

# 4.4

## Stages of conflict

*I conclude ... that—as with many instruments that can help make the difference between war and peace—an unarmed civilian presence can sometimes be useful in different phases: in a conflict prevention mode; during the mediation of active conflict, when popular voices of moderation risk being extinguished by the forces of violence; and in the post-conflict phase, in support of the implementation of peace agreements and the consolidation of peace.*

*Christopher Coleman, Director of Civilian Capacities Project at the UN  
(2012, p.15)*

Complex as conflicts may be, they generally pass through well-recognized stages. Recognizing these stages can help UCP practitioners at the field level to understand better the conflict dynamics and developments, and to formulate appropriate scenarios and timely responses. Stages of conflict include latent conflict, confrontation, crisis, outcome, and post crisis (figure 2, below based on: Galtung 2000, p.2). Though most conflicts go through these different stages, they often jump back and forth, as unresolved issues may lead to additional confrontations and crises. Protracted conflict in particular may not easily fit a linear model, nor will conflict in urban areas, in many cases. Additionally, conflict may manifest differently in specific local areas, so that nearby communities appear to be in different stages at the same time. UCP is applied in all stages of a conflict (see figure 3 for an example). Different methods can be applied simultaneously and are not confined to one particular stage.

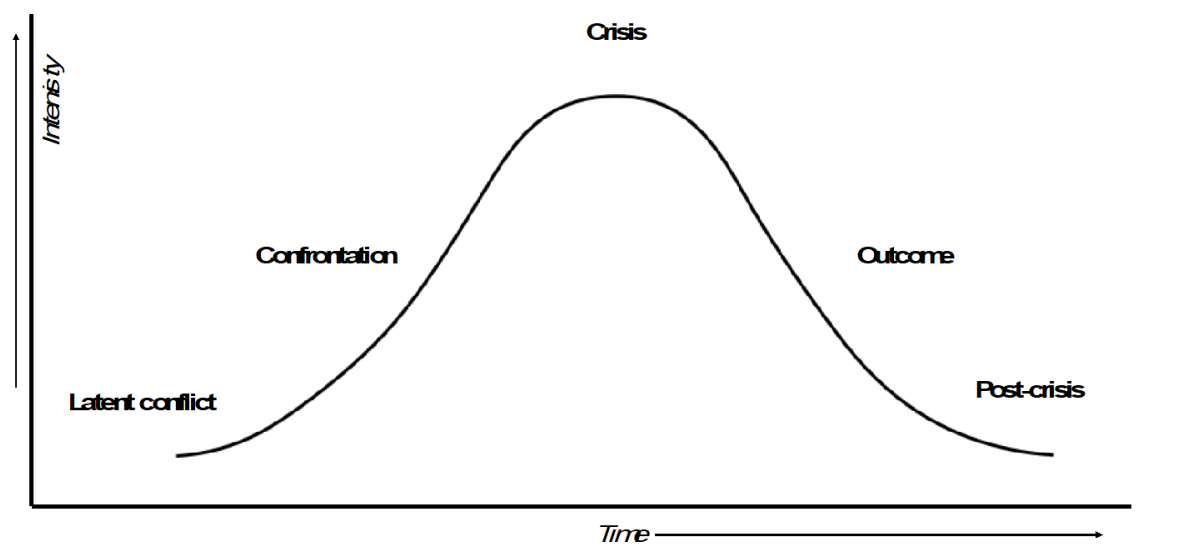


Figure 2: Linear model on stages of conflict

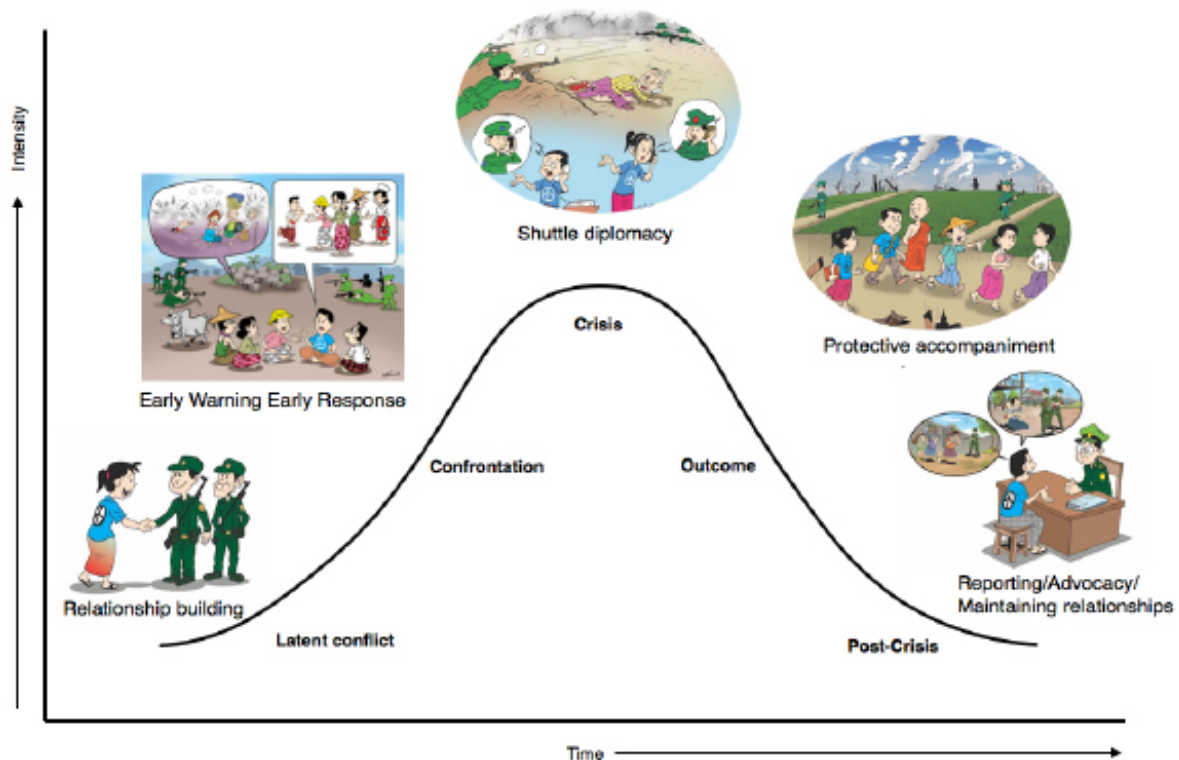


Figure 3: UCP methods are applied in all stages of a conflict cycle. Multiple methods can be applied simultaneously. Methods are not confined to one particular stage. In the example above, the relationship with the military actors is further built during the shuttle diplomacy effort at the crisis stage. The early warning plans of communities may be reviewed and refined at the post-crisis stage.

## LATENT CONFLICT

Latent conflict is the stage when there is an incompatibility of goals between two or more parties, which could lead to open conflict. The conflict is hidden from general view, although one or more of the parties are likely to be aware of the potential for confrontation. There may be tension in the relationships between the parties and/or a desire to avoid contact with each other at this stage (Fisher, 2000).

As UCP is ideally applied in a preventive capacity, the early stages of a conflict are particularly important. A wide variety of methods can be used. Latent conflict is the ideal place to establish EWER systems together with communities, and to build relationships and engage in dialogue, especially in a situation with recurring cycles of violence. It is also a good time for capacity enhancement. Though tensions are relatively low, local actors are often aware that there is a potential for conflict and are willing to explore options for early response.

## CONFRONTATION

At the stage of confrontation, the conflict has become more open. If only one side feels there is a problem, its supporters may begin to engage in demonstrations or other confrontational behaviour. Occasional fighting or other low levels of violence may break

out between sides. Each side may be gathering its resources and perhaps finding allies, in the expectation of increasing confrontation and violence. Relationships between the two sides become strained, leading to polarization between the supporters of each side (Fisher, 2000).

