

## Interview with the UN Resident Coordinator Dafina Gercheva on the Occasion of 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of United Nations Organization

**When was the UN office opened in Armenia? Can you describe in brief the current structure and mode of work of the office?**

The UN established its presence in Armenia in December 1992, subsequent to Armenia's membership at the UN in March of the same year. The UN System in Armenia presently consists of 12 resident UN agencies, funds and programmes - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), International Labor Organization (ILO), United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Volunteers (UNV). Collectively they form the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), including International Organization for Migration (IOM), which has observer status at the UNGA. The Bretton Woods institutions - World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and International Finance Corporation (IFC) - also comprise a formal part of the UN System.

The UN Resident Coordinator (RC) system encompasses all organizations of the United Nations system dealing with operational activities for development, regardless of their formal presence in the country. Thus it also includes non-resident UN agencies, funds and programmes, among them World Trade Organization (WTO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).

In capacity of the designated representative of the UN Secretary-General for development operations, I have the honour to lead the UN Country Team as the Resident Coordinator. Coordinating development operations promotes more strategic support for national plans and priorities and makes operations more efficient.

The UN-Armenia partnership is regulated through the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) - a five-year programme document signed with the Government of Armenia - which outlines the main areas of UN activities in the country, in line with national priorities.

**As we understand, Armenia is a net recipient of the United Nations Organization. What is Armenia's membership fee and the assistance Armenia has received from the UN since it joined the organization?**

Armenia's annual contribution to the UN is defined according to the UN scale of assessments of the state parties. Presently, it is 0.002% of the UN annual regular budget.

The UN, through its multidimensional activities, contributes towards accelerating human development in Armenia since its independence. As I already mentioned, UNDAF is the collective response of the UN family to the national priorities. The first UNDAF cycle (2005-2009) was completed last year with a budget of 46.5 million USD and I am delighted to note that the UN system successfully accomplished all of the results envisaged in partnership with international and national partners, as outlined in the framework document.

The UN System in Armenia envisaged a 72 million USD budget for the second UNDAF (2010-2015).

**Assistance to refugees and IDPs seems to be the most prominent contribution of the UN to Armenia. What is the number of refugees from Azerbaijan now in Armenia and what forms of assistance has the UN provided them so far? What are the current projects of UNHCR?**

The mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is to lead and co-ordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of their problems. The UNHCR's mandate was expanded to include former refugees who have returned to their home country, internally displaced people and stateless persons.

UNHCR opened a country office in Armenia in 1992 in response to the Government's appeal for international assistance to meet the humanitarian needs of some 360,000 ethnic Armenian refugees who fled Azerbaijan during 1988-1992. In UNHCR's assessment, generally Armenia has taken its international refugee obligations seriously, arising from 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, though certain gaps remain in a number of areas, especially in regards to housing and social services.

The provision of decent housing in either individual houses or apartments has been the key component of UNHCR's programmes. UNHCR has also implemented throughout the country health, education, vocational training and income-

generation projects, also advising the government on refugee legislation and policy.

Tens of thousands of the refugees from Azerbaijan have now acquired Armenian citizenship and are therefore no longer refugees. Many others have migrated to the EU. Some 2,800 still remain in the country with refugee status, i.e. have not applied for Armenian citizenship. There are also nearly 900 Iraqi refugees of Armenian origin, assisted by UNHCR.

**We have heard that WFP Office has downsized its activities in Armenia. Could you please specify, as of now, what specific projects WFP is involved in? And what is the mandate of the FAO?**

WFP was downsizing its protracted relief and recovery activities in Armenia, when the Government asked WFP Executive Director if WFP could stay on in Armenia and engage in development activities, as even though the overall economic indicators were improving in Armenia, the country was severely affected by the food, fuel and financial crises. WFP responded with the development school feeding project which will

activities. It mainly relates to the support of SMEs, integration of innovative employment schemes and opportunities, creation and support of youth-led businesses in partnership with private sector.

UNIDO is also mandated and helps the Government of Armenia to promote investment and technology transfer, strengthen industrial competitiveness and trade, support agro-industries, sustainable energy and environmental management.

**Armenian intellectuals often suggest including this or that particular historical monument into the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites. Can the UN office in Armenia help them?**

The Etchmiadzin cathedral and the vestiges of the Zvartnots archaeological site, monasteries of Haghpat, Sanahin, Geghard and Upper Azat Valley were already inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

UNESCO and Armenia have established strong bonds of cooperation aimed at the promotion of national and regional cultural heritage. Even though UNESCO doesn't have an office in



*UN Resident Coordinator Dafina Gercheva delivering a lecture to the students of Department of Journalism at Yerevan State University*

serve as a basis for the Armenian Government to develop a national school feeding policy and for the Ministry of Education and Science to take over the project from WFP in three years time. The Russian Federation has provided funding for the project, totaling US\$8million.

