

NP's Executive Director featured at Canadian Mission to the United Nations

MARC-ANDRÉ BLANCHARD, Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN welcomed a crowd to the Canadian Mission on April 27th for the film, *In Pursuit of Peace*. The event featured NP's Executive Director, Tiffany Easthom and filmmaker Garry Beitel, who were part of a panel that answered questions after the showing.

Growing understanding at the UN

The event, attended by diplomats, UN staff, NP supporters and six members of the Swedish parliament, illustrated the growing understanding at the UN that unarmed approaches must be at the forefront of protecting civilians. In addition to NP's work in South Sudan, the film showcases Canadians who are conducting nonviolent peace and conflict transformation work in Iraq, Turkey and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. "The film is also a welcome reminder of the spectrum of approaches to the protection of civilians. While we often focus on the armed peacekeeping, this is just one of many options to be pursued," Ambassador Blanchard observed.



Tiffany Easthom discusses unarmed civilian protection with, L-R, Jörgen Andersson, member of the Swedish parliament, Canadian Ambassador to the UN Marc-André Blanchard and Fredrik Eriksson, also a Swedish parliamentarian.

New appreciation for the work

Like many others, filmmaker Beitel was unaware of the extent of nonviolent peace work being done in the field when he started the project in 2012. "One of the wonderful surprises that came from my work on this film was learning of the extent of activity in the domain of peacebuilding and civilian protection... Today, working with local and international NGO's, there are thousands who are

"I'm struck by the courage and determination of those individuals who dedicate their lives to the pursuit of peace often in hostile and forbidding locations... It brings me great pride to see so many Canadians, such as Tiffany Easthom, take on this task."

—Marc-André Blanchard, Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN

actively working to put an end to civil wars as well as community and ethnic conflict,” Beitel said.

Concluded Ambassador Blanchard, “... with the intensity of armed conflict affecting civilians

worldwide and the related crisis in migration, we need peacemakers more than ever.”

How you can see *In Pursuit of Peace*

- Copies of the movie can be ordered from www.reframe-films.com/en/films/in-pursuit-of-peace/. The accompanying educator’s guide is available at www.reframe-films.com/en/
- View the trailer at vimeo.com/150351138.
- If you’d like to sponsor a screening in your community and would like the support of Nonviolent Peaceforce staff, please contact Amy Hansen at ahansen@nonviolentpeaceforce.org



Filming in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp.



Women’s Peacekeeping team role play exercise.



Tiffany plays cat’s cradle with children in the IDP camp.



Meeting with cattle herders.



IDP returnees on the Nile—with cattle.

Diary of a peacekeeper

Reflections from Sri Lanka—then and now

by Jan Passion, former NP Peacekeeper

SRI LANKA BECAME MY SECOND COUNTRY when I joined the pilot project of Nonviolent Peaceforce in 2003. I had the honor of serving as the Deputy Director for three years between 2003 and 2006 and then returning twice a year through 2009.

Challenging and rewarding

I first visited Sri Lanka as an undergraduate in 1984 and was deeply moved by this beautiful, yet troubled island nation — struggling to embrace its mosaic of cultures, religions, languages combined with a complicated legacy of colonialism.

Working with NP in Sri Lanka was one of the most dynamic, challenging and rewarding experiences of my life. I was delighted to return to Sri Lanka this past January. One of NP’s original Member Organizations, Conflict Transformation Across Cultures (CONTACT) was having their mid-year seminar for peacebuilders, and they invited me to help lead the seminar. I jumped at the opportunity to see how things have progressed since the end of the war in 2009, and to reunite with many of NP’s former Sri Lankan staff members and program partners.

How we helped

I met with Ruki Fernando, a human rights defender who occasionally worked with some of the teams that made up Nonviolent Peaceforce Sri Lanka (NPSL). I asked him how he would best describe NP’s impact. He replied, “NPSL provided support to

mothers searching for children forcibly recruited by Tamil militants, sheltered and accompanied journalists and activists threatened by the state and were often the first and only international agency on the front-lines, when civilians and activists were facing serious risks, providing lifesaving and morally uplifting accompaniment and presence.”