At this stage UCP teams may intensify their monitoring and may engage in rumour control to de-escalate tensions. Intensified efforts of UCP personnel are often a direct result of intensified efforts undertaken by local actors to protect human rights or resolve conflicts. UCP practitioners may be needed to create safer spaces for dialogue to take place and to provide protective accompaniment to local conflict negotiators and at demonstrations.

Furthermore, UCP teams may engage with government officials, security forces, and UN peacekeepers to ensure the protection of vulnerable communities in case violence occurs. Finally, they may use their relationships to negotiate and facilitate mutual commitment from aggressing parties to not attack specific places (e.g., hospitals, schools) or people (e.g., civilians, women, children, foreigners).

## CRISIS

The crisis is the peak of the conflict, when direct physical violence is most intense. In a large-scale conflict, this is the time when people on all sides are being killed. Normal communication between the sides has probably ceased. Public statements tend to be in the form of accusations made against the other side(s) (Fisher, 2000). There may be mini-cycles within a longer overarching cycle of conflict that leads to a return to crisis stages periodically within the larger cycle. In protracted conflict, it may be that the conflict is stuck in crisis or some combination of crisis and confrontation. It may also be useful to think of smaller cycles of conflict lasting a day or a few days happening within these long-term conflicts, and break specific incidents down in different stages in order to identify opportunities for response.

In crisis situations UCP practitioners may use protective presence, accompaniment, and interpositioning to stop violence and provide protection to vulnerable groups. If they are not able to provide sufficient direct protection, they may use advocacy and multi-track dialogue to encourage other actors to stop violence or provide protection. In Mindanao, for example, UCP personnel, together with a large number of civil society organizations, on one occasion managed to negotiate a temporary ceasefire for a human corridor. Because of the close relationships built up over a long period of time, the leadership of both parties agreed to hold their fire for a short while, just long enough to evacuate a number of vulnerable civilians.

Though external UCP teams may try to stay as long as possible in crisis areas to protect civilians, there are high-intensity crisis situations in which they have to evacuate from the area. When UCP practitioners are no longer able to protect themselves, they cannot protect others. UCP security protocols (see module 5 for more) identify good relationships and mutual protection between UCP teams and local people as essential for security. This allows UCP personnel often to be the last international civilian actors to evacuate a crisis area. Moreover, they will return to the area as soon as possible.

While there have been instances where UCP organizations have had to evacuate from a particular site, in most cases they have been able to return. That said, local staff of international UCP agencies generally stay in their own communities when international staff evacuate. If there is reason to believe that local staff will be particularly targeted, they may be evacuated too. This is a difficult situation that must be prepared for ahead of time if at all possible.

## OUTCOME

One way or another, direct physical violence subsides and the crisis leads to outcomes of various sorts. One side may defeat the other(s), or perhaps call a ceasefire. One party may surrender or give in to the demands of the other party. The parties may agree to negotiations, either with or without the help of a mediator. An authority or other more powerful party may impose an end to the fighting. In any case, at this stage the levels of tension, confrontation, and violence decrease somewhat with the possibility of a settlement. If there is no clear victor and neither party is destroyed, the groups may develop a 'cost-consciousness' of the losses each side is incurring. In this period groups may be more likely to welcome UCP and begin earnestly looking for a negotiated solution to the conflict and for help maintaining any agreements (Schirch, 2006, p.68).

In the outcome stage, UCP practitioners may organize an emergency response assessment and accompany vulnerable people to safer places or to designated service providers. They may also provide protective presence to threatened survivors in hospitals, conflict negotiators or human rights defenders who visit crisis areas to investigate violations and abuse. UCP practitioners have played critical roles in monitoring ceasefires during this stage of the conflict. Through the verification of incidents, reporting and rumour control, they can help to stabilize the situation and create a space in which local actors can transform these ceasefires into peace agreements.

## POST- CRISIS

Finally, at the stage of post-crisis, direct violence has significantly decreased. This also leads to a decrease in tensions and to more normal relationships between the different parties in the conflict, which allows for nonviolent political contestation. However, if the issues and problems arising from their incompatible goals are not adequately addressed, this stage could eventually lead back into another cycle of escalating conflict, leading to another crisis. In fact, many peace agreements have collapsed within five years.

At this post-crisis stage, UCP practitioners can help facilitate the transition from crisis to peacebuilding. They may be involved in evaluating the crisis with local communities. They may support communities in redesigning protection strategies and strengthening the capacity of local peace infrastructures to respond to current needs and in anticipation of possible future cycles of violence. In light of their exit strategy, external UCP teams will make an effort to further move the ownership of UCP activities to local peace committees, NGOs and CSOs, and community protection teams. These protection strategies are important as they provide the space and stability in which peacebuilding activities can unfold and set the stage for reconciliation.

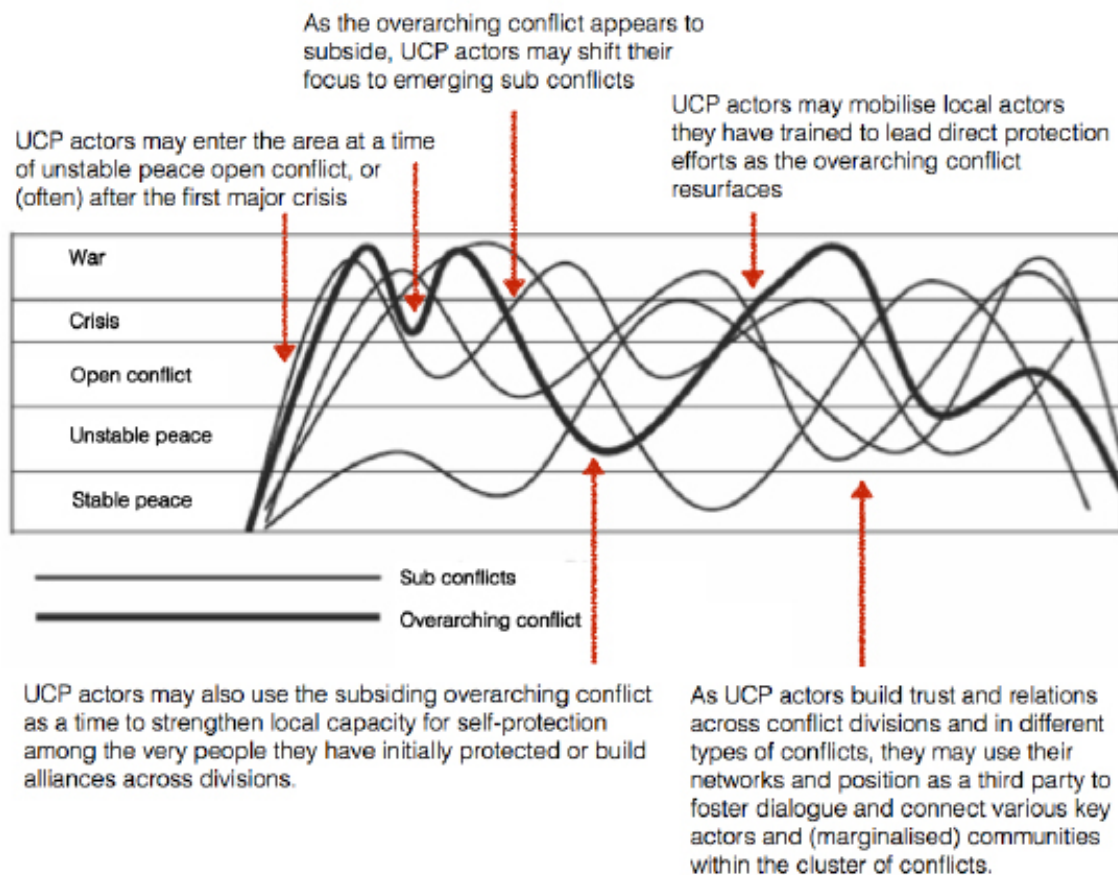


Figure 4 (Adapted from unknown source) shows a more complex, though still linear, cycle of conflict and how UCP actors not only operate on different stages of one particular conflict, but may also jump from a crisis of one conflict to a crisis of another (often related) conflict, weaving a complex protection response by connecting various processes and people.

