

Nonviolence is Not Lost in Translation

How civilians protect one another in different countries.

VIOLENT CONFLICT ISN'T NEW to Rocky Ambago, an International Protection Officer in Iraq. As a young adult, he crossed from Sudan into Central African Republic, seeking refuge from fighting and forced military recruitment. Nine years ago, he joined the first-ever Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) team in South Sudan, Rocky's home country.

NP's message of peace and nonviolence resonates strongly with him and has influenced his career path: He was a Christian evangelist before becoming a humanitarian worker. "I chose to build a career that could best spread the message of peacemaking and peacebuilding among communities affected by armed conflict."

And he's done just that.

In South Sudan, Rocky protected people on an individual level. He accompanied citizens threatened by armed actors or family members from location to location. He reunited unaccompanied children with their families.

He also peacefully intervened on a larger scale. In South Sudan, he met separately with two conflicting tribes, the Moru and Mundari. As a result, the tribes agreed to meet and have a peace dialogue with one another. Together, they resolved their conflict nonviolently.

Rocky with some Women's Protection Team members.



Rocky has trained Women's Protection Teams to peacefully mediate conflict and advocate for peaceful co-existence among conflicting communities. And he has trained people ranging from elders and chiefs to women and youth in unarmed civilian protection.

The passion Rocky has for his work is evident. He gets excited when he talks about civilians protecting civilians, without the use of weapons. It was observing the effectiveness of that concept that compelled him to see how it could be applied in different conflicts and countries.

"I felt like I needed to know more about different kinds of contexts unarmed civilian

protection would be successful in and how we could promote it,” Rocky says, when asked why he transferred from South Sudan to Iraq. “People should be able to use this tool to make an impact and protect civilians in their communities.”

Working Abroad

How can different contexts affect the way civilians protect one another? The conflicts of each country where NP works are unique and so are the social structures, cultures, and languages. Those differences affect how peacekeepers work from location to location.

Rocky has noticed the difference. His interactions with Iraqi female colleagues and civilians are not the same as they were in South Sudan.

“In Iraq, I can greet and shake hands with any men, but I cannot shake hands with any

“I speak Arabic, but if I have questions for Iraqi women, I will just say it in English and national staff will translate,” he says.

When Rocky and his colleagues hold community discussions, women are absent. So, to increase women’s participation in safety and security issues, his female NP colleagues engage female Iraqis in separate meetings.

After several community discussions had been held, one of Rocky’s female colleagues attended the next one. Rocky paved the way for her cultural and social acceptance at the meeting by introducing her as his colleague. He promoted her expertise in women’s protection concerns so that they would accept and welcome her, which they did.

After that, when a community discussion on security took place with a smaller group of men, one Iraqi woman was invited to participate. She shared specific examples of the protection concerns that were affecting the women in the camp, such as explaining why water for drinking was consumed quickly in the family home: The women felt afraid of men who lingered near the places where there was water available. So instead of going out to get water for housework, they would use water at home that was designated for drinking. To resolve the issue, discussion participants decided to raise awareness in the community to dissuade men from lingering near water points and bathrooms.

“To me, that was one of the most successful meetings that has paved a space for women to come out clearly and loudly voicing their concerns,” says Rocky.

When he first started with NP nine years ago, Rocky had no idea how to protect civilians. But after training and observing how peaceful interventions can be successful, he understands how well nonviolence works to reduce conflict.



Rocky greeting Iraqi civilians.

women,” he says. “You have to keep distance. I’m always watchful when we conduct safety assessments, I don’t look directly into women’s eyes.”

Because of the distinct roles men and women have in Iraq, Rocky has had to learn some ways to navigate Iraqi social norms so that he can build strong relationships and trust among the Iraqi people.



Nonviolent Peaceforce Iraq team meeting with civilians.

He's also seen how successfully it can be translated from one country's context to another.

"Unarmed civilian protection is something I've been trained in and groomed in. It's become a part of me." 🙌

Building a Community of Practice

By Mel Duncan

Last November, colleagues involved with unarmed civilian protection from throughout Sub-Saharan Africa gathered for a Good Practices workshop at a retreat center outside of Nairobi. We examined, and validated methods being used to protect civilians and prevent violence in some of the most protracted conflicts on our planet.

The lessons shared at the three-day gathering were deeply informed by successes and failures. People working from Ghana to Rwanda consistently cited that deep community engagement is the foundation for civilian protection.

Each local community has intricately woven traditions, leadership, and approaches to conflict that are the starting place for protection. Trust and confidence need to be built and carefully maintained. To connect with communities, unarmed civilian protectors have to have "big ears

and small mouths." Our work begins with Capacity Recognition, not Capacity Building. Some of the lessons shared at the workshop include:

- *Build enduring relationships with grassroots leaders, not necessarily elites.
- *Address small conflicts. Otherwise, they can spread.
- *Decentralize authority. Local teams need to creatively innovate using UCP principles and methods.
- *Support women to actively engage in all levels of the peace process.
- *Get better at engaging youth.
- *Protect marginalized people including LGBT+ individuals. They become even more vulnerable in violent conflicts.



NP co-founder Mel Duncan sits with another Good Practices attendee.

***Work to prevent violence leading up to elections.**

Most importantly, a community of practice is forming. People representing

[Read more at www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/buildingacommunityofpractice](http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/buildingacommunityofpractice)

31 organizations working in 15 countries have connected in Nairobi and similar workshops in Manila and Beirut to learn from one another. The next workshop will be held this spring in Latin America. Nonviolent Peaceforce is leading this process.

Together we're learning and validating affordable, effective, and replicable practices that transform the way we approach violent conflicts and at the same time building the international community to sustain, and scale up unarmed civilian protection. 🌊

Peace can be Your Legacy

A conversation with Lynn, an NP supporter who is a member of the Legacy Circle, a group of generous people committed to protecting civilians for generations to come.

I grew up in the 1960s where I saw the Vietnam war on TV every day and body count reports were on the news every night. I was 4 or 5 years old when Jack Kennedy was shot, and I knew even at that age we lived in a crazy world. I knew peace was the answer.

Growing up, I was very influenced by Martin Luther King, Jr., and I felt like hope was over when he died. I felt like we were waiting around for the next MLK or Gandhi. In the 1980s, I was staying on a farm and became friends with David Grant. He was authentic and a visionary. He embraced and lived the same values I had. David introduced me to Nonviolent Peaceforce by giving me a brochure. This was what I had been waiting for.

I was impressed by the people who had the courage to go into conflict unarmed, with no more than their training and khaki vests. I feel strongly that nonviolent peacemaking is usually the most effective

action for long-range peaceful settlement in a conflict situation. I couldn't do the work myself because of my current circumstances, but I was happy to support others who could. I started doing so by giving here and there when I could. **It made sense to me that when so much money is invested in war, some should go to peace.**

I know that my money goes to work in the world. What kind of work do I want to see accomplished with my money? I don't have enormous resources, but it is likely that there will be a modest legacy remaining at the end of my life. Nonviolent Peaceforce is one of the organizations I've designated to receive it. It's easy to do with an IRA: All you have to do is designate a beneficiary. It's the least I can do. I won't need it when I am gone, and the world will be a better place.

People may not remember me, but I'll be making a change. I consider myself a citizen of the planet, and I am proud to keep doing good work. **Any contribution in the direction of peace is a significant contribution, no matter how small.** I also feel that numerous small personal acts from many people all contribute significantly to world peace. 🌊

If you would like to learn more about leaving a gift to Nonviolent Peaceforce through your will, trust or retirement fund, please contact the U.S. Office at info@nonviolentpeaceforce.org or 612-871-0005.