

## PROFILES IN ACTION: CORRECTIONS OFFICERS IN UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS

### Somalia: Rehabilitating Convicted Members of Al-Shabaab

Peace and security continue to be threatened by extremist groups in many parts of Somalia, including Baidoa, a town 300 kilometres from Mogadishu in south-west Somalia. The rehabilitation and reintegration of convicted former Al-Shabaab members is critical to countering and preventing violent extremism. Ms. Amelie Runesson joined the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) for two years to develop the Rehabilitation Project for High-Risk Prisoners – a program aimed at assisting former members of Al Shabaab detained in Baidoa Central Prison to disengage from violent extremism and reintegrate in their communities upon release.



Ms. Amelie Runesson, former Corrections Officer with UNSOM

Despite her 13 years of experience in the Swedish corrections system, including as a forensic psychologist specializing in working with sex-offenders and individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder, Ms. Runesson was anxious about joining UNSOM. Before deployment, she reflected at length about working in a place she considered a “deeply wounded land, where possibly the whole society could be experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder”. But motivated by professional and humanitarian goals, inspired by the resilience of the Somali colleagues and community, and with a clear focus on the project, she adjusted quickly to the United Nations and Baidoa. Being “a dedicated learner and a good listener of narratives”, “understanding the political landscape”, “engaging meaningfully with the community”, “building strong relationships”, “motivating a diverse team”, and “being strategic and pragmatic” were all qualities that Ms. Runesson believed were essential to her work.

“The program helps rebuild bridges that have been destroyed by decades of conflict”, remarked Ms. Runesson. She worked closely with and supported the local government, prison management and the implementing national NGOs. Navigating the complex United Nations system, Ms. Runesson led a multidisciplinary team - a group of psycho-social, religious and security experts - to develop pre-and post-release disengagement initiatives that would enable high-risk prisoners to reintegrate into their families and community. Working closely with the affected communities, her team helped improve prison security and create an environment conducive to reintegration efforts, including by understanding the motivations of prisoners and family and community dynamics.

With limited capacity and resources, the Somali prison system has been long neglected. Security concerns were a constant factor for Ms. Runesson and her team, as extremist groups controlled much of the territory surrounding Baidoa. Despite these challenges, the morale and motivation of her team did not diminish, indicative of their deep sense of purpose and recognition that their work had a positive impact in their community. The local administration has praised the project for encouraging the reintegration of former Al-Shabaab members into their communities, and improving confidence in the functioning of the criminal justice system. Although Ms. Runesson completed her assignment in August 2017, the program’s success catalyzed funding from the Swedish Government, which has enabled its continued implementation.



Baidoa Central Prison, Baidoa, Somalia

With deep appreciation for the experience gained in Somalia, Ms. Runesson remarked that she was “honoured to have worked closely with the community in Baidoa in support of their efforts to advance peace and reconciliation in Somalia”. By “living so close to war, it has helped me appreciate the presence of things,” a reflection on the serious challenges of working in a resource deprived area far from home. She will not forget the powerful sense of “togetherness” she felt in Somalia and with its communities, and hopes to have ample opportunities to apply her new knowledge and skills in other contexts, including in her home country of Sweden.

## **South Sudan: Operating Holding Facilities in United Nations Protection Sites**

“South Sudan is a hard mission” remarks Mr. Arto Juutinen, but “I wanted to feel the earth under my feet”. Mr. Juutinen works in “protection of civilians sites”, established by the United Nations Security Council as part of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to provide a secure and safe environment to civilians affected by conflict. Over 200,000 displaced persons are currently receiving shelter and protection in these sites.

Mr. Juutinen is a member of a unique team of corrections officers who operate the holding facilities established in these sites to detain individuals who pose a risk to the safety and security of civilians and United Nations personnel. Working in the remote area of Malakal, Mr. Juutinen helps ensure the safe and secure custody of the individuals detained at the facilities and that they are held in humane conditions, with regular access to food, water, and health care.



Mr. Arto Juutinen, Corrections Officer with UNMISS

With over 25 years of experience in a variety of prison services, from Finland - his home country - to peacekeeping settings, including in the Golan Heights, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, Mr. Juutinen brings a level of insight and wisdom that is essential to the challenging setting in which he serves. Driven by a desire to do something different both professionally and personally, he wanted to return to “the basics,” or what he calls “keys and padlocks” prison operations. Reflecting on the multitude of opportunities he has had over the years, including for many years in an international advisory role, Mr. Juutinen finds engaging in basic security and prison services very rewarding, especially as his work directly contributes to the mandate of the Mission to keep vulnerable communities safe.

Although not comparable to the extremely difficult living conditions of the communities they serve, working in South Sudan can be exceptionally challenging and can cause elevated levels of stress to personnel. Staff movement is restricted in order to reduce risks to their safety and security; essential goods, services and recreational activities are highly limited,

especially in areas outside the capital; and, there is irregular contact with families and friends who can provide important emotional and psychological support.



Holding Facilities, UNMISS

Recognizing these challenges, Mr. Juutinen is grateful for the support provided by the United Nations, including compensation for the hardship endured and provision of security, accommodation, and access to basic goods, services and recreational facilities at the Mission’s compound. In the absence of family and friends, Mr. Juutinen highly values the camaraderie and care of his diverse colleagues. He ensures that he always has time to maintain “a healthy soul in a healthy body”. He also believes that the pre-deployment training provided by the Swedish Government and the United Nations prepared him well for his deployment, and is a strong advocate for such trainings.

“At the end of the day though”, he remarks, “one has to be professional and be able to show persistence in the face of difficult challenges, exercise solid judgement and make quick decisions.”

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Corrections Officers in peace operations may be United Nations staff members, government-provided personnel (GPP) or [United Nations Volunteers](#). Corrections experts interested in serving as GPP must be nominated by their governments. For additional information, please visit the websites of the [United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations Justice and Corrections Service](#) or [United Nations Careers](#), or contact [dpko-jcs@un.org](mailto:dpko-jcs@un.org).