parish, or 'Scotland district,' I am eco-friendly Barbados, with my wild coastline bordered by protected sand dunes and green hills.

Wild

My roughest side is on the North Coast, in St. Lucy Parish, with high cliffs shielding me from the ocean's fury. At Animal Flower Cave, witness the awe-inspiring sight of waves crashing against the cliffs. These cliffs extend many miles toward the north east coast, offering breathtaking views.

Lush

In the landlocked parishes of St. George and St. Thomas, enjoy my countryside: sugarcane fields, historic plantation

houses, remnants of windmills, and the lush beauty of my botanical gardens—Flower Forest, Coco Hill Forest, Hunte's Gardens, Welchman Hall Gully, Explore the geological wonders of Harrison's Cave, with its stunning stalactites and stalagmites. Tour fields and hills aboard the heritage train of St. Nicholas Abbey (in St. Peter), a former plantation house now hosting a rum distillery.

Authentic

How can I describe Bridgetown, my capital? This is where I feel most connected to my African roots. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it retains its original street layout and historic buildings. Get lost in the city's maze, explore Cheapside market, the bustling Swan Street, hair salons, artisan shops of Pelican village, and you will begin to grasp my soul.

Proud and caring

What about my people, the Barbadians, whom I affectionately call Bajans (pronounced bay-djun)? They are my greatest treasure, my pride. They embody joy and warmth. They give me vigor, creativity, resilience and desire to stand out. My people honor the memory of our enslaved ancestors by turning past sufferings into expressions of humanity and solidarity. It's because of them that the diaspora returns for the 2025 'We Gathering' event. And it is my Bajan people who convert tourists into friends and family, making them come back time and again, like the lucky author of this article who has just visited me for the 27th time in nine years.

If you want to learn more about me, check out this blog: oceaninspiration.ch

But nothing beats a visit to get to know me better... ■



Jihane Sfeir is a Freelance Interpreter living in Geneva.

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MY PEOPLE ARE
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HUMANITY



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Argan oil and the importance of the argan tree to Morocco

On 10 May, we celebrate the International Day of Argania, a multipurpose tree that produces the world-renowned argan oil

ABDELLADIM ATERCHI *

Argan oil, often called 'liquid gold,' has become a renowned beauty and health product worldwide, celebrated for its numerous benefits and versatile uses. Extracted from the nuts of the argan tree (*Argania spinosa*), native to the southwestern regions of Morocco, this oil has been used for centuries by the Berber people of Morocco for both culinary and cosmetic purposes. Argan oil's rich composition makes it an exceptional natural resource with various applications in skin care, hair care, health, and even cooking.

There are many benefits of argan oil, as outlined below:



ARGAN OIL IS PACKED WITH ESSENTIAL FATTY ACIDS, VITAMIN E, AND ANTIOXIDANTS

Skin care

Argan oil is packed with essential fatty acids, vitamin E, and antioxidants, making it an excellent moisturizer for the skin. It is often used to hydrate dry and sensitive skin, as it has anti-inflammatory properties. Its high concentration of linoleic acid (an omega-6 fatty acid) helps to maintain the skin's natural barrier, preventing moisture loss while softening and smoothening the skin. It's also beneficial for reducing wrinkles and fine lines, as it promotes skin elasticity. Argan oil can help with various skin conditions such as acne, eczema, and psoriasis due to its anti-inflammatory properties and ability to balance the skin's oil production.

Hair care

When it comes to hair care, argan oil is a popular ingredient in many shampoos and conditioners. Its high vitamin E content and antioxidants help to nourish and repair hair, improving strength, softness, and shine. It is particularly beneficial for dry, damaged, or frizzy hair. Applying a few drops of argan oil directly to the hair can help reduce split ends, tame frizz, and restore moisture. Moreover, it is believed that regular use of argan oil can stimulate hair growth by promoting scalp health.

Anti-aging

Argan oil's rich vitamin E content makes it a popular anti-aging product. Vitamin E is known for its ability to fight free radicals, which are responsible for the breakdown of skin cells. This makes argan oil effective in reducing the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles, keeping the skin youthful and vibrant. It also aids in maintaining skin elasticity, which can be compromised with age.

Health benefits

Argan oil is also used for culinary purposes, particularly in Moroccan cuisine. Its rich nutritional profile, which includes monounsaturated fats and polyphenols, makes it a heart-healthy oil. The consumption of argan oil has been linked to various health benefits, including improving cholesterol levels, boosting cardiovascular health, and promoting overall well-being. Its anti-inflammatory properties are also believed to assist in reducing the risk



The argania tree is a native species of the sub-Saharan region of Morocco

of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

Nail and cuticle care

Argan oil is highly effective in nourishing nails and cuticles. It helps to moisturize and prevent cracking or peeling of the skin around the nails. Regular application of argan oil to the nails can improve their strength and appearance.

