

Maha Abdalla Mohamed Sherif, El Daein (East Darfur)



As part of the UNs' support to the African Union's Initiative on Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020, UNAMID has partnered with Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) to provide capacity building on unarmed protection methodologies to African youth and peace leaders in Darfur through an online training course. From June to July, over 40 Darfuris from all 5 Darfur states were trained. Below, you find one out of eight interviews of course graduates who give their insights on how the eight-week course has changed their perspective on how to deal with conflict and how to change behaviours of those around them to prevent or mitigate violence.

My name is Maha Abdalla Mohamed Sherif. I am originally from North Darfur State, born in El Fasher. I am married with one girl and two boys. I currently work for UNAMID's Protection of Civilians section and am based in El Daein, East Darfur State where I am embedded in UNHCR. I joined UNAMID in October 2008.

How has this course added to or changed what you knew or believed about protecting civilians or securing communities?

It encouraged me to focus more on protecting civilian IDPs in an unarmed way. We can adapt some of the UCP approaches and strategies instead of relying on normal routine activities which we have seen do not work.

Of the things you learned or experienced in the UCP course, what has been the most important for you?

The UCP methods and application such as proactive engagement, monitoring, relationship building and capacity development.

Were you able to use the information and methods from the UCP course in your life, whether in your family, your community, or your work? Can you give one example?

Yes, truly speaking I am doing my best to use some of UCP best practices in our daily protection activities. I try to be closer to our target group and stakeholders as well. I engage them more and try to build trust, convince

them to practice the ideas of unarmed protection, train good UCP workers, adopt new approaches, accept others and improve commitments.

What initiatives in civilian protection have you participated in since you took the course, if any?

During this month of October, we as Protection team started working closely with the Government's newly established national Protection committee in El Daein. This committee includes all conflict parties and plays a mediator role. With the UCP approach, I contribute to monitoring the implementation and commitment of each individual member to ensure useful and peaceful interaction between all parties.

What opportunities for UCP do you see in your community?

The opportunities are many because the community has been suffering a lot from the war. They are now looking for ways to end the war and bring peace. With the signing of the Juba peace agreement, I believe there is a good opportunity for UCP practitioners to be part of the process, support the international community and donors to monitor and report on the implementation of the agreement, highlight challenges and propose solutions. It is important at this particular moment to bring community members and community leaders closer together with a focus on women groups as they are the real victims and always push for peacefulness and reconciliation.

How do you see that UCP can contribute to silencing the guns in Darfur?

I believe that currently we have a good number of youth groups including both men and women who realize that armed conflict never solves problems but instead contributed to long years of suffering. Therefore, if together with trained UCP practitioners we stand together and advocate for unarmed solutions, we gradually will succeed and positively contribute to silencing the guns in our communities, assist the affected population and vulnerable families.

Many people, including civilians, have and use weapons in Darfur. Do you see that UCP can effectively protect people in this context? How?

Although it won't be easy, strong UCP can do something and can succeed: we all need to support the government in identifying the root causes of why people have weapons, ensure real implementation of the peace agreement and security arrangements, ensure that there is no tribalism or armed militias, etc. All armed actors should be assigned as official governmental forces with one chain of command, so that weapon collection campaigns can be implemented in a proper way. This should be accompanied by close monitoring by UCP workers and other nonpartisan parties. UCP should furthermore continue conducting community sensitization at local and IDP communities, where they will have an effective role to play.