

2023.4.18



On the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary of the Japanese UN volunteer District Electoral Supervisor, The LATE NAKATA ATSUHITO and Cambodian interpreter Lek Sophiep were killed in an ambush in Kampong Thom, Cambodia in 1993, a conference was organized by the Kyoto Peacebuilding Center, Kyoto University of the Arts and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the UN Volunteers Programme as well as the Japan Parliamentary Committee of the Diet of Japan for World Federalism at the Kyoto University of the Arts on 5 and 6 April 2023. As part of the conference, Working Group 2 discussed more specifically the role of UN volunteers in peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities. (This summary report was filed by Mr. Stephen Kinlock-Pichat.)

**Summary of Group 2:**

**The Role of the United Nations Volunteers in Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Activities**

**(This summary report was finalized by the Group 2 rapporteur, Mr. Stephen Kinlock-Pichat.)**

**Moderator:**

Mr SHINYO Takahiro, Former Ambassador to the United Nations and Germany, Professor, Kwansei Gakuin University

**Rapporteur:**

Mr Stephen KINLOCH-PICHAT, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, former UN Volunteer District Electoral Supervisor in Kampong Thom, Cambodia

**Discussants:**

Mr HONDA Michiharu, Senior Researcher of Okinawa Peace Assistance Center and former Phnom Penh Bureau Chief of the Yomiuri Shimbun

Mr ISHIKAWA Kaoru, Visiting Professor to Akita International University, former Visiting Professor of the University of Tokyo, Former Ambassador to Egypt, Arab League, and **Canada**

Mr YOKOSUKA Kyoko, Deputy Executive Coordinator of the UN Volunteers Programme

Mr. KONDO Tetsuo, Professor of Sophia University, University of Tokyo, Kyoto University and Nagasaki University, Former Director of UNDP Office in Japan

Mr MIZUNO Takaaki, Professor, Kanda University of International Studies and Former Special Correspondent of Asahi Shimbun in Cambodia

Ms TARDIOLI Renata, International Legal Election Expert (EU and OSCE/ODIHR), Former UN Volunteer in Cambodia

Ms NISHIDA Ippeita, Senior Research Fellow, Security Studies Program, Sasakawa Peace Foundation

Mr TOYMA Seiko, First Secretary, Embassy of Japan in Timor-Leste

Ms GAMARRA Elizabeth, Rotary Graduate Student, International Christian University

Ms Xin Lillian Weng, Graduate Student, University of Pennsylvania

**General Summary:**

Although impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of UN Volunteers has increased in recent years, reaching 10,000 yearly. The financial constraints faced by the United Nations are an incentive to rely more and more on UN Volunteers. Peacebuilding and democratization activities are among the typical activities involving UN volunteers. One-third of the volunteers contribute to Sustainable Developmental Goal (SDG) 16 (peace and justice). National UN Volunteers are also on the rise (currently 66%) relative to international volunteers and are often deployed with international volunteers. In some circumstances, UN Volunteers may also be deployed to non-program countries such as Japan.

With 55% of them being women, UN volunteers help balance gender within the UN. UN Volunteers also bring diversity, with 80% of them being from the South. Furthermore, new categories of volunteers have also been introduced recently, including youth, university, and community volunteers. Online volunteerism, for which UNV provides a platform, is also a growing phenomenon, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. UN volunteers may serve between the ages of 18 and 80-year-old however for a maximum of four years, which is enforced strictly to avoid UN Volunteers being perceived as substituting for UN staff or being considered as cheap labor.

One is to acknowledge that it is impossible to ensure 100% security and safety and there is always risk in any assignment when working for the UN. Security and safety of UN volunteers, however, is a paramount preoccupation for the UN Volunteer programme. While it is the host country's primary responsibility to ensure the security and safety of UN volunteers, and the host agency is

responsible for appropriate security arrangements being made, the UN Volunteer Programme is putting renewed emphasis on training and mental health support.

The concept of UN Volunteers has evolved together with the concepts of UN peacekeeping and human security. Following the large waves of deployment at the end of the Cold War, rapid deployment is also an important consideration. New methods are available and used to increase the speed of recruitment and deployment (e.g., AI, for longlisting). More efforts are being made to improve the speed of recruitment and deployment.

What the experience of the UN operation in Cambodia (UNTAC) showed is that there are pros and cons in resorting to UN Volunteers. The events in Kampong Thom and Cambodia also showed the importance of enhanced civil-military coordination for the security of UN personnel in the field. Overall, UN volunteers are and remain assets and are highly relevant to UN operations, particularly in humanitarian, democratization, and peacebuilding as well as peacekeeping activities, and more generally as part of building a culture of prevention and peace.

