

# 3

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MODULE 3  
UNARMED CIVILIAN  
PROTECTION:  
KEY METHODS

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## OVERVIEW AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This module introduces the main methods employed by UCP practitioners in the field. It is worth noting upfront that while we categorize them into five main approaches, the individual methods are rarely used in isolation, and they function interdependently in practice. And as UCP is constantly evolving and adapting, this may not describe every method used by UCP actors. UCP at its most basic revolves around the notion of being physically present and using that presence strategically to protect civilians. Some UCP organizations may use advocacy as a method, but these efforts will be based on what has been learned by being present in communities. Others may focus their efforts primarily on training local civil society networks, but they will do that with the aim of helping those networks in using their physical presence to protect civilians. Thus, whether UCP is applied by local actors in their communities or by international UCP organizations in foreign countries, the assumption of direct physical presence is woven into all UCP methods. Likewise, while relationship building is identified as one of the methods, good working relationships with relevant stakeholders are an essential component for all methods.

We have categorized UCP methods into five main groupings in order to better clarify the theory and practice of UCP. These include: proactive engagement, monitoring, relationship building, advocacy, and capacity enhancement. Each of these methods has a number of different applications:

- **Proactive engagement:** protective presence, protective accompaniment, and interpositioning
- **Monitoring:** ceasefire monitoring, rumour control and early warning early response
- **Relationship building:** confidence enhancement and multi-track dialogue
- **Capacity enhancement:** Enhancing self-protection capacities and strengthening local protection infrastructures
- **Advocacy:** Educating and organizing

These methods are shown in Figure 1 and explained in the text of module 3 that follows. Both diagrams and explanations are meant to provide a general introduction to the

range of UCP methods used by different UCP actors. As has been mentioned before, different contexts, interests and opportunities have led to creative applications of UCP methods, not all of which are captured here (in their entirety). In addition to the UCP wheel (figure 1) that shows a categorization of UCP methods, a second UCP model (figure 2) has been added that emphasizes the relationship between methods, principles and objectives.

UCP is more than the methods listed here. Military actors, human rights organizations, and national governments all engage in some form of relationship building, early warning or monitoring. What makes these methods uniquely UCP is that they are grounded in specific principles (see Module 2), contribute to interrupting cycles of violence and enhancing nonviolent responses to conflict (see Module 2), and are applied with specific skills (see Module 4). UCP is a complex, systemic, and flexible process for protecting people and responding to conflict.

At their core, UCP methods and skills are focused on creating productive relationships with actors across different levels of society (grassroots, middle-range, and top level), as well as across dividing lines of conflict. These relationships may at times rely on calculated pressure, but building and maintaining cooperative relationships is generally more effective over time than applying pressure.

Module 3 first introduces and describes UCP methods. It then discusses how, when, and where these methods are used. Practical case studies illustrate different strategic applications of methods in a conflict context.