On 4 October 2010, the school feeding project was launched providing lunches to 50,000 primary school children in some 700 schools.

FAO's mandate is to improve levels of nutrition, increase agricultural productivity, improve food security and standard of living of the rural population and contribute to the growth of the economy through agriculture development.

**Employment is one of the crucial preconditions for the development of each country. Could you please introduce ILO's and UNIDO's activities in Armenia?**

The ILO has a unique tripartite structure in the United Nations, in which employers and workers' representatives have an equal voice with those of governments in shaping its policies and programmes.

Within the Decent Work Programme the ILO assists the Government and social partners in elaborating the employment strategy, and effectively use labour market analysis in formulating and implementing labour market policies in order to increase employment opportunities in particular for youth, disabled, women.

The Decent Work Country Programme also aims to improve national occupational safety and health system and introduce several social security schemes such as maternity protection, occupational accident and diseases insurance.

Employment and job creation are a top priority for the Government. All national programmes in social-economic sectors emphasized the role of SMEs and job opportunities with special emphasis on youth.

We have a UN specialized Agency, i.e. United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), who's direct mandate is to support poverty reduction through productive

Yerevan and covers Armenia from the Moscow office, the Armenian National Commission for UNESCO conducts scores of activities. UNESCO named Yerevan World Book Capital 2012.

**As a development partner, what are the main priorities of UNDP in Armenia?**

UNDP has been a strategic partner to the Government of Armenia supporting its efforts to advance human development and improve the well-being of citizens. The response to the impact of the global crisis on human development in Armenia has shaped the UNDP priorities for 2010.

The economic decline largely affected the poverty alleviation process, deepened regional disparities and increased unemployment. Therefore, we support the government to develop policies aiming at bridging regional disparities and socio-economic inequalities. UNDP also promotes and facilitates participatory community planning and implementation of infrastructure and income generation projects, which will improve the quality of public services delivery in urban and rural communities of Armenia.

Given the crucial importance of creating new jobs to reduce income inequality and poverty, as well as considering the strategic importance of the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector for the country's economic development, UNDP targets new entrepreneurs in terms of improving their business skills and funding opportunities.

Education is among key priorities for UNDP in Armenia and vocational education and training (VET) is a key focus area of UNDP since 2006. Currently we are in the process of establishing modern professional educational laboratories at the premises of 12 multifunctional regional VET schools, developing and publishing educational materials in Armenian language, and training 350 VET faculty on modern educational technologies.

Our efforts are also directed towards reinforcing state capacity and improving the performance of public institutions. In partnership with the EU, we are providing top-notch technical assistance



and policy advice to the government facilitating the effective implementation of the EU standards.

Many of our projects are targeting civil society aiming at its empowerment and promoting broad-based public participation in policy making and development processes. UNDP is actively engaged in protecting and promoting human rights, tolerance and social cohesion.

The main focus of our operation in the area of energy and environment is to fight climate change and avert land and biodiversity degradation. UNDP supports Armenia in promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We aim to further strengthen Protected Areas network in Armenia.

**Could you briefly present what are the programs and projects of UN Armenia Office related to children?**

UNICEF is the UN agency that is mandated to monitor the rights of children in Armenia and provide support to the Government and NGO community in the fulfillment of rights of all children, with a focus on the vulnerable and excluded.

Support is being provided to the Ministry of Health in improving maternal and child health services with particular focus on improving newborn care services. UNICEF and WHO also support the Ministry of Health in developing multi-year immunization plan with cost activities; improving surveillance system for vaccine-preventable diseases and introducing new vaccines (rotavirus vaccine) and related communication activities.

In Armenia 37% of children aged 0-5 and 39% of pregnant women suffer from anaemia caused by iron and micronutrient deficiency. The most cost-effective and efficient way of addressing this problem is universal fortification of flour with iron and folic acid. Based on the previous successful experience with universal salt iodization that helped to eliminate iodine deficiency in the country, UNICEF together with the Government set up an Inter-ministerial Task Force on Flour Fortification based on the Prime Minister's decree, producing a concept and an action plan on implementation of flour fortification.