Although a temporary experience, not to be considered necessarily as a stepping-stone for a UN career, and not reserved for young people, serving as a UN Volunteer has also proved to be a career asset for a number of people, as shown by the number of former UN volunteers who have progressed within the UN ranks. This is also to be recognized, as a testimony of the relevance of the concept and the quality of the recruitment of UN Volunteers.

UN Volunteers, being often less bureaucratic and a cost-effective contract modality, may also, more generally, help improve the image of the UN and concretely demonstrate its idealistic character. International volunteers typically work closely with the population where they are deployed. Stronger security and safety support to UN volunteers is, however, needed, through clearer rules of engagement in peacekeeping operations and clearer mandates being given by UN Member States, as well enhanced training and pre-departure briefing of UN Volunteers (including on conflict sensitivity, civil-military coordination and HDP nexus aspects). The visibility of UN Volunteers can also be enhanced, e.g., in Japan, for instance each year on the occasion International Volunteers Day.

Further analysis is needed in shaping the “UN Volunteerism of the future” and ensuring the adequacy of UN volunteers to the “UN organization of the future”, and for the UN and UN Volunteers to be fit for purpose. It is also important to better understand the future needs of the UN, as well as the psychology of youth and volunteerism in the new millennium.

#### Part 1

### **The Role of the United Nations Volunteers in Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Activities**



The Moderator, Professor SHINYO Takahiro, suggested the following guiding questions.

- 1) How has the role of the UN Volunteers differed from that of UN staff and other international volunteers. Furthermore, how has the Coronavirus pandemic and the War in Ukraine have affected the activities of the UN and UN volunteers in recent years?*
- 2) How have the UNV Secretariat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, and the volunteers responded to the peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and development priorities of the countries needing to adapt to the emerging new world situation? How have UN Volunteers played their respective roles and what challenges and problems exist regarding the activities of UN Volunteers amid major changes in the world situation?*
- 3) What measures are you taking to strengthen the role of the UN volunteers?*

**Ms. Kyoko Yokosuka, Deputy Executive Coordinator, United Nations Volunteers Programme:**



UNV was established in 1971, with the same mandate now, to support the entire UN System, contributing to work on development, and achieving the SDGs. The focus is now on UNV being a service provider to the entire UN System, expanding deployment with UN entities, and operations: 10,000 UN volunteers last year, with 4,000 on-site volunteers, 55% are women, contributing to diversifying the UN workforce, 55 UN entities in 66 countries and territories, 179 nationalities, from 18 to 80 year-old, 80% from the South.

UNV deployed UN Volunteers since 1972; in 2022, 1,706 UN Volunteers served in PKOs, the top three missions being UNMIS, MONUSCO, and MINUSCA. 344 UNVs in political missions (e.g., Columbia, Afghanistan, and Iraq). The increase of female volunteers over the last few years is from 42% to 49% (in 2021). In general, one-third of UN Volunteers contribute to SDG 1, which is a substantial figure.

Typical work of UN Volunteers is electoral support, e.g., in Burkina Faso in 2020 (50 international volunteers and community volunteers doing electoral and advocacy work, or Afghanistan. We have just heard however that female workers of the UN will be banned from work in Afghanistan, which is an unfortunate development.

The role of UN Volunteers differs from the role of UN staff, in that they play a supportive role to UN staff, they do not perform staff functions. They are not a substitution to UN staff, but complementary to them. For example, they nevertheless play an important role, for instance in awareness raising community dialogue, strengthening social cohesion, elections. In elections, 42% were women. They work alongside national staff, building capacity and empowering the local population.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted UN Volunteers, their number plateaued in 2020 and 2021, and travel constraints made their deployment difficult. There are more national UN Volunteers now, as they account for 70% of all UN Volunteers. . There are also online volunteers, not contracted or paid by UNV, as UNV only offers a platform for actors to make requests completely free of charge. Demand and supply for online volunteers skyrocketed during COVID-19. This trend will continue, with more creative assignments related to data management and analysis (e.g., in Moldova, on data related to COVID-19).