## 4.5 Needs assessment

Needs assessments are usually carried out in conjunction with conflict analysis, before initiating operations or establishing a presence in a country or a specific area of violent conflict.<sup>4</sup> Conflict analysis allows UCP agencies to determine if there is a role for UCP to play in a particular type and stage of conflict. Though the answer may be affirmative, it does not mean that UCP can be implemented immediately. First, UCP teams need to

4 Conflict analysis often precedes and follows a needs assessment. UCP teams may conduct a preliminary conflict analysis before carrying out a needs assessment at the field level. The needs assessment will provide them with more detailed information about the conflict that allows them to finalize the conflict analysis.



determine if there are vulnerable populations in that conflict and if these populations need and want to be protected from violence. In case there are no vulnerable populations, or they do not want protection or support in violence prevention, there is no reason for UCP practitioners to be present. Second, they need to find out if affected communities will accept non-local UCP personnel to live and work in the area. UCP practitioners need the acceptance and consent of local actors to conduct their operations effectively. Needs assessments are conducted to answer these questions. While local efforts and organizations do not need to consider if they can live and work in their own area, they do need to understand the needs and risks and what, if anything, they can do to address these needs, especially if they aim to protect civilians outside of their village or ethnic group. Some groups and organizations will do this intuitively and informally, while others will use more formal and articulated processes. What follows is more oriented to an international organization entering a community, but has elements that may be helpful to local organizations as well.

## **WHAT IS NEEDS ASSESSMENT?**

A needs assessment is a systematic process for determining and addressing needs, or gaps between current conditions and desired conditions. In the context of UCP, a needs assessment usually determines the safety and security needs of civilians in situations of violent conflict. UCP teams aim to measure the discrepancy between current conditions and wanted conditions, and to measure their ability to appropriately address the gaps. Other needs, such as food or healthcare, may occasionally be assessed by UCP personnel in isolated areas with a lack of other service providers. These needs will then be shared with appropriate service providers in areas nearby who may be able to address them.

## **HOW DOES NEEDS ASSESSMENT WORK?**

Needs assessments are conducted to answer the following basic questions:

- What are the most vulnerable areas?
- Who are the populations and individuals most at risk in those areas?
- What are the (most urgent) protection needs of those at-risk populations and individuals?
- Why have these needs not been addressed (yet)?
- What are the existing local structures and mechanisms that address safety and security needs?
- How can UCP teams enhance these structures and mechanisms?
- Are others trying to address these needs? Who are they? What have they achieved?
- Can UCP organizations safely address (some of) these needs? Do they have the capacity?
- Are UCP practitioners the right people to address these needs? Can others do it better?
- Do local actors want UCP organizations to address these needs?
- What could be the negative impacts of the presence and involvement of UCP practitioners?

It is important that UCP teams conduct their own needs assessments, rather than solely relying on the outcomes and recommendations of third parties (national and international). Conflict situations continually change. The outcomes and recommendations of other actors may be outdated. More importantly, the needs assessments of third parties are driven by their own objectives and mandates. They will most likely exclude elements that are crucial to UCP. Furthermore, adhering to the primacy of local actors, UCP practitioners will engage directly with local communities in order to assess their acceptance of UCP. This consultation process includes the direct involvement of the populations and individuals at risk. The views of government officials or community leaders do not automatically reflect the views of the people they represent. These representatives may say that there is no need for UCP because they themselves sustain patterns of abuse, because they are out of touch with the reality of life in distant areas, or simply because they consider international presence to be a nuisance. Finally, conducting needs assessments is an important opportunity for UCP practitioners to start the process of building relationships, demonstrate nonpartisanship, and to show local actors that UCP interventions will be based on local needs and views. This underscores the need to engage with people from many different sectors during the needs assessment process.

UCP practitioners conduct needs assessments in the following situations:

- Before establishing a presence in a country that is experiencing violent conflict
- Before establishing an additional field site in a part of the country where UCP teams have infrequent or no presence
- After a crisis situation in a particular area of violent conflict (rapid response assessment)
- Before a UCP agency expands its programming to include an additional area of work (e.g. child protection or prevention of sexual and gender-based violence)

Needs assessments may also be carried out within the context of a particular activity. A training-needs assessment, for example, assesses the needs of participants to develop their capacity for addressing a specific issue. This type of needs assessment is not included in this section. Although each of the above-mentioned needs assessments will have different objectives, their basic outline is similar. This section focuses on the first three types of needs assessment, though it will be relevant for the fourth type as well.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN ACTION

Most assessments go through three basic stages: pre-assessment, assessment, and action planning. Pre-assessments are carried out before moving to a particular target area and are guided by the overarching mission purpose or mandate. This stage is basically about data collection through online research, as well as conversations with relevant actors in the area. In capital cities there are usually multiple sources of information about the situation in the target area. These sources include NGOs, think tanks, diplomats, and displaced communities from the target area. The action planning focuses on the basic question, “How are we going to translate what we have into what they need?” It includes the formulation of recommendations, (security) concerns, and outstanding issues, oriented toward meeting the overall mission goals.

The most important and difficult part of a needs assessment is the interaction with the community at the field level. UCP personnel are not there just to collect information. It is the start of a process to build relationships of trust and acceptance. It is also an opportunity to manage expectations about what UCP can and cannot do. Communities in areas of violent conflict usually expect international organizations to provide material aid and may not understand the concept of UCP at first. Additionally there may be a history of feeling disappointed or harmed by previous or current international interventions, and the related mistrust must be addressed.<sup>5</sup> Providing concrete examples about the functioning of UCP in other communities tends to be an effective way of explaining UCP. Answers to questions, such as “What makes you feel (un)safe in this community?”, may further provide UCP practitioners with context specific examples that they can use to explain UCP in a way that communities will understand (see Box 3). Thus, relying on the research of other agencies, no matter how thorough and informative they may be, is missing an important aspect of the needs assessment.

Initial community entry meetings usually prioritize senior leaders in the community followed by other relevant actors. UCP practitioners need to be sensitive to hierarchical structures and local customs, although they also need to make an effort to engage directly with groups that are at the bottom of a hierarchy. It is often necessary to speak with women separately, as they may not wish to articulate their needs in front of men.

### **BOX 3 | SAMPLE NEEDS-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS TAILORED TO SPECIFIC ACTORS (addressed directly to local actors)**

#### **Civilians**

- Do you feel safe in this community or your community? If not, why?
- What makes you feel unsafe in this community?
- Are you ever afraid to send your children to school?
- Do you or family members ever miss work because of fear of violence?
- Are the hours shops stay open reducing?
- Are there certain hours of the day when you are afraid to walk on the streets? Are the number of hours changing?
- Are there areas in you community where you will no longer go?
- Is it safe for you to travel outside of town? Is it safe for you to move anywhere in town? If not, why?
- What would have to change to make you feel safe? What does that mean?
- Are the authorities involved in improving your safety?
- If you did witness an incident of violence – where would you go? Who would you tell? Why?
- Who helps you when there is violence?
- Have you seen lots of other people moving in and out of town recently? If yes, where

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<sup>5</sup> Particularly people who have been asked to take part in surveys or questionnaires and have never seen any value come from it.



- are they coming from, where are they going to, and why are they moving like that?
- Has someone from your family or community suffered a conflict related injury? (e.g. bullet wound, unexploded ordnance, landmine). If so, did they receive treatment?

### Government

- Which are the most vulnerable groups or areas in the community?
- Which are the least vulnerable groups or areas in the community?
- What threats are there from outside the community?
- What threats are there from inside the community?
- What services are available in the community for people who are victims of violence?

### Police

- Do you see much violence inside the community? What kind of violence?
- What is your response when a violent incident occurs?
- Do all groups in society report cases to you?
- Do you see a change in the number of reported incidents of violence?
- Do you see a change in the types of violent incidents you are responding to?
- What contributes to these changes?

The rapid-response needs assessment is a type of needs assessment that UCP practitioners carry out frequently. Following incidents of violence, a bombing or an attack, UCP personnel may visit the area to assess the protection needs of the affected population. They may also provide a protective presence at the place of the incident or use other UCP methods to prevent additional incidents or revenge attacks from happening. In isolated areas UCP personnel may be the only international actors present and will play an important role in coordinating service provision with service providers in areas nearby.

