

## Portrait of Leila Bouchebouba Brodin

I will tell you one thing right away: I have never seen someone, put forth as a candidate for the "Portrait of the Month", who attracts so many testimonies on her. This means that either she is, as the singer would say, "GREAT", or her colleagues are "GREAT" or they are all "GREAT". I would go for the latter, as far as I am concerned. Listen to this, coming from the Head of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) Division, Ely Dieng, who is naturally the first to testify, being the one who put Leila forward as "model staff member":

**« If I had to define Leila in one word, I would say "committed". Indeed she is committed to her daily work in the service of security sector reform generally, and particularly for the improvement of the security governance framework in the DRC. She works with determination and conviction and she is always driven to search for appropriate solutions to the problems facing those whom we, as a Mission, are supposed to serve, namely the Congolese people. She takes things to heart and does not tolerate injustice and indifference. She speaks her mind and has a strong character. We work in tandem, and together we have quickly identified areas where we complement each other. Leila is a "fighter".**



**At times, she is impatient for results and eager to get things done well and coherently, which is not always the case. For this reason, she is sometimes misunderstood by those who do not know her well. But her attitude is driven by her desire for justice and her love of work well done. She is very much concerned about the security of the SSR team and has imposed a weekly radio check among us, in addition to being the self-appointed warden. Committed she is also in daily life where she always honors her commitments; she is always ready to assist others and share her knowledge without hesitation, and also vis-a-vis her sporting life between long-distance running, cycling and swimming in Kinshasa and winter skiing in Europe".** Yolanda Serrano-Montano, SSR Officer, Gender Specialist, makes the following comments, confirming Ely's judgement: **« In my view, and after working with her for nearly two years, the two most important qualities of Leila are: her integrity and commitment for her work. All her decisions and initiatives are based on these two principles, and she is a very accessible person, both professionally and humanely. Leila understands that the role of a manager is to coordinate and supervise but also to provide personal support to colleagues.**

***Through her personality and knowledge, she conveys her vision of, and her passion for, Security Sector Reform within the Mission and to the security institutions of the DRC. "***

You know, I could just sit back and let these testimonies unfold, one by one, and you would get in this way a complete portrait of Leila. But you know me, I always have to add a bit of spice. Well, Leila, it's just the two of us now. She is...how shall I put it?... a calm tornado, a zen storm, a soft hurricane ... Here I can imagine your eyes widening in astonishment, and yet such contradiction does exist. It is known as an oxymoron, an alliance of opposites, a stylistic device. So please spare me having to explain everything to you, because it ruins the "surprise" element. To Me, Leila comes across in that way. Calmly, she listens to my questions, I sense from her an internal "boiling" like: "Do I show her what I am made of or do I just look on the bright side of life?" She opts for the second and gives me a gentle smile. Me: Tell us about yourself. Her: "What do you want to know?" Me: Everything! Her: "What do I start with? Me: Your professional experience, for example. Her: "Okay". Me, inside my head: Isn't she a bit of a soldier? Well, no, I've got it all wrong. Let's listen to her: ***"I arrived in the DRC for the first time on December 14, 2005, and I spent three years working for the European Union delegation within the framework for supporting security sector reform, and particularly internal security and the provision of electoral security. Then I returned to the DRC on September 15, 2015 to work, this time, with the Security Sector Reform (SSR) Division of MONUSCO".***

Leila, could you tell us about this Division, its work and your duties and responsibilities therein? ***"The MONUSCO SSR Division is a small team working with all Congolese stakeholders in the security sector; security providers (Armed Forces of the DRC, National Congolese Police, General Directorate of Migration, National Intelligence Agency, Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature), state control bodies (respective line Ministry, National Assembly and Senate, Civil Society as well as Media); to equip them and help them define their vision of security, and their respective contributions to the implementation of that vision. In addition to colleagues in the Division stricto sensu, we have a colleague from the Child Protection Section and colleagues from the Force. I am the Deputy Head of the RSS Division in charge of coordinating the activities of the 3 pillars of our work, namely: democratic control, security governance and the reform of security institutions such as the Armed Forces, the National Police, the Civilian Intelligence Service and the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature".***