UNV provided support in Ukraine, with Ukrainians staying in neighboring countries and working as UN volunteers for UNHCR. As overall UN financial resources declining for the UN in comparison to the needs, there are new incentives and opportunities for deploying UN Volunteers. In terms of security, UNV takes the duty of care very seriously. The primary responsibility lies with the host countries and the host agency, . Safety , security, and well-being are however also paramount considerations for the UNV Programme. UN Volunteers are UN personnel under UN security systems, subject to advice by the UN Department of Security and Safety (UNDSS). Sometimes, we have to discontinue operations in some areas where the risk is too high. Dedicated security training and briefing and good health insurance coverage contribute to mitigating the risks. We do more and more onboarding activities so as to make sure UN Volunteers are aware of available support. Finally, as part of UN strategies for health and well-being of UN personnel, provision of mental health support is an important consideration. There is a “zero tolerance” policy on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse as well Harassment (SEAH), of which UN Volunteers may be perpetrators and/or victims.

### **Questions & Answers:**

Mr. Nishida:



- What are the motivations of national volunteers?

Approximately, 66% of national UN volunteers’ expectations are there to become UN staff (even though that is not a stepping-stone as such), but they primarily want to contribute to the work of the UN and their own country. UNV as an organization is, however, not just about national volunteers but also encourages international volunteerism, and we combine them, working in tandem, to learn and acquire new skills and build capacities.

UN PKOs are also interested in taking on more national volunteers, a new trend.

- *What kind of security training is available for UN volunteers?*

UNDSS requirements are also mandatory for UN volunteers, using global onboarding tools online and introducing virtual learning activities, including on SEAH.

Ms. Yokosuka: In response to Professor Hasegawa's question, Ms. Yokosuka said that UNV could deploy volunteers to non-program countries, but we need a host entity with relevant activities.

Mr. Kondo:

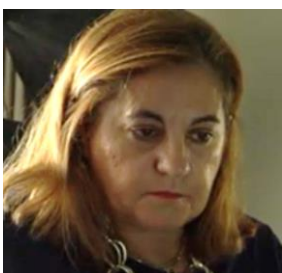


It is indeed possible, National UN volunteers however may sometimes compete with JICA personnel. So it may be preferable to avoid such deployment so as to keep the UN character of UN volunteerism.

- *What kind of specialties exist for UN Volunteer experts?*

The UNV programme responds to the needs of the UN community (e.g., youth volunteers, university volunteers, and community volunteers). Also, expert volunteers with 15 years of experience or more, including those who retire (UN retired staff as well), are deployed. There are some 600 volunteers in expert categories, who help with UN coordination work or technical support (e.g. to UNODC).

Ms. Tardioli:



- *Is there any age limit or required medical check after a certain age?*

Yes. 80 years is the age limit, and medical check and clearance are required. The time limit of UN volunteer assignments is also being enforced, which is up to 4 years (a measure which was met by significant resistance but was important to counter the narrative that UN volunteers are cheap labor, or substituting staff).

Mr. Ishikawa:



Ambassador ISHIKAWA Kaoru asked about coordination with the military component. He said it was important to ensure the host entity is aware of the situation and in a position to take its responsibilities.

Elizabeth Gamarra:



*What is the UNV funding model, and what is the financial situation for next year?*

UNV sends UN volunteers on demand from UN partners, e.g., UNICEF, which pays cost and overhead.

Sometimes specific donors sponsor UN Volunteer assignments, whether international or national.

Specific donors are also promoting volunteers with disabilities to work with UN agencies. This differs depending on the source of funds and donor.

Demand for UN Volunteers will continue as long as UN Volunteers will continue being considered a cost-effective solution.

Pr. Shinyo:

- What alternative solutions are there to online volunteers, what is the potential of AI?

An integrated platform exists, whereby all volunteer services are managed by one platform, AI manages longlisting. The Solutions Team in Bonn is mindful of opportunities being offered by AI to improve efficiencies.

- 1) Ms. Renata Tardioli:

The UN volunteers were posted in Kampong Thom for one full year, and the country became very dangerous within one year. It was a very special mission, one of its kind, in which UN volunteers were

not deployed for monitoring but to organize the elections, with large-scale fielding of UN Volunteers in sometimes high-risk areas.

UN personnel, including UN Volunteers, were in charge of putting in place the electoral systems, doing the job with local staff (electoral awareness, registration, and polling) as one of the components of UNTAC, at a time when Cambodians were not disarmed. Technologies were not advanced, with FM radios covering short distances only, isolation being a factor (with running water or electricity, availability of distractions, etc.).

Security was an issue due to a lack of communication. Many security features were not as developed as now (only a mission in Namibia before). UN staff were not present in the districts, only in the provincial towns.