UCP practitioners have to be careful, transparent, and creative in their approach to affected communities, because they may be expected to provide material aid. Moreover, community members may not ask for protection or respond positively to an offer of unarmed protection if the process and its implications have not been clearly explained. Sometimes, it is simply a matter of giving practical examples or asking the right questions (“what are you worried about?” and “why do you worry?” instead of “what can we do?” or “do you want protection?”).

When UCP teams provide a rapid response needs assessment they often engage with survivors or witnesses of violence. This is a delicate matter that requires refined listening skill and empathy as described in section 1 of this module. UCP personnel need to ensure that there is a safe space for survivors and witnesses to talk. They may take great risks in sharing their stories. Interviewers need to be careful in using the information from these stories and should communicate clearly at the start of the interview how the information will be used and that information will only be shared anonymously. They also need to allow survivors and witnesses to share their stories without interruption and not force them to talk about things they do not wish to talk about. Recounting

violent incidents may deepen the trauma people are suffering. At the same time, UCP personnel need to collect as many pertinent details as possible. Some questions that may be relevant include the time and place of the incident, clothing style, numbers, age, and behaviour of perpetrators etc. Questions about sensitive issues may have to be phrased carefully (“was there any sexual violence?” rather than, “did you get raped?”). Though care and subtlety are crucial, obtaining needed details of incidents is equally important, as decision makers may not act without specific details. At the same time, it is important NOT to press for details that will not be used, or that the asking itself will raise unrealistic expectations of results from the sharing. This is especially the case for UCP agencies that are not involved in advocacy, but use data collection to strengthen their own protection responses.

Information can be gathered in many different ways. Sometimes the least obvious sources can provide the best information. Taxi drivers or local caretakers at the UCP compound may have in-depth knowledge about the security situation in the area. Humanitarian aid agencies may have conducted extensive needs assessments in a particular area and be willing to share their conclusions and recommendations. In divided communities it is important to collect information from all sides of the divide. Information can be sensitive and needs to be managed confidentially. The imperative of “do no harm” requires utter meticulousness. The safety of the people providing information has the highest priority. Leaving a notebook containing details about human rights violations behind in a public taxi may endanger the life of the human rights defender or informant whose name has been written down in that notebook. Projects must consider email security and other technology security concerns. As the technology changes all the time, it is critical to try to stay up to date on what communication platforms are most strongly encrypted, etc. At the same time, transparency must be maintained about the fact and purpose of information gathering. Even a perceived lack of transparency can create suspicion among authorities or other actors that UCP personnel are spying. This can undermine the trust that has been carefully built up.

*There is a tension between helping [local ceasefire] monitors carry out their work in more safe and effective ways, and the generation and sharing of more timely, granular, and highly-sensitive crisis data with other actors. If we want to hold both objectives in view, we will need to do so carefully. More information about mass atrocity situations do not lead intrinsically to better outcomes for affected people. In reality, it is likely that the opposite is the case: digital technologies are often a causal vector for harm. In the context of Kachin, for example, reporting or sharing highly-sensitive information may actually undermine community protection and efforts to sustain the peace process.*

*Joseph Guay, Lisa Rudnick and Leeor Levy, Navigating Innovation & Risk in the Digital Age (2018, p. 8)*



#### Recommended Resources for Further Study (Read)

- ACAPS. (2013). Compared to what: *Analytical thinking and needs assessment*. Available at <http://www.acaps.org/resources/technical-briefs>
- ICRC. (2013) *Professional Standards for Protection Work*, Chapter 6. Geneva, Switzerland: ICRC

# 4.6

## Populations, individuals, or groups particularly impacted by violence

UCP practitioners conduct conflict analyses and needs assessments for the sake of preventing violence and protecting civilians. However, not all civilians threatened by violence need to be protected. Some civilians may be threatened, but feel confident in dealing with these threats on their own. They may have sufficient security measures in place or consider the threat not to be a high risk. Therefore, UCP practitioners provide protection services to civilians who request protection or to those who are highly susceptible to loss, damage, suffering, and death. These civilians are often referred to as ‘vulnerable’. Vulnerability however is a relative concept. Everyone is vulnerable in some way or another, but some more than others. The level of vulnerability depends on specific circumstances, some of which are more fixed than others. A threatened human rights defender can, for example, change his or her profession in order to reduce his or her vulnerability. A member of an oppressed ethnic minority does not have this option. However, this person may be able to leave the area or the country and by doing so, reduce his or her vulnerability. In this example, location determines the relative degree of vulnerability, despite the individual’s unalterable ethnicity. No matter how high the risk groups and individuals face, they are never ‘simply victims’ but must always be understood and respected as people with agency.

When people that are subject to violence in systemic ways are categorised as “the vulnerable”, there is a risk of removing their agency or power. It may resurface as the power of paternalistic care, in the form of aid agencies or UCP actors, feeling obligated to help or protect the “powerless”. Philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler suggests to see the situation of people deemed vulnerable as “a constellation of vulnerability, rage, persistence, and resistance” rather than seeing vulnerability as an identity of a particular population or individual. Butler adds that “persistence in a condition of vulnerability proves to be its own kind of strength, distinguished from one that champions strength as the achievement of invulnerability.” (Butler (2020, p 184).

Vulnerability can derive from a number of different factors. Children, youth, and the elderly may experience vulnerability because of their stage of life and dependence on others. Those with physical or mental disabilities or who are injured, ill, or pregnant may experience vulnerability due to their physical or mental condition. Others experience vulnerability because of their identity, whether that be religious, ethnic, national, tribal, or related to sexual orientation or gender identity (Knight, 2014). Finally, there are those who experience vulnerability due to their economic condition (poverty), residential dislocation, social isolation, occupation (journalists, defence lawyers), or political activity

(activists or human rights defenders). While vulnerability varies considerably in most communities, and some profiles are clearly more likely to be vulnerable than others, in reality it can be difficult to assess an individual's security from a quick glance. In many conflicts, young men are particularly at risk for forcible recruitment and abduction by one or all of the armed actors.

Generally speaking, UCP practitioners approach the protection of threatened populations from three different angles. They aim to:

- **Decrease the levels of vulnerability of threatened civilians:** a lone journalist who publishes articles about human rights violations may be vulnerable to violence, but when the journalist is connected to a support network of influential people she becomes less vulnerable;
- **Increase the capacity of these civilians to deal with threats:** the same journalist may join a workshop on security, where she learns additional ways of self-protection and increases his or her confidence;
- **Remove the threat, or at least deter potential aggressors from realizing the threat:** UCP personnel may engage with government officials and police who have the capacity to influence the potential perpetrator, or they may provide protective accompaniment to the journalist to deter violence, sometimes on a 24/7 basis, or provide proactive presence at the media office.

In the following sections, four different types of populations or frequently threatened groups will be explored in more detail: children, women, displaced people, and human rights defenders.

## 4.6.1 Children

*Throughout the years, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) has offered protection to Palestinian children who must pass through military checkpoints, or face the risk of harassment and/or violence from Israeli settlers and soldiers while trying to exercise their right to education. EAPPI has helped these children to deal with and expectantly conquer fear; a fear that would prevent them from enjoying this fundamental right.*

*Manuel Quintero Perez EAPPI International Coordinator Geneva (2013)*

The year 2018 was marked by the highest levels of children killed or maimed in armed conflict since the United Nations started monitoring and reporting this grave violation, according to the Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict that was released in July 2019. More than 24,000 violations were verified in 2018 in the 20 conflict situations on the Children and Armed Conflict agenda. Sexual

violence against boys and girls and the recruitment and use of children has also continued unabated with more than 7,000 children drawn into frontline fighting and support roles globally. Children living in the midst of armed conflict face unprecedented threats. These include the six types of grave child-right violations mentioned in UN Security Council Resolution 1612: killing and maiming; attacks on schools and hospitals; recruitment of children in armed forces or groups; rape and sexual violence; abduction; and denial of humanitarian access.