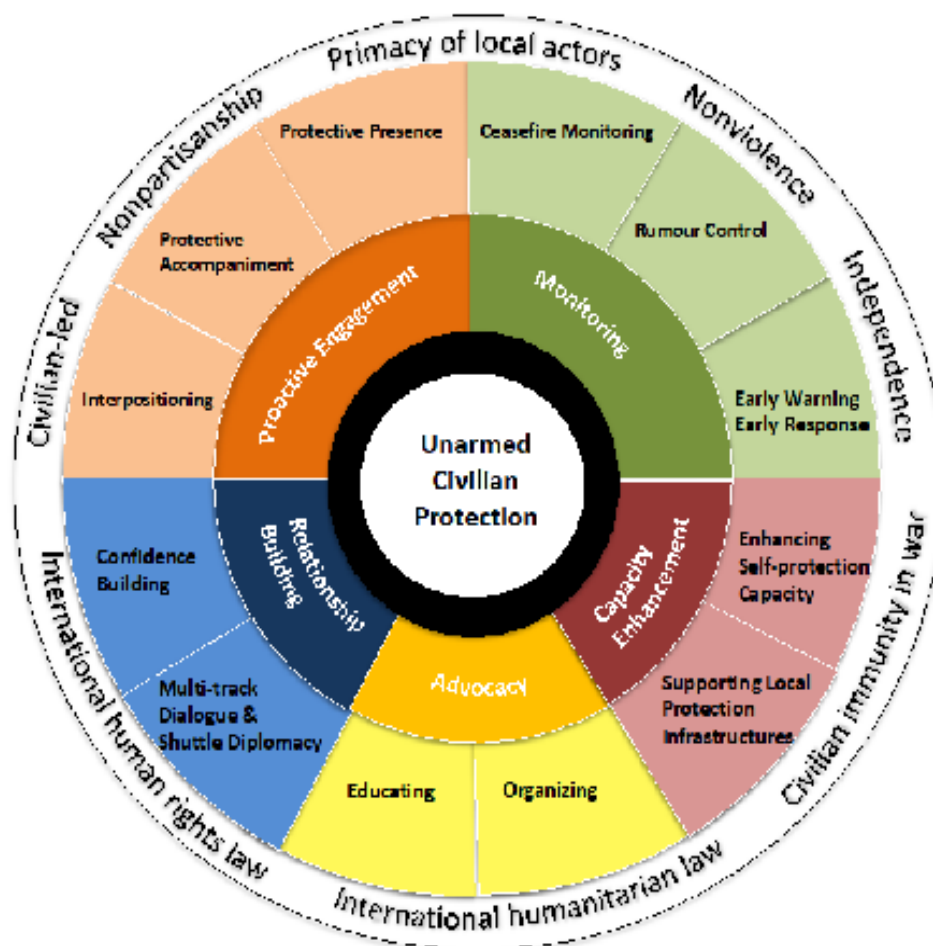


Figure 1 (previous page) shows the spectrum of UCP methods that is used in this module as a road map or table of contents of the various sections. It is the surrounding tire of principles and sources of guidance that brings the methods together, making them uniquely UCP.