UN Volunteers were there for various reasons, some of them with the hope to get a job in the UN, others to escape their own country, and quite looking for new opportunities. There were different age groups, Atsuhito Nakata was one of the youngest. Very few were electoral experts, this field of activity was a novelty for many UN volunteers. UN Volunteers did not always bring strict adherence to the rules or compliance with documentation requirements. They were however often ready to push the mandate further, without fear of the bureaucracy. UN volunteers shared compassion and solidarity, and believed in democracy and human rights, demonstrating respect for the population. They were also a more affordable proposition for the UN given the scale of the operations. UN volunteers brought to the task hard work and closeness with the Cambodians, working side-by-side with them. UN Volunteers were somehow the “NGOs of the UN”, by-passing bureaucratic systems.

Professor Shinyo:

Lack of communication would have been a security constraint and liability. Fortunately, times have changed, and progress was made.

Ms. Yokosuka:

With so many crises occurring at the same time, it is necessary to find ways to shorten the deployment time of UN Volunteers even more, and the UN Volunteers Programme is working on fast-tracking those processes. Our niche is humanitarian deployment. It is also important to ensure that host entities are more sensitized on the specificity and unique role of UN Volunteers and not deploying UN volunteers alongside UN staff with the same role, which contributes to confusion and demoralization. More and more people need to be involved in the work of the UN; we need to focus on where we can make a difference.

Mr. Kondo:

PKOs are evolving, particularly after the Brahimi report and the articulation of the integrated mission concept. In terms of security, it costs the same to deploy a UN Volunteer or a UN Resident Representative, as the UN is applying equal treatment. Townhall meetings with all UN personnel are



important to keep everyone on the same page in relation to security, e.g., in Kosovo or Tchad, including UN Volunteers.

Ms. Toyama:



- *Is there any distinction based on age among UN Volunteers?*

Not at the time of the Cambodia/UNTAC operation. Most UN volunteers, however, are now “specialists” (i.e., 26 years old and onwards).

- *What is the difference between UN Volunteers and internships?*

Generally, interns are there to learn, while UN Volunteers have something to contribute. There was however a discussion about paid internships, and it was suggested that university volunteers could replace volunteers. And there are also youth volunteers, which is perhaps closer to internships. The distinction is, therefore, sometimes a bit blurred. \_But the concepts are fundamentally different.

## **Part 2**

### **Q&A**

*1. What do you expect from UN volunteers in a new era? We are moving into an era in which both civil wars and wars between nations are being fought.*

*2. Mr. Takehito Nakata, the father of Atsuhito Nakata, had hoped that UN Volunteers should conduct their missions in a safe environment, but what should the UN, donor countries, and the host countries do to ensure their safety?*

*3. In light of the 30th anniversary of the death of Mr. Atsuhito Nakata, I would like to ask you to make a concrete proposal on the new role that UN volunteers should play and what you can do to nurture future volunteers.*

Mr. Honda:



We have of course have pay attention to the safety of UN volunteers; it is a must, but at the same time there is no such thing as a “100% safe” environment. We need to be honest about it. Six (6) Japanese lost their lives in a UN mission, including three (3) from hostile action. Loss of life is a possibility, statistically. We also need to communicate clearly on that.

On proposals, the following was discussed:

Ms. Weng:



Clearly human rights are important in relation to displacement and refugees, and the protection of refugees and displaced persons, and UN volunteers can play a role.

Enforcing policies on Sexual exploitation and abuse, and providing mental health counseling and support, are important. Is that provided by UNV or host agencies?

Proposal: increase engagement of online volunteers and increase recruitment of youth volunteers. Also, why not consider unpaid national youth volunteers?

Ambassador Ishikawa:

Written agreements are to be translated into concrete commitments. Volunteers need food, sleep, and logistical support; UN Member States must ensure they have what they need to operate. World leaders should give clearer and more solid mandates to PKOs, which will also contribute to the security and safety of UN Volunteers. New York HQs are too often the cause of the issues!

There are important success stories of UN volunteers, and the impact of their work on ordinary people. The fate of ordinary people is essential, as ordinary people should be smiling again. Post conflict reconciliation is also essential, and UN Volunteers may contribute to it. Post-WWII reconciliation between Germany and France served as a model. It is important to learn the acceptance of others during peaceful times and give the importance it deserves to the role of UN Volunteers in peace building.

Mr. Kondo:

Expenditure for the military can be made available for humanitarian assistance and peace. Ms. Ogata launched a new concept of human security. The new notion of human security from UNDP, considering the latest inter-related threats (climate change, cyber, pandemics), regardless of countries' wealth level or their fear of security. UN volunteerism is not just about selflessness and dedication; it is also about sharing skills and expertise.

