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United Nations Institute for Training and Research



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# Strengthening Civilian Capacities to Protect Civilians

A JOINT UNITAR-NONVIOLENT PEACEFORCE ONLINE COURSE

# Background

More than 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by repeated violence. In absolute terms, the unmet need for direct physical protection of civilians against imminent violence has never been greater than it is today. In these contexts, civilians are faced with a wide variety of abuses and human rights violations, including killings, torture, sexual abuse, and forced displacement. In many situations children are abducted or recruited into armed forces; women trafficked for sexual exploitation; and human rights defenders imprisoned or killed. Even humanitarian aid workers, delivering aid to survivors of war, are not free from targeted attacks. Recognizing the overwhelming need, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has underlined that “human protection is a defining purpose of the United Nations in the twenty-first century” .

UN peace operations have assisted states recovering from war in protecting civilians. However, there are many situations of war and violent conflict where UN peace operations cannot be deployed and where government actors are not able or willing to provide protection to (all) civilians. The international community has been struggling, in theory and in practice, with the question of its responsibility to protect civilians within the territory of sovereign states. In addition, the scale and complexity of protection challenges in the Balkans, Rwanda, Darfur, Libya, Syria, DRC, Iraq and Central African Republic have demonstrated that threats to civilians are complex and dynamic and that no single international actor is capable of mitigating them without significant support from other institutions.

Over the past decade, the international community has begun to recognize that civil society organizations may play a long-established and often critical role in seeking to address large unmet protection needs. A small number of these organizations focus specifically on providing direct physical protection to civilians and reducing violence, by applying an approach that is described in this course as Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP). UCP is the practice of unarmed civilians – from within or outside the country concerned – protecting civilians in situations of violent conflict, imminent violence, and post-crisis situations.



*“...We heard a few messages again and again. First, the journey from war to sustainable peace is not possible in the absence of stronger civilian capacity. Without this capacity, there may be breaks in the fighting but resilient institutions will not take root and the risk of relapse into violence will remain.”*

Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Chair to the Senior Advisory Group to the UN Secretary General on Civilian Capacities in the Aftermath of Conflict, March 2011

UCP approach is probably the least understood and least recognized among the different strategies adopted by civil society organizations. Yet, it reflects a profound global shift that is taking place, i.e. from a state-centred to a human-centred approach to security.



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# What is UCP?



*“On April 17, 2014 United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) base in Bor, Jonglei State, was attacked. Gunmen invaded the base and fired upon unarmed civilians, predominantly internally displaced people (IDP) who had taken refuge inside the base since the civil war erupted in December 2013. At least 58 people were killed in the attack: men, women, and children. Two unarmed civilian protection officers of Nonviolent Peaceforce, both expatriates, were present at the base when the attack occurred. They took shelter in a mud hut with five women and nine children. The two officers stood between the civilians and the gunmen who approached them three times with guns, axes and sticks. By repeatedly clarifying their roles as humanitarian actors and by refusing to move, these two men effectively saved the lives of fourteen civilians.”*