It was heart-warming to experience again how NP’s work touched the lives of so many people — activists, communities, fisher folk, human rights defenders, child soldiers, and others. In the eastern part of the country our group visited with dedicated community activists and organizers who are still doing critical work — promoting peace, justice, coexistence and nonviolence.

Fernando went on to say: “NPSL friends rallied around to support me when I was arrested and facing threats after my release. While personally benefiting from NPSL, I also worked closely with them to protect other civilians and activists at risk, recognizing our limitations and drawing on our strengths as national and international activists.”

Moving forward

While Sri Lanka is in ‘post war context’ it is still grappling with the underlying issues the led to the conflict as well as the painful and controversial end of the war in 2009, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians. While there are positive



Nonviolent Peaceforce Sri Lanka team.

continued on back page

Journey to South Sudan

By Simon M., former Communication Officer, NP

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK ME how my recent trip to South Sudan was and I struggle to answer. It would be so much easier if I had just returned from vacation in a peaceful country. I could simply talk about the great weather, a surprising local gastronomy and share my amazing wildlife photos. After returning from a war-torn country, one made worse by a humanitarian crisis on all fronts and a famine—where do I start?

First time back since war broke out

This was my second trip to South Sudan, almost three and a half years after the war broke out in December, 2013. Now, 1.9 million people have been internally displaced and another 1.6 million have become refugees in neighboring countries. By July 2017, the humanitarian community estimates that 5.5 million will be severely food insecure—equal to half the population of Belgium, my home country!

In addition, there has been an increase in attacks on humanitarian personnel and assets. Last summer, civilians, mainly women and children, seeking assistance in a Protection of Civilians site were directly targeted and attacked despite the presence of the UN peacekeepers. These incidents have a very negative impact and interfere with humanitarian operations that save lives and preserve dignity.

I'm overwhelmed and heartbroken. I felt powerless before so much suffering. That's what I'm first telling people who ask me about my trip. Then, I tell them about the amazing work done by my colleagues who gave me the outstanding opportunity to join them for five weeks across the country.

Hope lives in a difficult place

Our journey started at a protection site in Juba, which houses 34,000 displaced people. I was particularly excited to see some of NP's national colleagues I met in 2015. However, I was quickly disenchanted when I realized life in the camp is precisely how I left it two years ago. Surrounded by

fences and watch towers, thousands of Nuer families live in tents susceptible to flooding or strong winds, surrounded by stinky outdoor toilets and dust. In the middle of this huge camp, two tents are used as an office by NP. There, NP's national staff, those living in the camp and those coming from the Juba office, meet. Throughout the day this office is used as base to discuss their work to protect and to strengthen the ability of civilians to protect themselves or other civilians.

Nonviolence is not only a strategy, it's a philosophy. And I'm always impressed with the resilience of NP's national staff who, despite their current miserable situation, continue to have faith in a bright, peaceful and prosperous future for their country.

A few days later our little delegation flew to Bentiu, the largest protection of civilians site in the country with more than 125,000 people seeking protection and assistance. This place started out in complete chaos three years ago and the camp is now organized in blocks. There is a water irrigation system to prevent floods during the rainy season. It looks like Juba's but with four times the people and size. Again, I felt very inspired by the courage, strength and hope of our national colleagues. Some have been living 24/7 inside the perimeter of the fences since January 2014 with their families. When I was overwhelmed by what I witnessed, they were the ones who kept me motivated with their smiles and unwavering faith in humanity.

Outside the camps

I also had the amazing opportunity to join two other community-based teams in Rumbek and North Bahr El Ghazal. I assumed life would be better for the civilians living outside the camps, but it's not that easy. With the aggravated drought and conflicts across the country, roads are very hazardous. This makes it extremely difficult to bring the necessary food and medicines to the local markets. Women



Simon with national colleagues in South Sudan.

the importance and the need for more unarmed strategies to protect civilians affected by armed conflict. These words are now in the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. NP is at the frontline. We live within the affected communities and our non-partisanship lets us access areas where no one else can go. Our teams of national and international staff are very knowledgeable of the situation and our expertise makes a difference. More than ever our

methodology needs to be promoted and supported. Together, let's tell the Women Peacekeeping Teams they won't have to risk their lives to find food for their children. Let's show the children born in a camp that a tent is not a home. Let's help our national colleagues and the whole population of South Sudan! Let's restore their faith in humanity and in a peaceful future!

