



Transforming the world's response to conflict

Diary of a peacekeeper

Your support turns despair into action

Rosemary Kabaki grew up in Kenya and is the Program Manager for Nonviolent Peaceforce in Myanmar

I AM PROUD TO WORK for Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) training civilians to become Unarmed Civilian Peacekeepers (UCP). The work is fascinating to me. I've now worked in the Philippines, Georgia, and Myanmar; and while the underlying model is the same, the application of our work varies depending on the conflict. In each country, I have been fortunate to meet so many committed people trying alternative methods to reduce violence and resolve conflict. I am so grateful to the donors like you who made it possible for me to do this work.

Kenya—Violence changes my life

I chose to get involved with NP because of what happened in my own country following the December 2007 elections. At the time, I was living in a middle-class neighborhood in Nairobi. I was fortunate in the sense that I was sheltered from some of life's struggles. I had a daughter in school and a full-time job in community development.

Contested elections were nothing new in Kenya, but mostly, we just lived with the results. To my incredible shock, this time Kenyans started killing other Kenyans! This was new for me. It happened in other countries, but never here! It seemed to erupt out of nowhere.

Could you imagine the country you grew up in suddenly catapulted into extreme violence?

The very poor took to the streets, uprooting the railway and fighting among themselves. I watched

"I realized ... no matter how great the work, without peace, it will just break apart."



Rosemary, with her daughter Sade, felt powerless and frustrated when violence broke out in Kenya.

these horrendous scenes happening on CNN/BBC, and would think, "Is this my country?"

When the violence broke out, I felt five steps removed.

The whole situation seemed out of our hands. Kofi Annan was brought in to negotiate a solution.

While the elites went behind closed doors, the poor took to the streets and

shut down the country. The rest of us just cowered in our homes not knowing how to respond. Our reality became sneaking off to the supermarket at 3 a.m. to grab more rice than we needed—just in case.

Eventually, life resumed as before. My daughter left for university and I continued working.

By that time, I'd been doing community development work for ten years. But nothing felt the

same. During the conflict, the city of Kisumu was practically burnt to the ground: all our beautiful

development efforts were destroyed. And then I realized something most of you have already concluded. It struck me that no matter how great the work, without peace, it will just break apart.

Time passed, but I remained frustrated by how powerless I felt about all that had happened. The middle class seemed to have no productive role. The country's leaders were locked in negotiations and those living under \$1/day went to the streets. What about the rest of us?

So when my daughter went off to school, I thought about what I could do. Was there anyone doing anything differently in these kinds of

“... go and learn how they do it. Then come back and show us how it's done.”

situations? Other than voting every five years, what role could we play? Did I have to be Mother

Theresa in order to have a positive impact? I researched alternatives and came across Nonviolent Peaceforce. “Oh my God,” I thought, “Someone out there had this same concern and has come up with an alternative!”

I didn't have any direct experience doing this type of work, but nevertheless, I applied to NP's training program in Thailand. Supporters like you enabled me to receive hands-on training and get mentored through the process to become an Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeper (UCP). When I received the invitation to participate, along with about 40 others, I was so excited!

Before I left, one of my religious leaders, Reverend Steve*, came to see me. I'll always remember what he said, “Rosemary, go and learn how they do it. Then come back and show us how it's done.”

Philippines- I am not a buffer

With the support of donors like you, I started my first job with NP in the Philippines as an International Civilian Peacekeeper in 2010. I still wasn't sure what our work would be. I imagined that peacekeepers served in one of two ways: Either they were people who positioned themselves with guns and trucks between two armed forces, serving as a buffer to protect civilians from the armed conflict or, they held high-level meetings with the key armed commanders and negotiated for a cessation of hostilities.

I expected to do the same type of 'buffering', only now without guns or maybe negotiating with lower-level armed actors. In fact, my reality couldn't have differed more from that early notion. I was part of a team that spent most of the time discussing and facilitating discussions with communities and civil society members. We talked about what would make them feel and be safe. We learned what they were already doing to keep their communities safer. We asked how NP could provide support so they could protect themselves from impacts of living in armed conflict.