You work for the United Nations, and this is not an entity like many others. This implies a certain rigor, principles, empathy vis-à-vis the world around us and, above all, many sacrifices. Was it a happy coincidence that led you there, or a combination of circumstances or simply a personal choice? ***"It is certainly not a happy coincidence, but a choice. In certain circumstances and at certain points in my professional and personal life I have been led to believe that it is the United Nations that will enable me to align my work with my values and principles. As mentioned before, I have worked with a wide variety of organizations where I have been able to combine the organization's values with my own personal values, and to enjoy working conditions that can have an impact on the people or the institutions. It is good to alternate so as not to cut yourself off from the people you are working for. So I had to make a choice not only between the United Nations and other organizations but also within the United Nations between the headquarters and the field offices. "***

What we would also like to know about is your career path, Leila. You give the impression of someone who has gone through many, many things. Not blasé but someone who has in her life encountered all kinds of situations, someone who is ready to take on any challenges and who, as it were, eagerly awaits all challenges that may come. Am I wrong? ***"You know, I was born to an Algerian father and a French mother, who met in the midst of the Algerian war because of their political convictions. From them I inherited principles and empathy, all of it forged on very contrasted foundations: on one side my father (now deceased), youngest and only boy in a family of 6 children, the only one to have been educated, but only up to fourteen years of age, in a school for native Algerians under the French rule, was engaged in politics for the decolonization of Algeria, imprisoned in France and released at the Independence, was a Muslim and Haj. On the other side, my mother, a fatherless orphan, raised with her brother and sister in Paris under the German occupation by one of the first French female scientists, who was a scout and a feminist engaged within the networks of French students in favor of decolonization, a medical doctor, a Catholic but excommunicated, a volunteer worker in North Africa. A mix that allowed my two sisters and myself to know what life is and to chart our own course.*** Indeed, we admit that it is difficult for someone with such a legacy not to be concerned, or to be indifferent in the face of injustice and misery. Without wishing to play the role of a “counter” psychologist, I remain convinced that parents, their history and their choices leave a mark on their offspring and in part make them what they are. Education does not need to always be imparted through words. Let us serve as models and our heirs will follow the path of the "just".

Speaking of education, what was yours, Leila, I mean formal education acquired in school and university? ***"For 7 years I pursued my education in two schools offering also ski courses. This allowed me to be acquainted myself with the rigor of the practice of competitive sport. I then went to university to get a master's degree in political science, and another degree in European affairs. I also received a university education in law regarding refugees and stateless persons. During my education, I studied in France and also in Manchester, Great Britain, and in Warsaw, Poland."***

Could you now tell us about your career and your work experiences since completing yours studies? ***"I have always worked with different structures operating in conflict or post-conflict areas. Beginning in the field of humanitarian aid, chiefly in the Balkans, Croatia and Bosnia, and also in Burundi and Dagestan and Chechnya, I managed the program of distribution of food aid, or other basic necessities. I quickly went into other fields including restoration of legitimate state authority, building of state services with a focus on democratic and security governance as well as rebuilding public infrastructures. I then worked for international organizations such as the European Union in Kosovo, Serbia, the Palestinian Territory, Guinea-Conakry, Nigeria, and three years in the DRC, for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), mainly in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and finally for the United Nations in BiH, Kosovo, in Kuduk, Afghanistan, and in Kidal, Mali, where I was head of field office".*** A bit of a daredevil she is, don't you think? We cannot say that she chose the quietest places on Earth! Well, if that's what she likes ... Afghanistan and Kidal, dear Human Resources colleagues, if you see my application file listed for these two places



(very nice places, by the way), please remove my name . You see, I do not like bullets, bombs or anything explosive.



Talking about colleagues, what are your relationships with them? We work in a multicultural environment, which can lead to misunderstandings and other bad interpretations, but also to a beautiful experience of brotherhood. What about you? ***"Regarding my relations with colleagues, be they from the SSR team or the Mission at large or in any other context, what motivates me is the exchange of experiences, mutual empowerment, and aggregation of our skills to achieve a collective goal. The reasons why I work in an international and multidisciplinary environment is to benefit from these exchanges. Finally, my interest for this multicultural working environment within the United Nations is that it offers us the opportunity to have colleagues or friends from across the 5 continents, coming from countries that are sometimes so difficult to access and the existence of which we did not even suspect. When I was in Afghanistan I worked with colleagues from Bhutan, not just one but two of them, and from the Philippines, the United States, France, Ghana, Poland, Somali, Canada, Kenya, Japan, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Burundi, India ... and of course with my Afghan colleagues. For anyone who wants to go beyond prejudice, this is an undeniable enrichment. "***

For sure! Two of those colleagues of hers have been kind enough to tell us about their working relationships with Leila. Ray Mvuemba Talanitu, her colleague in charge of Governance and close collaborator, says: ***"Leila Bouchebouba Brodin, has solid knowledge in her field of expertise and is a***