Simon started working for Nonviolent Peaceforce in 2012 as an Communications Associate intern in Mindanao, the Philippines while completing his bachelor degree in communications and media studies. He was later promoted to Strategic Communications Officer working in our headquarters. In May 2017, Simon started a new career where he will continue focusing on the protection of civilians.

We wish him a very warm farewell!

walk for hours under the sun risking harassment, rape or being killed to find food. I met with some of NP's Women Peacekeeping Teams who shared their concerns with me. NP's trainings and support have effectively helped them to prevent gender-based violence for years, but now they face a new challenge of finding enough food to live. Some of them will soon try to travel to another country to seek humanitarian assistance in a refugee camp. They know their chance to survive the journey is 50/50. But they'd rather die trying than slowly starve to death.

Bright spots

I know this story may sound pessimistic, but it is also a great opportunity to learn from our mistakes. Violence leads to violence and South Sudan has demonstrated the limits of international intervention. For the very first time in the history of the UN, the Security Council has recognized

Searching for home in Iraq

By Tiffany Easthom, Executive Director



Driving northwards toward Mosul in Iraq I was struck by the “ghost town” nature of the places we drove past.

THE SUN WAS JUST COMING UP as I was sitting in the backseat of a Land Cruiser, pulling out of the calm and safety of the city of Erbil in northern Iraq. Traveling with colleagues from the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) we were headed to Mosul. The offensive on the western part of the city was underway. As part of a larger campaign to eliminate ISIS presence in Iraq, the Iraqi-led coalition forces were working to reclaim the city after it fell to ISIS two years ago.

Laying the foundation

As I listened to the OCHA colleagues’ narrate what we were seeing and were going to see, I felt a surge of anticipation and nervousness. I was in Iraq with our team to lay the foundation for NP’s newest

project—to implement unarmed civilian protection to support civilians affected by the fighting in the area. On the trip we would be building up contacts with key personnel including the various fighting forces, United Nations (UN) and non-governmental organization (NGO) personnel, as well as affected populations and civilians mobilizing grassroots responses. All of whom are essential to inform our activities and strategy to ensure the safety of our protection officers.

Signs of war

As we rolled through the countryside on an indirect route, chosen for safety and to avoid active fighting, I could see the all too familiar signs of war: checkpoints run by various armed groups every few

kilometers, lone groups of young men moving lives tock along roads, heavily loaded transport trucks carrying all manner of goods and countless military, UN and NGO vehicles. Perhaps most striking from this vantage point was the widespread destruction and little presence of other civilians. We moved past farmland and through villages mainly empty of inhabitants. Damage to bridges, water pumping stations, factories and homes was common. We saw buildings collapsed upon themselves, small streets nearly impassable due to rubble, sides of homes riddled with bullet holes and larger gaping holes caused by artillery fire. It was clear that the fighting had been fierce and impacted nearly everyone who had been living there.

The “ghost town” nature of the places we drove past was striking. The vast majority of civilians had fled and either taken shelter in temporary displacement camps or found refuge with family or friends in other parts of the country or beyond. However, it was clear that people were incredibly eager to return to their homes. We traced the route of the offensive from where it had started northwards towards Mosul. Along the way, we could see small groups of civilians pushing their belongings in wheelbarrows, loaded down with bags on their backs, trying to move home—even if that meant returning to a house and community damaged by war.