The protection of children is a recurring theme in the UCP sources of key guidance, described in module 2, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (especially art. 34-38). UCP personnel work in different ways to protect children from violence, frequently in partnership or coordination with other organizations such as UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children, and ICRC, and through protection clusters when they exist. Among others, they:

- Provide protective accompaniment to children, school teachers and child rights defenders;
- Provide protective presence at schools or at child friendly spaces in displacement sites;
- Monitor and report abuse and (grave) child rights violations
- Encourage armed actors to avoid the occupation of schools or move military posts away from schools;
- Monitor and manage the preservation of schools as 'zones of peace' in militarised environments
- Provide family tracing and reunification for separated, unaccompanied, and abducted children;
- Negotiate the release of child soldiers or accompany the return and reintegration of ex-child soldiers;
- Support campaigns against the recruitment of child soldiers
- Establish or strengthen local child protection committees in conflict affected areas;
- Strengthen the agency of children to participate in Early Warning / Early Response mechanisms or community self-protection strategies
- Advocate for child protection policies, the establishment of juvenile detention centres, or the integration of child protection provisions into ceasefire agreements

A unique contribution that UCP actors provide to the field of child protection is the direct protection of children and child rights defenders. These efforts are particularly relevant in places where traditional child protection systems are non-existent or dysfunctional. They can complement efforts to monitor and report grave child rights violations through UN resolution 1612 and have at times been welcomed by local child protection actors who are not in a position to openly challenge child rights violators in their villages. They may prefer to solve issues of concern quietly within families and communities rather than adding perpetrators to an international "list of shame". Sometimes UCP actors have integrated monitoring and reporting of grave child rights violations into broader protection strategies that include ceasefire monitoring or community-based Early Warning / Early Response. They have also utilized their relationships with armed actors or ceasefire parties to promote international child protection norms and discuss urgent child protection needs. Finally, UCP actors have supported children to become actors in their own protection and encouraged the representation of youth in peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding efforts.



Particularly vulnerable groups among children include:

- Unaccompanied and separated children;
- Child soldiers, ex-child soldiers;
- Children that suffer from sexual and gender-based violence;
- Children with disabilities or injuries;
- Displaced children;
- LGBTI children;
- Children whose families are (perceived to be) affiliated with extremist groups
- Children in conflict with the law;
- Abducted children;
- HIV/AIDS orphans or victims
- Children Human Rights Defenders (CHRDs)

The following paragraphs will provide a brief description of the protection needs of the first two groups of vulnerable children. It also describes how UCP is applied to address some of these needs.

### **UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN**

In areas of violent conflict many children have been separated from their parents or primary care takers. Parents may have died, disappeared, become critically injured, or kidnapped. Children may have been abducted or separated from their parents during their flight. They may have escaped from armed forces or brothels. Many of these children do not know where their families are or if they are still alive. They wander around alone, or in groups of other children, or they may have found an adult who is taking care of them.

Living amidst communities in areas of violent conflict, UCP personnel are in a good position to identify separated and unaccompanied children and identify their needs. They may be able to address some of these (protection) needs directly, while connecting these children with other service providers in the area. UCP teams have especially played a role in family tracing and reunification.



#### **CASE STUDY: REUNIFICATION OF SEPARATED CHILDREN IN MOSUL**

In Mosul, Iraq, Nonviolent Peaceforce supported the reunifications for seven children who had become separated from their parents. The relationships that NP developed with the local security forces were leveraged to support in the immediate tracing of relatives. In two instances, soldiers at checkpoints were able to alert relatives to where their children had been found. On another occasion NP was able to elicit information from the military regarding two children who were being held in abusive conditions by security actors and subsequently worked alongside UN Civil-Military Coordination and the Child Protection Sub Cluster to negotiate their release. This information, reported by junior officers concerned with the conduct of their superiors, was obtained

through sustained relationship building and placed those soldiers at risk of reprimand or retaliation. It was testament to the discretion and sensitivity of all involved that the children were rescued without repercussions for the sources of the information.

**SOURCE:** Nonviolent Peaceforce, 2018

## CHILD SOLDIERS AND EX-CHILD SOLDIERS

Over the past decade, the global spotlight has, above all, fallen on child soldiers. The “presence of an estimated 300,000 child soldiers has created substantially more attention than millions of civilian children killed and affected by war” (Brocklehurst 2010). In its fight against the use of children in armed conflict, the international community has implemented three kinds of measures: the ‘naming and shaming’ of perpetrators, the sanctioning of violators, and the use of juridical instruments to punish offenders. These measures have increasingly been criticised, as, despite increased policy awareness and legal protection mechanisms, the use of child soldiers has not diminished. Currently, there is renewed interest, with the aim of prevention, in understanding the underlying causes that prompt youth to join armed groups as well as links related to recruitment.<sup>6</sup>

Children participate as child soldiers for a variety of reasons. They are:

- Forcibly recruited;
- Manipulated by adults;
- Encouraged by their parents to become soldiers;
- Sent by their parents in times of economic distress, in exchange for payment or other economic assistance;
- Drawn to armed groups willingly, by ideals of manhood, because they support the goals of the group, or as an opportunity to avenge the death of relatives;
- Drawn to armed groups as a way of survival: they are from impoverished backgrounds or separated from their families;
- Drawn to armed groups as a surrogate/substitute family.

Whether recruitment is forced or “voluntary”, it exposes children to extreme risks, such as death, physical injury, psychological damage, drug addiction, and sexual abuse. A return to civilian life also often poses many challenges for both children and their communities.

UCP agencies work to prevent forced recruitment of children in vulnerable areas, such as refugee camps that border conflict zones. In Sri Lanka, Nonviolent Peaceforce accompanied mothers to military training camps where their children had been taken

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<sup>6</sup> Various studies have pointed out that the recruitment of roughly two out of every three child soldiers involves some form of voluntary enlistment. Furthermore, there have been calls for more attention to the consequences of child soldiering and the role of girls—in various African conflicts, girls have comprised 30-40% of child combatants and are considered to be fundamental to the war machine. They are often used as “wives” (i.e. sex slaves) of the male combatants. However, it is important to note that girls are not simply silent victims, but active agents and resisters during conflict.

and gained the release of the children. The organization also supported mothers when they demanded a cessation of child abductions and provided a visible protective presence at Hindu Temple festivals where children were routinely abducted. At times, when child soldiers escaped or were released, NP provided accompaniment as they travelled to safer places than their own homes. They also provided accompaniment to mothers who began reporting incidents to the human rights commission.

Often local governments, in collaboration with international agencies such as UNICEF and Save the Children, are the drivers of child protection processes, especially when it comes to child soldiers. In those cases, UCP teams may play a supporting role, using their presence in isolated areas to monitor the protection needs of ex-child soldiers following their reunification. Reunification and reintegration of ex-child soldiers can pose a range of challenges that the child or the community is not able to deal with. In some cases, the child may have been encouraged by their families to join armed forces and is now perceived as a burden. In other cases, the child goes voluntarily back to the same armed forces. In yet other cases, the child is not accepted by the community and is threatened or stigmatised as a “killer” or a “prostitute”.



#### **CASE STUDY: LOCAL CEASEFIRE MONITORS IN MYANMAR NEGOTIATE RELEASE OF CHILD SOLDIERS**

13 children (all boys), aged 10 – 16 years, who were working in a stone crusher plant, were forcefully recruited by one of the armed groups. The owners of the plant contacted us to report about the incident. Our network decided to proceed on the case with precaution as the tension was high, before we decided to visit the armed group post in the village. During these 10 days, the parents of the children had visited the post but returned without success. In a meeting that lasted for two hours, we explained the bilateral agreement and civilian protection to the post commander. Two weeks later the armed group contacted us and asked to come to the place where the children were undergoing training. A few days later we returned to the Township with all 13 children and reunited them with their families.