Nonviolent Peaceforce, April 2014

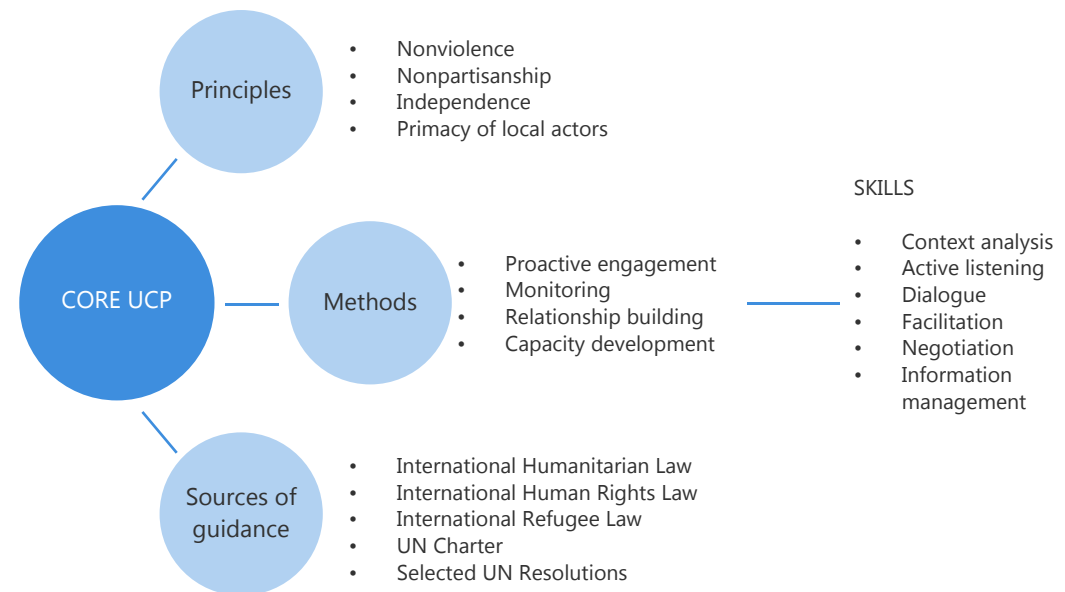
Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) is an approach that involves a combination of principles of nonviolence and nonviolent methods, aimed at preventing violence, providing direct physical protection to civilians in a variety of contexts, and strengthening local peace infrastructures. Nonviolent principles and methods define the skills needed by UCP practitioners who – in turn – operate in the framework of internationally set guidelines. Applied together, these elements constitute the core of unarmed civilian protection.

Organizations involved in UCP practice may use some, but not all, of the methods and principles presented in the diagram. Most often, methods and principles are

selected on a case-by-case basis, depending on the mandate of the organization, as well as the specific context in which practitioners operate.

Unarmed Civilian Protectors (UCPs) support local actors as they work to address the roots and consequences of violent conflict. UCP adopts a bottom-up approach in both the determination of the protection needs and the identification of local capacities to address those needs and support the peace process.

Diagram: UCP principles, methods and sources of guidance



# The context

UCP may be applied in situations of violent conflict, imminent violence, and post-crisis situations. During early stages of conflicts, Unarmed Civilians Protectors (UCPs) can be deployed to prevent or reduce violence; at later stages, they can intervene to sustain peace agreements.

UCPs may operate alongside, and collaborate with, international and regional peace structures and operations also deployed on the ground. Though very often mandates overlap, the specific guiding principles and methods of UCP differentiate unarmed practitioners from other actors. In places where regional and/or international structures are in place, UCPs may play a complementary role, for example in strengthening community-based protection capacities and in accompanying or supporting mediation processes (through on-going engagement with conflict parties at the local level). Similarly, UCPs may play an important role in identifying and addressing protection needs of particularly targeted groups, such as human rights defenders.

UCPs may also work in environments where regional or international organizations are not present. As unarmed protection is provided upon request from local actors and does not require multilateral authorization or formal governmental consent before initiation, the intervention of UCP organizations into conflict and post-conflict environments can be easier and quicker than the entry of more formal regional and international actors.

# The methods

UCP employs four main methods: proactive engagement, monitoring, relationship building, and capacity development. These methods are applied to prevent violence and reduce the impact of violence; increase the safety and security of civilians threatened by violence; and strengthen local peace infrastructures. Each of these methods has a number of different applications. At their core, UCP methods (and related skills) are focused on creating productive relationships with actors across different levels of society (grassroots, middle-range and top level), as well as across dividing lines of conflict.

Proactive engagement refers to the need of being proactive and assertive for the sake of providing protection. Though the mere presence of expatriate observers may contribute to protection efforts, cases tend to be isolated. According to Liam Mahony: "What is needed is not passive presence for its own sake, but well informed and carefully analysed strategies and tactics that use the presence of each [UCP implementer] to influence all the actors around them" . Proactive presence has three different, but closely related, applications: protective presence, protective accompaniment and inter-positioning.