Ms. Toyama:

Information sharing with the Embassy of Japan can have a positive effect on security of UN Volunteers. The Embassy can also play a role as a bridge with UN agencies.

Mr. Nishida

UN Volunteers can be drivers of change, they are professionals, and the UN Volunteer programme is a dedicated mechanism to support them. They can serve as an interface with the local population and close the information gaps. Digital transformation requires a culture change. Their awareness of security if to be increased using new technology. IVD, on 5 December, could be an opportunity for joint events with domestic and international NGOs, not just with JOCV.

Mr. Mizuno:



Among considerations to be learned from and kept in mind:

- 1) As there was a radio station in UNTAC, Japan donated radios distributed free of charge by UN Volunteers, which at the time created tensions and hostility towards UN volunteers due to the limited number of radios being available. This, which put UN volunteers at risk, could have been avoided.
- 2) Quick mobilization of information may in some cases be essential . Useful security-related information can come from the UN, MSF, or UNHCR. Therefore, UN volunteers' security network must go beyond the UN, so as to share security information more broadly.
- 3) For ordinary Japanese people, UNV could be a good entry point for a career path. Some people, however, may feel they want to have a paid job, and harvest the benefit of their studies earlier. What advice is to be given to young people?

Mr. Kinloch Pichat:



Civil-military coordination is something to look into more closely as part of the profile of UN volunteers for deployment to hardship/conflict areas. It is to be kept in mind in pre-deployment training, together with conflict sensitivity. This may contribute to greater safety and security, and also more generally to the success of the UN volunteers' mission.

Rapid deployment of UN Volunteers: technical solutions exist, making it possible to speed up the deployment of UN Volunteers, but also inherent limitations within UNV. There are positive precedents. For example, in 1998, the 15-person advance deployment of electoral UN Volunteers to MINURCA, only two days after the resolution voted by the UN Security Council, or in Kosovo in 1999 with 50 UN Volunteers selected and deployed within only a few days to serve as the core of the UNMIK civil administration.

The origins of the UN may be worth revisiting, to understand its future better. There were competing concepts at the origin of the UN, and volunteerism was one of them, eventually put aside to set up a structure of UN civil servants. Then volunteerism was brought up from the back door with the creation of the UN Volunteer programme in the wave of the creation of the Peace Corps, which was set up as part of a strategy for the so-called "Free World" to contain communism. In the future, one could look at the proportion of UN Volunteers versus regular UN staff and consider reversing these ratios. UN Volunteers as indeed not only at the frontline of the UN, and spearheading its work. They are also the very essence of the UN, and its ideals. UN staff could see themselves more as supporting UN Volunteers, and enabling their work, rather than being supported by them. This focus on UN Volunteers could change the image of the UN, make it visibly less bureaucratic, and closer to people's preoccupations and realities, the UN being thus also more diverse. The mentality of younger people today is also, however, also to be taken into account: what was acceptable to young people in the past, including taking risks and sometime risking their lives or accepting a high level of hardship, and delaying access to career benefits to serve as volunteers, may no longer be acceptable in the same way to "millennials" and future youth.

Ms. Yokosuka:

The value proposition of UNV and UN volunteers is that they are "Inspiration in action." A more coherent and effective narrative is, however needed.

The visibility of UN Volunteers in Japan is something to be worked on, and the related narrative is to be articulated. In many cases, being a UN volunteer may be an entry point to working with the UN, but this is not necessarily what we want to emphasize, as they do not get a salary as such, they are a different concept altogether. There is a fine line and balance to be found; we need to get it right. Having worked as a UN Volunteer however is certainly an asset to get to work for the UN.

International Volunteer Day: we can do more, and more in Japan.

On rapid deployment: we need to bring in efficiency, flexibility, and standardization.

As for the new generation, we need to focus on the discussion on the future of UN Volunteers and their

work, reflecting on the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. There are lots of discussions on remote and part-time working, which is the direction in which we are going.

Professor Shinyo:

Professor Shinyo thanked participants and suggested there was not enough time to summarize the rich discussion immediately (a summary will be compiled later); precious time, however, was spent, during two hours and half discussing on how to make the UN Volunteers more effective and a few orientations were put forward. Professor Shinyo expressed the hope that participants, beyond this substantial discussion, will remain permanent supporters of UN Volunteers, and friends of UN Volunteers, and will continue encouraging people, and not just young people, to serve as UN Volunteers.