## 4.6.2

### Women

*Everyone, the community members and the soldiers, respect us when we are in the Women's Protection Team uniforms, because they know that we were trained to bring peace.*

*Grace, member of Women Protection Team in South Sudan, 2020*

Among women aged between 15 and 44, worldwide, targeted acts of violence cause more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war casualties combined. Up to 70 per cent of women experience physical or sexual violence from men in their lifetime—the majority by husbands, intimate partners or someone they know. As of 2018, in situations on the Security Council's agenda over 50 parties to conflict are credibly suspected of having committed or instigated patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence. In some situations, rape is used as a weapon of war, a deliberate strategy to hurt or humiliate the opponent. In some cultures, women are exchanged as part of peace agreements. Violence against women not only devastates their own lives and that of their children, but also fractures communities and stalls development. The presence of gender-based violence against women is a substantial obstacle against reaching gender equality, one of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. As the Council on Foreign Relations notes, "a substantial body of research now suggests that gender equity and the achievement of other development goals, such as health, education, social and economic rights fulfilment, and even growth, are inseparable." (Terra Lawson-Remer, CFR, 2012).

Sexual and gender-based violence is the most common threat to women in situations of violent conflict. It refers to violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty (UN General Assembly, 1993; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 1992). The majority of victims are women and girls. In many areas of violence, it is downplayed as an unfortunate but inevitable side effect of conflict. If laws exist that protect women from sexual and gender-based violence, they are seldom implemented. Women are often unsure what their rights are and what supporting mechanisms and legal processes are available to them. Women in rural areas may be illiterate and unable to navigate the legal system on their own. Family structures in traditional cultures often encourage women to accept gender-based violence as a part of life.

There is little if any recognition that men may also be victims of gender-based violence and there are currently no protections written into international standards. Men suffer from sexual assaults: castration and other genital mutilation, as well as rape in prisons and IDP camps, according to Laura Stemple (2006). Men suffer summary execution in wartime, their assailants assuming that men are enemy combatants; they suffer from the gender-based violation of conscription and abduction (Carpenter, 2009). The more women are typecast as a 'vulnerable group', the more men are typecast as 'perpetrator', rendering the notion of male vulnerability unimaginable. The assumption that certain

men may be or have been militarised and violent can increase their vulnerability. ‘Able-bodied, military-aged’ civilian men are seen as potential combatants and somehow assumed to be less worthy of protection by international and national legal norms. Motorcycle taxi drivers in Sierra Leone and Liberia, for example, have been assumed wholesale to be ex-combatants, which can lead to them becoming targets of ‘revenge’ violence by community members.

Though women in situations of violent conflict are particularly susceptible to violence, they should not be considered as passive victims of violence. Violent conflict can create large numbers of female-headed households when men are detained, displaced, have disappeared, or are dead. This can heighten insecurity and danger for the women left behind, since traditional protection and support mechanisms may no longer be operating. But women often take on leadership roles in these circumstances, whether as a matter of opportunity or of necessity. They are often at the forefront of peacebuilding and human rights defence. Women may also be forced to take over responsibilities and activities traditionally carried out by men. This often requires the development of new skills and confidence as they become involved in rebuilding the lives of their own families, as well as their communities. Moreover, women often play an important role in the prevention of and resolution of conflicts (Forced Migration Online, n.d.).

*Although many male respondents prioritised women at first when describing groups that they considered ‘vulnerable’, through discussion they often modified their thoughts, conceding that women were often better able to cope than men. And all Nuba men interviewed admitted without exception the crucial role of women in caring for the family as well as their wider contribution to protection...*

*Justin Corbett Learning from the Nuba (2011, p.21)*

In spite of the important roles that they play in enabling communities to survive times of crisis, women are often excluded from decision-making processes regarding peace and security. According to UN Women, of all participants involved in major peace processes between 1990 and 2017, only 2% of mediators, 5% witnesses and signatories, and 8% negotiators were women. Protection and security are widely considered to be responsibilities of men. Women often have different views and priorities regarding safety and security, including the needs of children and other vulnerable groups. Moreover, they have frequently learned more than men to find sources of power other than physical strength. Therefore, if women are not included in analysis, decision-making processes, and coordination mechanisms, many of their protection needs remain unaddressed, while their insights are not shared. These are missed opportunities for the development of appropriate protection strategies.

UCP organizations have recognized the often-unaddressed protection needs of women, their lack of access to support structures and decision-making processes, and their potential for playing an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Therefore, women are an important target group for UCP, as recipients of protection services and as drivers of local peace infrastructures. Furthermore, the protection of women is a key tenet of the UCP sources of guidance, described in module 2, including UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security.



In order to protect and support women affected by violent conflict UCP teams:

- Provide direct physical protection to women threatened by violence;
- Provide direct physical protection to civil society networks (men or women) that promote gender equality and the rights of women or sexual and gender minorities;
- Enhance the capacity of women's groups to undertake their own initiatives for peace;
- Enhance the capacity of law enforcement and local leadership in responding to gender-based violence;
- Support the establishment of women protection teams or promote the leadership of women by hiring and promoting local women as well as employing them as facilitators, trainers, or volunteers in UCP activities;
- Connect women networks across conflict divisions or fault lines
- Facilitate dialogue and information exchange between women's networks at the track 3 level and women leaders or negotiators at the track 2 and 1 levels;
- Accompany women to access services, especially survivors of sexual and gender-based violence;
- Raise awareness and develop capacity of local actors (men and women) about the rights of women, especially through the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW];
- Support and encourage state actors and other duty bearers to protect the rights of women;
- Strengthen and advocate for the inclusion of women in community security meetings, trainings, UCP teams, local protection teams, as well as formal peace process institutions;
- Develop early warning systems in areas where women are particularly vulnerable to violence;
- Formulate gender-sensitive ceasefire provisions.

Many UCP actors adopt a holistic approach to the protection of women that takes aim at gender inequality as a contributing factor to violent conflict. This includes drawing women into (formal) peace and decision-making processes and mobilizing women as peacemakers, ceasefire monitors, and protectors of civilians (women *and* men). By involving women in their own protection and presenting protection as a collaborative effort between protector and protected, UCP actors reconcile the above-mentioned tension between protection and participation and rebalance power within security processes. Furthermore, by promoting factors that improve the bargaining power of women and girls, they are better able to advocate for improved access to relief services or justice, and improve security within their communities. UCP actors also draw the attention of security actors and decision-makers to the informal spaces at the grassroots level where women make essential contributions to human security. By making these spaces more visible, UCP actors validate women's informal contributions to security and broaden the scope of the discourse on peace and security. In this way they contribute to remaking the tables instead of adding more women to tables that are made and held by men.