The importance of the argan tree to Morocco

The argan tree is a vital part of Morocco's natural and cultural heritage. It is not only a source of income for many families, but it also plays a key role in the environment and the local economy.

Economic significance

Argan oil is one of Morocco's most important export products. The oil's growing popularity in international markets has provided new income opportunities for rural communities in southern Morocco. Cooperative models, where women play a central role in the extraction and production of argan oil, have empowered many local communities economically. These cooperatives, which were established in the 1990s, have helped to improve the quality of life

for local women, giving them financial independence and improving their access to education and healthcare.

Environmental importance

The argan tree plays a crucial role in protecting the ecosystem of Morocco. These trees are well adapted to the harsh conditions of the semi-arid regions where they grow, and their deep roots help prevent soil erosion and desertification.

The argan forests, which cover approximately 800,000 hectares, act as a barrier against the expansion of the Sahara Desert and help maintain the region's biodiversity. The argan tree also provides shelter and food for various species of animals, including goats, which are famous for climbing the argan trees to reach the fruit.

Cultural and heritage significance

The argan tree has long been central to the Berber culture of southern Morocco. It has been used for centuries by local communities for a variety of purposes, from medicine to food to the production of oil. The traditional method of extracting argan oil, which involves grinding the nuts by hand, has been passed down through generations and remains an essential part



ARGAN OIL IS NOT JUST A COSMETIC OR CULINARY PRODUCT



➤
The traditional
method of making
argan oil

of the region's cultural heritage. The process of producing argan oil is a social activity, often carried out by women in cooperative settings, strengthening community bonds.

Sustainability and conservation

In recent years, the increasing demand for argan oil has prompted concerns about the sustainability of the argan tree and its ecosystem. However, efforts to protect the argan tree and promote sustainable harvesting practices have been underway. UNESCO recognized the argan forest as a biosphere reserve in 1998, acknowledging its global environmental importance. This designation has helped protect the argan tree from overexploitation and encouraged responsible farming and harvesting practices. Many cooperatives now focus on organic and sustainable production, further ensuring that the argan tree remains a valuable resource for future generations.

International recognition and preservation

On the occasion of the International Day of Argania, celebrated on 10 May each year, the importance of the argan tree and the oil it produces is highlighted on a global stage. The day raises awareness about the economic, social, and environmental

benefits of the argan tree, celebrating its role in the livelihoods of people in Morocco and its contribution to global beauty and health industries. It is also a reminder of the need to preserve and protect the argan tree, ensuring its continued role in Moroccan society and the wider world.

Argan oil is not just a cosmetic or culinary product; it is a testament to the ingenuity and resilience of the Berber people of Morocco and the argan tree itself. This remarkable tree and the oil it produces have had a profound impact on the local economy, the environment, and global health and beauty industries. The International Day of Argania serves as an important occasion to acknowledge and celebrate the invaluable contributions of the argan tree to Morocco and the world. Its benefits extend far beyond the realm of personal care products, making it a true treasure of nature that must be preserved for future generations. ■



Abdelladim Aterchi is the CEO and Founder of Moroccan Organica Group Ltd.

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A voice for press freedom: vision of the new ACANU President

Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga, a seasoned UN Geneva correspondent, takes the helm of ACANU in Geneva, championing press freedom and equitable access to information

VALÉRIE COUTAREL *

Considered a pure product of International Geneva, as she was born in the city of Calvin to a father from the Democratic Republic of Congo and a Belgian-Flemish mother, Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga has combined law and political science with a career as a UN Geneva correspondent since 1998.

members, establishing new bridges with other actors in International Geneva, and sharing experience with the new generation of correspondents. During my one year mandate, I plan to focus on organizing specialized training sessions in collaboration with technical entities like the World Trade Organization (WTO).

© PIERRE-MICHEL VIROT

➤ Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga a seasoned UN Geneva correspondent

On 11 February 2025, she was elected President of Association of Accredited Correspondents to the UN (ACANU) in Geneva where she leads the fight for equitable access to information and freedom of expression. In this article, she reveals more about her role and the vision she has for its future.

What does this appointment mean to you?

Being elected by my peers is both an honor and a great responsibility. It is significant as I am only the third person of African origin to chair this association since its creation in 1949. It's also a heavy burden due to the context marked by disinformation and the freezing of American funds threatening the UN system.

What are your main objectives as president?

My priorities include strengthening access to information for ACANU



These sessions will help newcomers understand complex mechanisms and procedures in international organizations.

What challenges do accredited correspondents to UNOG face today?