THAILAND— TRAINING AS A PEACEKEEPER

The NP training you provided was amazing. I had thought we were going to be learning something very complex, like rocket science. To me, a “peacekeeper” was something like what I'd seen on television; the U.N. forces in their lovely blue uniforms. “We're going to be like that,” I thought.

And it was like that, but in a completely different way. Here's what I observed and experienced:

A diverse group Participants came from all over the world, from all ages and all walks of life.

Short but intense The training only lasted three weeks, but was life changing.

Common themes Empowerment and nonpartisanship, concepts I knew from development work, also apply to peacekeeping.

Self knowledge How do I communicate with others? What long-held beliefs and assumptions do I hold?

Practical support We learned about international human rights law.

Most powerful takeaway For me, it was learning about myself, “what can I do? What am I able to do in a given situation?” and then, to help others find that voice in themselves.



Jess, Mai Ni and Rosemary engaging with Karen women about the prevention of gender based violence and the role of women in protecting civilians.

We worked with the community, shared our strategies, and they applied them to their own realities. You've supported this approach of letting local people make decisions about their own safety and security. For me, it was an eye opener! I did not expect that working with people to apply Unarmed Civilian Protection methods would be such an emotional, intellectual and psychological roller coaster. Despite the ups and downs, it was rewarding to see civilians learning and contributing to their own protection.

Myanmar- A proud moment

I currently work for NP in Myanmar, a program that supporters like you funded to start. Here, we focus on training local people to be civilian monitors. In their role, they report ceasefire violations and protect others from violence. It has been particularly rewarding to have the opportunity to work with young girls and see how empowered they become through the training process.

One of my most fond memories is of a training with many young girls who initially were very quiet,

as many girls came from such a patriarchal society. By day four of the training, none of them had spoken; they would just smile shyly when asked to join in a group activity. Then something changed. As they began to see the difference they could make through this process, they suddenly began to perk up.

One of the girls, Kaying*, especially impressed me. During the training, I wasn't convinced that she would make it as a civilian monitor. She was very quiet and introverted. However, she was motivated. She practiced talking about Unarmed Civilian Protection. I watched while she went to a group of older men, something that is culturally very difficult in Myanmar. She spoke with such authority and she got them to listen to her. I watched with tears and a smile: I was so proud of her.

Three months after the training, I met Kaying* again. She was so self-assured. She continues to amaze me. How she had changed since the original training! She was no longer “small,” looking down because she was in the presence of a foreigner. She

was able to talk to many groups about peacekeeping work—young girls, older women, her mother, even boys and older men!

For me, she represents exactly what NP is all about and what we are here to do. When we talk about “civilians protecting civilians”, we’re not talking about the 40-odd people who go through the training. Rather, the idea is that we train 40 people, then they talk to another 40 people, who in turn, talk to another 40 people, and so on; the work cascades. And, all of this has happened because of supporters like you!

When we first start our work, we ask people, what do you think we should do? Then people generally get confused; they are used to looking in textbooks for answers and being told what to do. But NP’s work is about helping civilians to help themselves, to empower themselves, and resolve their own issues. At first, civilians automatically look to us to be part of the response. Now we see villages in Myanmar that have set up their own systems by building

relationships and being able to identify vulnerable groups. This is ultimately what begins to build security.

I’ve seen so many positive outcomes in my work. You support a tool that works well and can be easily replicated in different situations. We don’t just talk about trusting the wisdom of local people and letting the solutions come from them, we actually do it. The work isn’t easy, but it’s humbling, and that is what I enjoy the most.

The more people we bring in to actively contribute to the protection of civilians and maintain the peace, the more successful we become. And the more we step back from the work and let the

community assume responsibility, the greater the chance that a lasting peace will take hold. As I write this, violence breaks out again in Kenya, following another set of contested elections. I think back to my conversation with Reverend Steve*: perhaps it is time for me to heed his words, and return home to my own country. 🇰🇪

*For protection purposes, we have changed these names.

“NP’s work is about helping civilians to help themselves, to empower themselves and resolve their own issues.”

Your donation gives hope for a peaceful future



IN PLACES LIKE IRAQ AND SYRIA, lives are torn apart because of hatred and intolerance. Whole communities and villages have been destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people have died. You and I know that guns and bombs are not the answer. The path to lasting peace is forged through seeing our humanity in one another. Even those we consider our “enemies.”

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