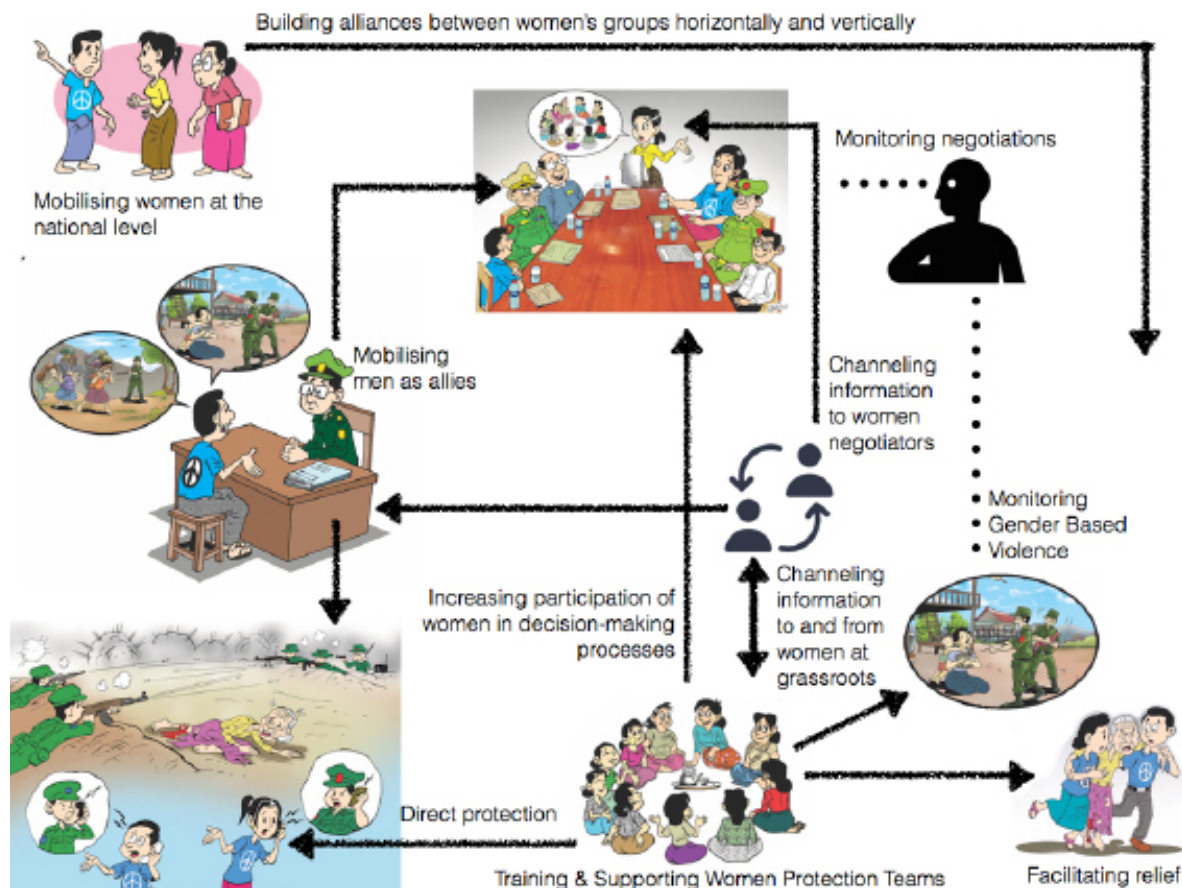


Figure 5: UCP actors may apply a holistic approach to women, peace, and security that includes all four pillars of the global Women, Peace, and Security agenda (Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief & Recovery)



## CASE STUDY: WOMAN PROTECTION TEAM MEMBER IN SOUTH SUDAN STANDS UP TO ARMED ATTACKERS

Charity joined the Mundri Women's Protection Team in 2017 and is an active peacemaker in her community. She has helped people resolve their disputes nonviolently, prevented instances of sexual and gender-based violence, and taught community members how to protect themselves in the case of a sudden attack. Charity is proud of her work, "I have skills now that nobody can take away from me. If anything happens in the community, they call me first to solve the problem because people trust me."

One night, Charity heard a noise close to her neighbor's house and ran to see what was happening. When she approached, she found her neighbor in distress as two armed men were forcing their way inside the house. "I cried out 'Oh, my dear sons!' and I spoke to them as neighbors." The armed men said to Charity, "Leave! We will kill all of you now." But Charity persisted. "Before, when I was not trained, I was afraid. But now that I'm trained on how to handle these situations, I'm not afraid." Charity said, "I know you are suffering. You have no money. Your relatives are not here. That is why you are attacking people during the night or during the day. We know very well. Even if we have something we can contribute to you because you are suffering. If you are not here,

we can not help you.” Charity invited them to come eat with her. “We shared food—we made a connection and they did not kill anyone.” Charity was able to convince them to leave without harming anyone. Sometimes people aren’t even aware of the trauma they are experiencing or causing.

This confidence to respond to violence is carried over into confidence in leadership. Charity hopes to help women in other communities form their own protection teams to improve the safety of civilians and increase women's leadership. As Charity noted, “In the past, women didn’t play any role in the community and didn’t have a voice in their own home. Now they play an important role, even in the government.”

**SOURCE:** Nonviolent Peaceforce, 2020, <https://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/blog/south-sudan-news/847-npss3rdannual>

## 4.6.3

### Displaced people

Displaced people, including refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), and returnees constitute a third population UCP actors often protect. Refugees and IDPs are people who have left behind their homes and communities because they have suffered (or fear) persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion or because they flee from conflict or natural disaster. Whereas refugees are outside their country of origin or habitual residence, IDPs have not crossed an international border to find a safe haven. Returnees are people that voluntarily or involuntarily return to their country of origin after a long absence.

The number of people forcibly displaced within and across borders because of conflict or persecution exceeded 70 million in 2019, the largest number since WWII according to UNHCR. Some 41.3 million people (58%) are internally displaced due to armed conflict, generalised violence, or human rights violations. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), thirty-nine per cent (39%) of 30.6 million new internal displacements recorded in 2017 were triggered by conflict and 61% by disasters.<sup>7</sup> The number of new displacements associated with violent conflict almost doubled in 2017, from 6.9 million in 2016 to 11.8 million.<sup>8</sup>

Natural disaster-related displacement is likely to rise in the coming decades. The 2014 Intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) report predicts that in the near

<sup>7</sup> Across 143 countries among 200 countries and territories monitored by IDMC, 2018 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID 2018)

<sup>8</sup> Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Iraq together accounted for more than half of the figure.

future millions of individuals will be forced to leave their homes due to climate change (IPCC, 2014). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, there were 18.8 million new disaster-related internal displacements recorded in 2017.

During their flight from areas of conflict displaced people continue to be exposed to multiple physical dangers, including sudden attacks and landmines, shortage of food and water, and lack of medical care. Moreover, refugee sites are not always set up in ways that promote the protection of and assistance to vulnerable groups. Old power struggles among displaced groups are often reproduced and traditional systems of social protection may come under strain or break down completely. High levels of violence, substance abuse, sexual harassment and rape, forced and early marriage, and forcible recruitment also play a role. The large influxes of refugees over short periods of time often lead to tensions with and within host communities, as they put a strain on local infrastructures and lead to competition over natural resources. In a similar way, the reintegration of returnees into their former communities can increase tension and open old grievances.

UCP personnel living within or near communities of displaced people are in a good position to identify and understand the different needs of displaced people. Special attention is given to the protection needs of women, children, and the elderly within displaced communities. In line with IHL and IRL, UCP organizations work in different ways and in coordination with UN and other humanitarian organizations to protect displaced people. They have provided protection to civilians within displacement sites, but also to communities at risk of being displaced, people on the move, people returning to their homes, and people reintegrating in their own communities or resettling elsewhere. They may:

- Provide protective presence in communities close to front lines to prevent forced displacement or assist communities in timely and safer displacement;
- Provide protective presence at transit sites to prevent exploitation, harassment, or trafficking;
- Provide protective presence and nonviolent crowd control at food distribution points;
- Patrol insecure areas in and around refugee or IDP sites;
- Provide protective accompaniment to people on the move, including people on their way to an IDP camp, people emerging from the bush, registered IDPs checking in on their properties or harvest, people on their way to and from aid distribution points, or returnees fearful of re-settling in hostile communities;
- Support IDPs and refugees in their efforts to resist forced returns;
- Establish local protection teams among displaced and/or host communities
- Negotiate humanitarian corridors for displaced people passing through insecure areas or permission for the provision of life-saving aid to displaced people, residing in areas that are off limits for humanitarian aid operations;
- Interposition between factions of displaced people in conflict with each other
- Mitigate conflicts between displaced and host communities and within displaced communities;
- Facilitate access to services (protection, aid, medicine, legal services) for displaced people;
- Monitor safe distribution of humanitarian aid and mitigate conflicts between

- humanitarian aid agencies and IDP leadership;
- Develop capacity and raise awareness of UCP with leaders of displaced communities about the protection needs of vulnerable groups;



### CASE STUDY: ACCOMPANIMENT OF RETURNEES TO GUATEMALA

From 1981 to 1983, indigenous Mayan campesinos fled Guatemala from the terror of the anti-insurgency policy of Rios Montt, then President of Guatemala. This led to the massacre of at least 100,000 campesinos and the destruction of numerous highland villages. Some refugees slipped back into Guatemala during the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s. On 8 October 1992 the Guatemalan government signed accords with the Permanent Commission (representatives of the refugees) to allow for their collective, organized return.