Assistance is being provided to the Ministry of Education and Science in implementation of its 2008-2015 Pre-School Reform Strategy. UNICEF in collaboration with the WB is currently providing help in establishment of low-cost pre-school services in 140 communities. Activities in the education sector are also geared at inclusion of all children, especially those with disabilities, in mainstream education.

Efforts are being invested in protecting children in areas such as children in orphanages and special schools, juvenile justice, child labor, violence against children, child abuse and exploitation, gender-based violence, cases of unregistered children, and disabilities.

Together with the National Statistical Service, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP launched the "ArmeniaInfo" database that allows monitoring progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and helps the Government to practice evidence based decision making.

**Recently we have heard that UNFPA has launched a survey on Gender-based Violence. Can you give brief narration of the findings? What else is UNFPA responsible for in Armenia?**

In 2008-2009 a nation-wide survey on Domestic Violence against Women in Armenia was implemented by UNFPA in cooperation with the National Statistical Service. It is the first nationally representative sample survey on violence against women. According to the survey findings, 8.9% of interviewed women were subjected to physical violence by their intimate partners. 4 out of 5 sexually abused women were also subjected to physical violence. Every 5th woman subjected to physical violence was also a victim of sexual abuse. About 7.4% of interviewed women were prohibited to work by their husband or partner and salary was taken away from 9% of the interviewed working women.

Psychological violence is the most commonly spread form of domestic violence. 24.6% of women were insulted by their partners.

UNFPA has launched its activities in Armenia in 1999, concentrating its assistance in the following three mandated areas: reproductive health, population and development strategies, and gender equality. In simple terms UNFPA area of responsibility are demography, reproductive health and fertility, aging, migration, gender

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issues as indispensable part of human rights and all other issues that have influence on population dynamics/changes. In addition UNFPA is the leading agency for data gathering on population issues and supports such data gathering activities as Census and other surveys in the field of population.

Armenia has taken obligations about reaching the Millennium Development Goals declared by the UN. How successful has been Armenia so far?

The Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000 by 189 UN Member States, including Armenia. The Declaration gave birth to a set of concrete development objectives known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015. The MDGs represent human needs and basic rights - freedom from extreme poverty and hunger; quality education, decent employment, good health and shelter; the right of women to give birth without risking their lives; and a world where environmental sustainability is a priority, and women and men live in equality.

The MDG targets and indicators were nationalized to correspond to the country-specific priorities of poverty reduction and human development. The government's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP) of 2003 became the first policy document where the achievement of MDGs was formally reflected.

The first nationalized MDG Status Report of 2005 established the MDG framework for Armenia. In 2008, Sustainable Development Program (SDP) was adopted, reflecting achievement of the MDGs. In September 2010, the Second MDG National Progress Report was launched by the UN Office in Yerevan. The document assesses the main trends and the current state of progress towards achieving the MDGs, taking into consideration the impact of the global economic and financial crisis. As a result of the economic downturn registered in the country since the fourth quarter of 2008, the Progress Report further refined the nationalized MDG targets and indicators to provide more up-to-date data and address more precisely the main challenges Armenia faced.

All these UN activities and projects in Armenia are very interesting. If public wishes to learn more about UN, what they should do?

One of the UN Secretariat's Departments - UN Department of Public Information (UNDPI) is the public voice of the UN and the principal source of information about the UN system. It promotes global awareness and greater understanding of the work of the UN, using various communication tools including press, electronic and new media. By translating information materials into Armenian, engaging opinion-makers, organizing events to highlight issues or observations and supporting the UN Country Team in implementation of communications strategy, the UN DPI is one of the main vehicles through which the UN tells its story.

More than 2000 young Armenians learned about how UN functions by playing the role of UN officials and representing UN member states at Model UN Conferences, organized by UN DPI. The UN DPI supports two UN Depository libraries situated at the National Library and Yerevan State University. Their stock has more than 20,000 UN publications with more than 90 UN materials in Armenian - also the work of the UN Department of Public Information.

## UN Office in Armenia celebrates 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Organization



UN Resident Coordinator raising the UN flag cheered with balloons and applause. Around 70 school children painted pictures of peace, friendship and tolerance at the UN Yard.



The Armenian President visited the UN House and met with the UN Country Team, where he discussed the UN work and achievements in Armenia



UN staff and partners were invited to a concert dedicated to the 65th anniversary of the Organization



50 students participated in a Model UN Conference organized with the help of DPI, IREX and US State Department together with the Armenian UN Association



Prominent Armenian artists and singers performed at the concert

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