

Since NP began working in Iraq in 2017, one of its key focuses have been to enhance the safety and security of families displaced by conflict. Early on, NP established a presence in the region south of Mosul, the area that Jeddah internally displaced persons (IDP) camp is located in. Since NP began working in the camp, NP has been supporting the local community and camp residents to protect civilians from violence and harm, as well as create an enabling environment for displaced people to access their rights.

Late in 2020 and early 2021, most IDP camps across Iraq were closed, while many people were unable to return home due to fear of discrimination, violence, harm and for not having access to basic services. Jeddah camp was left as one of the only four remaining IDP camps in Federal Iraq. However, as new families arrive in the Jeddah camps, both from camps that have been closed and from other areas of Iraq and Syria, they are often excluded by community members on basis of perceived affiliation with ISIS. Building community cohesion within camp has proven to be a challenge in this context, and tensions can mount to the point where even men's football games and children's quarrels can escalate to larger physical fights and violence involving displaced families and bystanders.

Youth play a central role in this scenario. Young men, for example, can engage in violent behaviour due to negative coping mechanisms and trauma that aggravate existing tensions. On the other hand, youth are also key agents of change, contributing to nonviolence, peace and protection of civilians at risk of harm in the community. To encourage and support young men and women's potential to become protagonists in protecting community members from harm, and ensuring the primacy of local actors – one of the pillars of NP's methodology, Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) – NP organized a series of sessions to actively engage local youth in a community-based process for violence prevention. The trainings took place both with residents of Jeddah 5 camp and host community members living in Qayyarah town.

After engaging with the head of the youth council in Qayyarah (south Mosul) and other youth and community leaders in Jeddah 5, NP

developed a tailored training curriculum based on different scenarios and everyday challenges faced by the youth in their communities. This curriculum was developed and adapted by NP, in particular by NP's National Protection Officers, based on their in-depth knowledge of the context in the south Mosul area, making it localized and relevant to the communities. The training was facilitated by NP between August 15th and September 1st, with a total of 27 participants, including 12 young women and 15 young men from both Jeddah 5 and Qayyarah.

Based on real life examples, the participants were able to reflect on and discuss key issues about peaceful conflict resolution and the strengthening of relations among the community. These included:

- identifying the various ways that violence can manifest itself, and the different spaces where it can be present;
- harmful consequences of responding violently – including conflict escalation, damaging relationships, and physical harm;
- how self-awareness and showing restraint can help avoid these consequences; and
- most importantly, the participants developed and shared strategies for addressing and preventing violence. This included working with the young people on positive coping mechanisms including managing anger.

The young men, in particular, discussed conceptions of manliness and honour and how these can contribute to violence. During the young women's discussions, on the other hand, issues like harassment in public places and gender-based violence were raised. By the end of the sessions, the majority of the participants demonstrated a shift in perspective, valuing restraint and learning how to better address potentially violent situations.

*“We learned that we can prevent problems if we control our feeling when we feel angry and this will reduce or prevent violence as well as controlling ourselves helps us maintain the relationship among each other” a young male IDP from Jeddah 5 said.*

NP sought to create a safe space during the sessions, encouraging openness and participation of the young men and women who attended. This allowed the participants to feel comfortable to a point where many shared very personal stories of violence they experienced and witnessed in the past. Sharing their thoughts and feelings in such an honest and vulnerable way enabled them to think about the harmful impact of violence on their lives and on their community, how they might contribute to that violence, as well as the possible nonviolent alternatives to resolving conflicts. The participants expressed that the sessions helped them understand that violence is not only physical, how violence of all kinds can be harmful for communities and their families, and that they are capable of managing their own anger. They concluded that the tools they learned as a result of the sessions would help them better address issues related to violence in future.

NP's capacity building efforts aim to have a lasting effect on participants, their family members and the community more widely, creating change that is ultimately steered from within the community. Enabling youth to become leaders in violence prevention and reduction increases their agency and participation in addressing key challenges within the community, including barriers to other humanitarian concerns, such as the right to dignified return.

An initial follow-up conducted by NP with the two groups from Qayyarah the following weeks indicated that the sessions continued to have an impact in the communities. Participants in both the male and female groups gave examples of how they were applying their learning in their daily lives. Some mentioned cases when they were able to prevent fights within the family, at work, and in social situations, while others talked about changes in their own attitudes and behaviours towards others.

The young men's group also showed significant awareness and concern over gender-based violence and harassment in the community, as well as ideas for addressing this problem. They, as well as the young women's group, have since participated in meetings arranged with the help of NP to speak with the community police about local protection concerns. NP is continuing to

follow up with the groups to identify new opportunities to coordinate on preventing violence, against women in particular, and creating an active community of youth working to enhance the safety and security of residents.

This is one of the many ways in which NP is helping to make sure that communities are able to protect themselves and further develop their own, community-based, nonviolent conflict resolution mechanisms. Recognizing this potential, NP considers these sessions as an introduction to nonviolent conflict resolution and a way to have the youth start to address issues of violence in their communities, from interpersonal, to family, to communal levels. NP expects that continuous active engagement among the youth, will lead to their involvement in forming and supporting community-based protection mechanisms in the region.

*"It is good to have such an objective to discuss. It gave us more information on how to solve issues related to violence in a peaceful way. It is possible now to be more careful when subjected to different types of violence. Force is not always the best choice" a participant in the session with young men in Qayyarah concluded.*