The refugees declared themselves Communities of Popular Resistance (CPRs) and engaged in a form of nonviolent direct action by choosing to re-enter the conflict zones as unarmed civilians. The CPRs requested a high profile protective international presence in moments of crisis. Many different UCP actors, including the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation and Witness for Peace (WFP) decided to respond to this request and accompany the refugees on their return to Guatemala. The presence of international accompaniers allowed the CPRs to return publicly and increased the political cost of violence against the CPRs.

The accompaniments were carried out from 1992 to 1997 and were coordinated by the National Coordinating Office on Refugees and Displaced of Guatemala (NCOORD) under the UN repatriation plan and repopulation of the conflict zones. At the 'first organized return', 100 buses, each bus including a pair of UCP accompaniers, departed from Mexico to Guatemala. As one of the UCP team members from WFP recalls, "Just on the other side of the border the roadsides were jammed with thousands of Guatemalans loudly cheering, waving the Guatemalan flag. It was such a heartfelt and warm homecoming."

When the returnees paused for the night and were assigned to military-type tents, they refused to use them, as they brought back too many memories, and demanded that they be replaced with civilian tents. Furthermore, when the Guatemalan government provided medical help, the returnees discovered that some of the doctors and nurses were military personnel and suspected them of being infiltrators. The leadership of the returnees then demanded that the military personnel leave, making it clear that they felt safer with the UCP presence and accompaniment.

**SOURCE:** Witness for Peace and Lisa Schirch, p22.

As displacement has increasingly become protracted, there is a need for more integrated responses to humanitarian emergencies that address the needs of a continuum of people affected by displacement, not just registered refugees or IDPs. This includes victims of



trafficking and smuggling at transit places or unwanted or stateless minority groups, whose needs may not be adequately reflected by existing legal or assistance frameworks. It also includes displaced people who are unable to return and have settled among the urban poor and marginalised groups of host countries, whose needs and vulnerabilities are difficult to distinguish.

UCP methods have successfully been applied to respond to some of these challenges. UCP actors have proactively responded to unexpected security threats civilians face in the turmoil of humanitarian emergencies, seeking local solutions together with affected populations. They have mobilized refugees to participate in their own protection, restoring a sense of dignity among people who have lost everything. They have provided protection for groups that have fallen through the cracks of humanitarian aid systems and supported local protection teams to mitigate conflicts between host communities and IDPs. Finally, they have provided frontline protection responses to emergencies and challenged attitudes of risk aversion or outsourcing security risk among humanitarian agencies. Central to all these efforts is a strong sense of the primacy of displaced people. As the story from Myanmar in box 8 shows, displaced people often already apply some form of UCP, though they may not call it that. External UCP agencies can support and validate these efforts, provide additional methods, or expand the support networks of IDP leaders. And as the story shows, these leaders may not necessarily be the secretary of the IDP camp administration committee, but perhaps an 18-year-old boy that knows how to talk to the military.



#### **CASE STUDY: TEENAGER BECOMES GO-TO PROBLEM SOLVER IN IDP COMMUNITY**

It was our village which became the first IDP Camp after that initial clashes. The initial clash lasted just for a while, and things got back to normal. Instead, there were serious clashes in other places. To avoid those battles, it was possible to hide in the jungle... Then we formed the organising committees, five persons in each team. The responsibility was to go around and motivate Kachin people to be united... Finally, our village parson was contacted by the district-level secretary of the Kachin Baptist Association. They took action to build temporary camps. Civilians around the state capital who were affected by the armed clashes also found some possible temporary places, to stay away from those clashes. Kachin Baptist Convention churches allotted spaces for the refugees. They also tried to get in contact with NGOs... Then the Kachin Army wanted me. The army supervisor saw I didn't want to serve them. So he helped me by giving me a position in the village administration committee so that the army could not get me to serve. He told me not to worry about the tasks and responsibilities because there were many elders including himself to advise me whenever I needed. This is how, at the age of 18, I became a village administrator... Even though I am not a member of the IDP camp administration committee or otherwise in charge, I am often asked to counsel and troubleshoot, because I am someone who knows how to talk to military personnel or leaders.

**SOURCE:** 'Like a Shady Tree for Those in Trouble. Experiences of War and Hopes for Peace of People Living Amidst Violent Conflict in Kachin State, Myanmar', compiled by Rachel Julian and others

PBI Photo / Accompaniment of Legal  
Representative of the Association of Friends of  
Lake, Izabal Eloyda Mejía, Guatemala / July 2012



espacios para la paz  
Brigades International  
Internacionales de Paz



## 4.6.4

### Human rights defenders

*In the middle of the solitude that human rights defence work can bring, turning round in a hearing and seeing the green jacket and a volunteer's face you say to yourself, 'ok, it's fine, let's keep going, I'm not alone, we're not alone.'*

*German Romero, DH Colombia, referring to the presence of Peace Brigades International.*

'Human rights defender' is a term used to describe people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights. Human rights include civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Particular issues of concern in areas of violent conflict are executions, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, discrimination, forced evictions, and access to health care. Human rights defenders investigate and report on human rights violations and abuse. They also accompany survivors of human rights violations, take action to end impunity, support better governance, contribute to the implementation of human rights treaties, and provide human rights education.

Many human rights defenders work in places where carrying out human rights activities, or giving voice to survivors and witnesses of human rights violations, can put their own lives at risk. Front Line Defenders, an international foundation for the protection of human rights defenders, reports that 304 human rights defenders were killed in 2019, 40% of whom were working on land rights, indigenous peoples' rights and environmental rights. Amnesty International reports that between 2014 and 2019 many states have introduced restrictive laws to silence and repress human rights defenders and attack the civic space in which they work. 'Some states have turned their back on previous commitments to the international human rights framework, even questioning the definition of a human rights defender.' (Amnesty International, 2019)

Human rights defenders are, perhaps, the group most frequently accompanied by UCP actors. An important reason for this is that the work of human rights defenders often has significant impact on the lives of many others. UCP actors have accompanied human rights defenders in many different countries: for example, lawyers who advocated on behalf of human rights workers who had disappeared in Guatemala, lawyers who filed lawsuits against army commanders and police chiefs in Colombia, and human rights activists who advocated for the protection of sexual minorities and sex workers in Indonesia. UCP personnel have sat in front of the offices of human rights defenders, courtrooms, and prisons, while human rights defenders conducted their affairs inside, sometimes for weeks on end. For many human rights defenders amidst armed conflict, the unarmed civilian presence and appearance of UCP personnel not only makes them feel safer and morally supported, but also reaffirms their belief in their own unarmed struggle for justice.

The protection of human rights defenders is a key tenet of the UCP sources of guidance,

described in module 2, including the Declaration of Human Rights Defenders (A/RES/53/144). UCP teams:

- Provide protective accompaniment to human rights defenders under threat;
- Provide presence and monitoring for human rights trials and tribunals;
- Build the capacity of human rights defenders to strengthen their own protection strategies;
- Monitor compliance of protection agreements (for example the EU guidelines for human rights defenders [2004], that EU member states pledged to implement through their missions abroad);
- Connect human rights defenders with each other and to international support networks in-country and abroad (for example through speaking tours);
- Encourage and support human rights defenders in building relationships with security forces and non-state armed actors, and include these actors in the support network;
- Indicate to government officials and other duty bearers the international expectation that human rights defenders be permitted to work unimpeded.

As discussed in module 3, many of these activities are augmented by or combined with advocacy for changes in specific policies and practices that contribute to the violence against human rights defenders.

While the direct protection of human rights defenders is the first priority of UCP actors, the issue of solidarity plays an important role as well, as the opening quote to this section illustrates. UCP actors may embody this solidarity in different ways with different actions across the world to ensure that human rights defenders are given the attention and platform they deserve. As Colombian human rights defender Adriana Arboleda from Corporación Jurídica y Libertad remarks: “We see PBI volunteers as human rights defenders who accompany other defenders, they are an expression of international solidarity, they are an expression of fraternity amongst peoples”.





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