The main challenge is access to information. UN agencies have shown reluctance to interact with the press, a trend reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a context where disinformation proliferates, this mistrust is understandable, but we must remember the UN General Assembly resolution (70/125) addressing access to information. I will add that the professionalism of ACANU members is regularly recognized by the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres.

What would be the consequences of maintaining this attitude?

In Geneva, the interconnectedness of various international entities is evident. If UN agencies increasingly prioritize online events and limit access to their experts, it could diminish the necessity for Geneva-based correspondents to cover news on-site. This shift might have a cascading effect on the 183 diplomatic missions and 476 NGOs currently present in Geneva. These organizations may find it more cost-effective to monitor International Geneva's activities from alternative locations, such as Paris. Consequently, this trend could accelerate staff relocations from the 40 international organizations in Geneva and potentially reduce the presence of diverse foreign media representatives.

How do you respond to all these upheavals?

The current atmosphere consists of a mixture of fear about the future and deliberate opacity towards the media. Under such conditions, it is very difficult to use the power of the press to help UN agencies attract new donors. The newly elected Committee is particularly focused on organizing exclusive press conferences with people (humanitarian actors, States representatives and NGOs) who 'make



BEING ELECTED BY MY PEERS IS BOTH AN HONOR AND A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

the news' in order to generate unique information ensuring professional coverage despite obstacles.

How do you perceive the impact of the American funding freeze on International Geneva?

This funding freeze is a blow to multilateralism. It is also endangering humanitarian and diplomatic missions. Essential programs have been suspended, threatening millions worldwide. This crisis also threatens the economic balance of Geneva, which is closely tied to the activities of the UN and its specialized agencies. The potential layoffs and budget cuts could have a ripple effect on various sectors, including hotels, restaurants, taxis, and suppliers.

You've been a correspondent to the UN Geneva since 1998. How does this experience influence your vision?

Being based in Switzerland while regularly going to the field highlights the need to showcase all angles of specialized agencies' work. The UN system is full of committed people helping others and defending their rights. These stories deserve to be told as they can inspire youth and prove hope is possible.

What do you wish to convey to the young generation of correspondents?

Cultivate solidarity and goodwill among the Geneva press corps, as unity is strength. Understand the issues, read reports, and ask questions to UN experts. Never underestimate the role of a professional press in building a fairer world. ■



Valerie Coutarel is Chief of the French Interpretation Section at UNHQ.



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SAVE THE DATES

Visions du Réel

April 4th - 13th

Caribana Festival

June 4th - 7th

Rive Jazzy

July 3rd - August 10th

Paléo

July 22nd - 27th

Far°

August 7th - 16th

Les Hivernales

February 2026

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MORE
INFORMATION



Enjoy festivals ?

Pin the dates of your favourite ones so you won't miss them.



Nyon, Ville de festivals

Nyon is a charming town with a warm atmosphere. It is close to Geneva, surrounded by the La Côte AOC vineyards and the Dôle mountains in the Jura. Festive events are part of the art of living in Nyon. Every year, six major festivals take place between February and August: Les Hivernales, Visions du Réel, Caribana Festival, Rive Jazzy, Paléo Festival and far° - festival des arts vivants. These exciting events gather almost 350'000 festival-goers every year. Will you be part of them?

VISIONS DU RÉEL

The next major festival is Visions du Réel, which will be held in Nyon from **4 to 13 April 2025**. The festival confirms its position as Switzerland's second-largest festival for the launch of new films and a key international event for non-fiction.

What's more, the colors of the festival will transform the whole city, with films being screened in numerous locations. In addition to the three guest filmmakers announced, namely Raoul Peck from Haiti, Corneliu Porumbolu from

Romania and Cláudia Varejão from Portugal, Visions du Réel will have the honour of welcoming emerging and established talents throughout its ten days, as well as prestigious members of the jury.

The 56th edition will open with the world premiere of Christian Frei's Swiss film **Blame**.

The programme features 154 films from 57 different countries. Of the 129 new films on show, 88 are world premieres and 12 are international premieres.

Ticketing and programme: visionsdureel.ch

Enjoy visiting museums ?

The region's museums offer a wide range of exhibitions and activities for visitors from all over the world. The Nyon region is rich in history, culture and natural heritage.

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New exhibition at Château de Prangins:

Round-the-world travel

From Jules Verne to the first globetrotters
(April 6th up to October 26th 2025).

Passes available from tourist offices in Nyon, Rolle, St-Cergue and participating museums. Free for children up to 16 years old.

- Château de Prangins, National Swiss Museum
- 3 museums of Nyon: Château de Nyon, Musée du Léman and Musée Romain
- Château de Coppet et Musée du Vieux-Coppet
- Musée romand de l'Agriculture, Chiblins
- Maison du Basketball, Mies



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