Resilience in the face of conflict

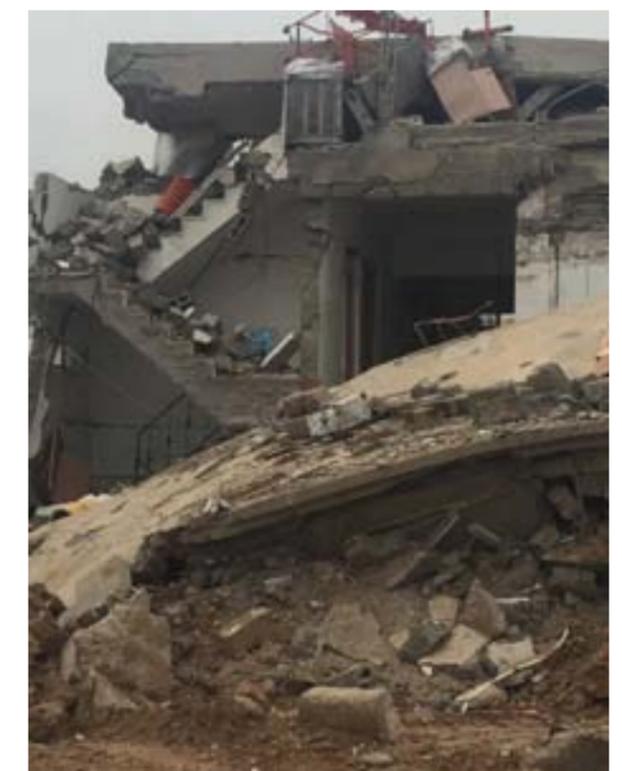
I am always struck by how determinedly and how quickly signs of “normal life” will appear. This happens even in ongoing fighting and in the first days after sudden displacement. It seems that our very human nature to build home, community and self-reliance is unstoppable. Even in the most chaotic of circumstances, people gather together to create shelter, to find food and cook meals, to trade and set up small markets. This unbreakable sense of humanity is common across the world. It is what inspires NP’s work and keeps us motivated.

Introductions and assessment

As the day unfolded we visited the places that civilians passed through on the dangerous journey fleeing Mosul — field hospitals, transit sites and displacement camps. Being new to the area, our job was to ask as many questions as we could, to introduce the work of NP, to learn what kind of unarmed civilian protection support was needed and to build relationships. As we were spending time at a transit site, we were completely surrounded by people in need — mothers with babies on their hips, elders struggling to walk, ill and injured people looking for clinics and children weaving throughout, some quiet and shy attached to their parents’ legs and others, playful and excited at the arrival of newcomers. Their lives had been completely uprooted and they needed help.

Up and running

The NP team is now operational in northern Iraq. They have implemented an emergency protection programme along the evacuation routes. We recognize that this is only the first step and that there is immense potential for growing this program. ➡





Nonviolent Peaceforce
2610 University Ave. W. Suite #550
St. Paul, MN 55114
1.612.871.0005
nonviolentpeaceforce.org

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT #3675
TWIN CITIES MN

NP Head Office

13 chemin du Levant, Bat. A.
01210 Ferney Voltaire
(Greater Geneva Area), France
+33.(0)9.674.619.48

US Office

2610 University Ave. W. #550
St. Paul, MN 55114
1.612.871.0005

field notes June 2017

Reflections from Sri Lanka, continued

steps being taken in terms of building a peaceful pluralistic society—clearly, there is still much work to be done.

NP developed much of its core identity through its work in Sri Lanka emphasizing the primacy of local actors; seeking to support local protection mechanisms; following a strict adherence to non-partisanship, and the critical importance of building strong relationships with all the stakeholders.

It was wonderful to catch up with so many old friends, and a special pleasure to visit with Umar Jaleel. I stayed with him and his family in their home in Mutur, on the eastern side of the island. Jaleel helped establish and support the NPs work in Sri Lanka, and he also went on to work for NP in the Philippines. After his work with NP, Jaleel returned home to his family and his fishing business.

Sri Lanka, like most places, still has work to do to develop a society that includes many voices and many perspectives. It is my hope that NPSL was able to contribute to a pluralistic society that expands the space for peace, justice and nonviolence. I was glad to return and see so many of those who helped bring NP's pilot project to life! 🐟

Jan Passion lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where he works as a consultant. He volunteers with the Bay Area Rapid Nonviolent Accompaniment Project. He recently embarked on a new vocation taking people sailing on the Bay.



Creative ways to support NP

- Donate airline miles from Worldperks or Delta Airline Skymiles.*
- Host a house party to fundraise for NP.
- Donate auction proceeds at www.charity.ebay.com
- Make a monthly gift at nonviolentpeaceforce.org/donate
- See if your employer has a gift-matching program.
- Leave a legacy of hope and dignity by making a planned gift.

* Donated miles are not considered tax-deductible by the IRS.

Nonviolent Peaceforce is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization [Tax-ID 35-2197019]. All donations made within the US are tax-exempt.