Monitoring activities include ceasefire monitoring, rumour control, and early warning/early response. Though ceasefire monitoring is perhaps the most prominent and most complex application of monitoring, UCPs also monitor many other events and proceedings, such as disarmament processes, political events (e.g. demonstrations, elections), legal proceedings (e.g. trials, tribunals) and social events (e.g. holidays, celebrations, parades).

Relationship building is essential to all UCP activities. Having credible relationships with key actors and other stakeholders helps to open up channels of communication between conflict parties. It helps to quell rumours, and support interventions to prevent an escalating violence. It also enhances safety and security of UCPs deployed in areas of violent conflict.

# The online course



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Similarly, strengthening local capacities is at the core of UCP practice. UCPs work to preserve and reinforce these capacities, as to enable local communities taking direct responsibilities over protection and the broader local peace process.

Strong civilian capacities are considered to be essential in the transition from war to sustainable peace. Building on this acknowledgment, UCPs work to strengthen these capacities even in devastated countries and pay particular attention to the potentialities of the communities they serve.

Capacity development takes several forms; in particular, the direct involvement of communities in UCP practice provides an opportunity for the effective and sustainable transfer of skills and competences from UCPs to local actors. Additionally, the exposure of local communities to nonviolent methods supports the transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace: it shows affected communities that it is possible to reduce violence without violence – i.e. without relying on the use of armed force.

The online course on Strengthening Civilian Capacities to Protect Civilians is designed to contribute to national, regional and international efforts directed at protecting civilians and sustaining peace. The overall goal of the course is to provide an introduction to the foundations of UCP (its principles, methods, and required skills) as well as to offer an overview of UCP in practice.

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- Recall the key principles and sources of guidance of UCP;
- Illustrate UCP methods and required skills;
- Summarize key steps to go through in preparation for entering a community;
- Devise key actions to undertake while entering, living in, and exiting a community.

The online course is composed of five modules that will be completed over six weeks. Modules are as follows:

- Module one** Introduction to unarmed civilian protection;
- Module two** UCP: Principles and sources of guidance;
- Module three** UCP: Methods and required skills;
- Module four** UCP in practice (1): Preparing to enter and entering a community;
- Module five** UCP in practice (2): Living in and exiting the community.

To complete the course, participants should successfully submit the activities throughout the modules.

Although the course is hereby presented as an online learning event, it may be delivered also in face-to-face and/or blended format.



# How to register

The primary audience of the course consists of leadership and staff of aid organizations working in conflict situations and interested in strengthening their capacities to protect the people they serve as well as their own staff. Secondly, the course is aimed at individuals and groups of people who are interested to take part in UCP activities in the field. And finally, the course addresses a broader audience of civilian, military and police personnel working in conflict and post-conflict environments (as part of a UN or non-UN operation) interested in gaining an appreciation of UCP principles, methods and required skills.

## Course schedule

The course will be open upon request throughout the year. Both groups and individuals will be eligible to participate. For institutions interested in enrolling a larger number of participants, please contact [ptp@unitar.org](mailto:ptp@unitar.org); for individuals, please check course dates at: [www.unitar.org/event](http://www.unitar.org/event)

## Certificates

Successful e-Learning participants will receive a Certificate of Completion from UNITAR after successful participation in the course. Certificates will be signed by the UNITAR Executive Director or his/her authorized representative.

## Technical requirements for the online course

Flash: Flash player 10 or later (<http://www.adobe.com/go/getflash>) and one of the following browsers:

- **Windows:** Internet Explorer 6 and later, Firefox 1.x and later, Google Chrome, Opera 9.5 and later;
- **Mac:** Safari 3 and later, Firefox 1.x and later, Google Chrome;
- **Linux:** Firefox 1.x and later;
- **HTML5**

## Contact us

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