*major asset to the SSR Division. She carries out her duties with rigor, dynamism, motivation, efficiency, discernment, precision, and she is particularly appreciated by her colleagues. She never fails to show proactivity, determination, and unfailing professionalism in order to achieve her goals. Her inputs have always been very relevant and have contributed a lot to the smooth running of the activities of the SSR division. Leila is honest with her colleagues and meticulous in her tasks. She demonstrates a rare professionalism to the point that she keeps repeating that the team's objectives are more important than our egos. Her organizational skills and her*



*moral and professional qualities command respect and consideration. In a sometimes difficult context, she has shown both firmness and diplomacy to ease tensions. Conscientious, available and responsive, Leila is an exemplary colleague who brings full satisfaction to the SSR Division".* And Captain Ishak Saleh, in charge of Defense Reform, adds this: *"Leila is a key element of the SSR system. Both her professional and human qualities have allowed her to create and maintain a climate of responsibility and dynamism within the Division. Her intellectual abilities and her know-how make her a reference and a source of learning for all of our staff. Leila remains always available to her team to solve problems and support everyone in their work. She is a model of dynamism, and she always behaves in an irreproachable way and perfectly represents the image of the Mission both internally and externally, while acting on the basis of the norms and principles of the United Nations.* In fact, it is every member of SSR team that wanted to give their testimony on Leila, so we had to pick out a few. The others are angry with me. To escape unscathed, I promised to them that I would do another portrait of Leila, but that's simply impossible! I can see, my dear sister Leila, that you are admired and respected, and I am happy when I see such fraternity in the workplace. We spend with our colleagues more time than with our family; I would not go so far as to say" "Let us love one another, but for God's sake, let us respect and help one another, let us show compassion and humanity in what we do with and for others.

Leila Brodin, you who have travelled half-way around the world and lived in conflict or post-conflict countries like the DRC, what are your views on the overall situation in this country? *"Having spent three years here, from 2005 to 2009, in an enthusiastic context with the adoption of the new Constitution and the joint efforts of Congolese and international actors, comparing that with the current situation is difficult. And yet beyond the persistent tensions and conflicts, we cannot ignore the headway made in the DRC: the transformations and achievements".* Do you think that the UN is doing well or little... in the DRC? *"The UN alone cannot do everything in the DRC. Any judgment that can be passed on the quality of the UN's work or its interventions can only be made in the light of the efforts of all, Congolese, international community and UN. Indeed, no result can be attributed*



*to one or the other, it is the correlation of our efforts leading to results that really matters to Congolese populations and institutions. When we all work in the same direction then, yes, we can be satisfied with what is done. Now the needs are such that we can always want to do better and more particularly by supporting the Congolese stakeholders in what they are doing for themselves. "*

There is one thing that the United Nations finds extremely important, namely gender balance, in society, in its functioning. Do you pay attention to it in your actions? *"I do not in my actions take account of gender balance in a normative way, because what matters to me is the impact. I prefer to speak of inclusiveness. Indeed, our work in the field of security sector reform is based on inclusiveness; it is concerned with the security of all Congolese, male and female, regardless of age, religion or ethnic group. The SSR Division is committed to developing security institutions that are sensitive to the security needs of all segments of the population but also encourages a gendered approach to threats. That's why you have this diversity within our Division where you have civilians, military and police officers, men and women, Congolese and international colleagues".*

Do you have activities outside of work? *"I am in Kinshasa with my husband and we share our time outside of work mainly in the practice of sports activities: running, swimming and tennis. We thus take advantage of the Congolese climate. "*

Leila tells us that she is *"lucky to have married a champion of positive masculinity, as our colleagues in the Gender Unit would say. So we try to share household chores, but I want to take this opportunity to thank my husband who on that front does much more than I."*

Your dream for the DRC? *"As part of our SSR work, we meet and work with all segments of Congolese society. During these working sessions, meetings, exchanges, we realize that many Congolese aspire to the same things: peace, security, development, a good education and a future for their children, the protection of the environment ... Unfortunately, even as we witness firsthand this freedom of speech and of tone, and these expressions of aspirations, I would like all these Congolese to pool together their good will and to unite in defining a common future".*

To the question as to what memories she will keep of the DRC, she answers: *"When I left DRC in 2009 I kept strong friendships with people with whom I exchanged from time to time throughout the years that followed. I found them when I returned in 2015 and I intend to maintain the same type of relationship with a larger number of people.* Beautiful declaration of friendship!

By Aissatou Laba Touré

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