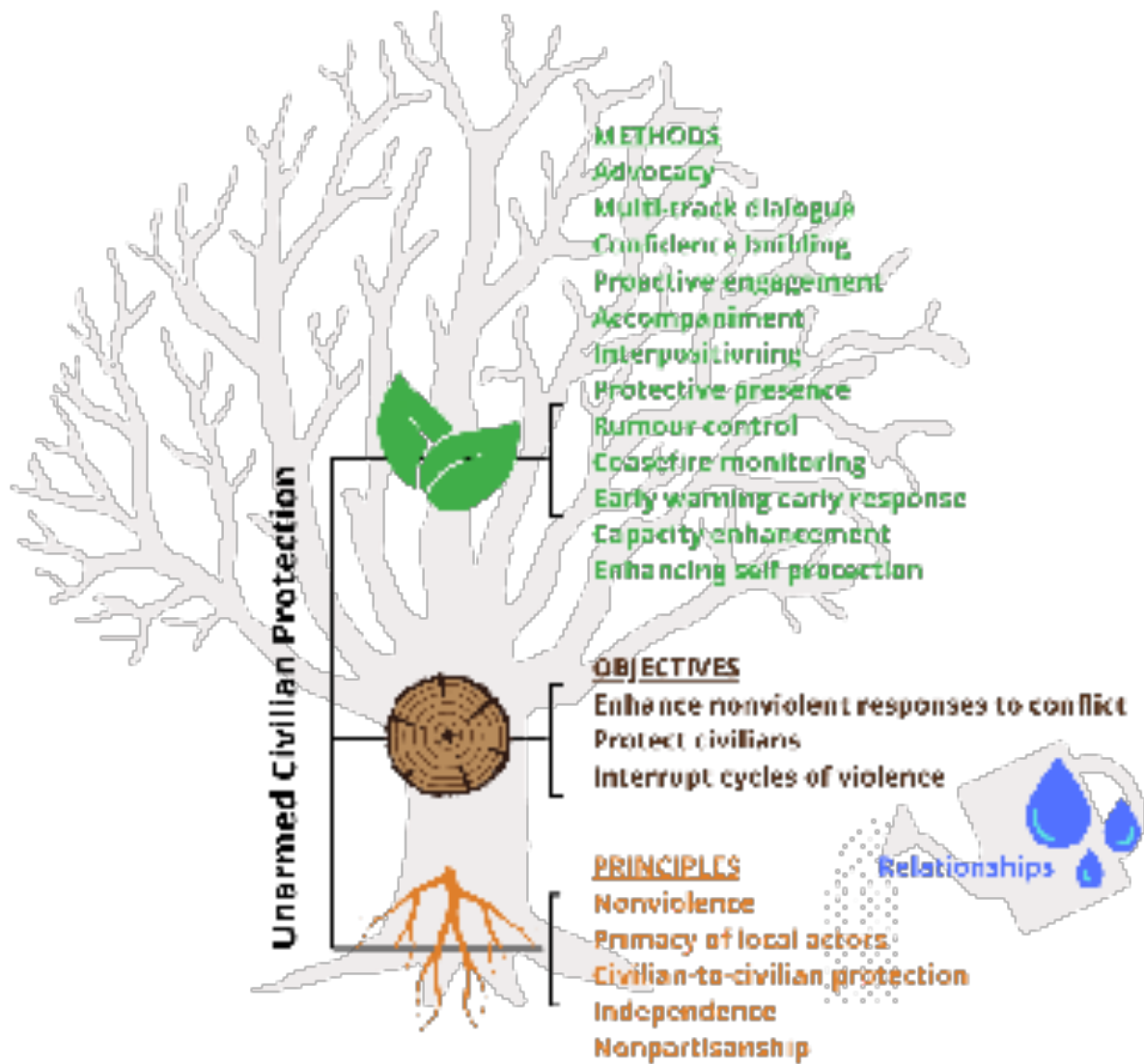


Figure 2: UCP tree model shows the UCP principles as roots of a tree, grounding all UCP activities. The UCP methods are displayed as branches of the tree and the objectives as the center of the tree. Relationship building is illustrated as a watering can, continuously nurturing the entire tree.

**BOX 1 | LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this module participants will be able to:

- Explain basic methods of UCP
- Apply these in practical exercises



## Summary of Key Messages

- International field presence strengthens the international response against attacks on civilians by targeting the entire chain of command, revealing responsibilities, and strengthening international commitment.
- UCP practitioners may at times use relationships with armed actors for pressure and coercion, but cooperative and collaborative relationships are more effective over the long term of an intervention. Knowing when to emphasize pressure and when to work for collaboration is complex and depends on careful analysis.
- Protective accompaniment is a preventive, not a defensive, strategy. It uses physical presence and visibility to deter violence. For local actors it means stepping out of the shadows, showing that with the international community on their side, there may be significant consequences for the aggressor if threats are realized.
- Interpositioning owes its effectiveness to the conflicting parties' unwillingness to harm an innocent bystander and to sustained communication by the UCP teams with all of the armed actors. When nonviolent interveners interposition themselves, they are, in effect, saying, 'I put myself at risk to protect this human being's life.'
- Monitoring serves as a way to collect and report information about compliance to agreed standards by all parties involved, but it also serves as a method to create confidence, provide a protective presence, and encourage conflict parties to adhere to agreed standards (including armistice arrangements or peace deals).
- Rumour control refers to the verification of (mis-)information about imminent threats. It also includes the timely sharing of factual information with various parties within and across conflict lines in order to prevent escalation of violence and unnecessary displacement.
- Early Warning systems aim to prevent grass-root conflicts, reduce the impact of violence, and manage conflict escalation. Early response action aims to protect civilians from violence as well as to reduce the impact of violence on civilians and to empower them to proactively engage in reducing their exposure to violence.
- Effective confidence building is a matter of generating inner strength, rather than changing external conditions or increasing skills. With increased confidence, civilians are more likely to resist abuse or speak out against abuse.

- Multi-track dialogue includes dialogue on multiple levels with a variety of actors, including military commanders, leaders of non-state armed groups, government officials, diplomats, and representatives of IDP communities. Dialogue is used to build support networks, influence actors, understand protection needs, and mitigate conflicts.
- UCP training means working together with people in a dynamic process of discovery, analysis, and skill building so that their capabilities are enhanced and they are better prepared to solve their problems and increase their own security and the security of vulnerable individuals and groups.
- When UCP is conducted by local people, community members witness the efficacy of nonviolent conflict prevention strategies first-hand. As a result, their conceptualization of security shifts from one that is necessarily coercive and externally imposed, to one that can be community-based and nonviolent. With this shift, they become less dependent on outsiders for their own wellbeing.
- Advocacy, in the context of UCP, leverages education and organizing to promote changes in one of two areas of focus. One of these is to shape specific policies or improve certain conditions in order to increase security and reduce violence in communities where they work. The other is to expand the field and use of UCP more broadly by raising awareness in government institutions and in the general public of its potential and implementation. Education is generally meant to reach larger audiences, while organizing is premised around mobilizing smaller groups of people to take strategic action to effect change.





NP Photo / Social cohesion and local peace process work. Al-Ayadiyah, Iraq / April 2020



# 3.1

## Proactive engagement

Proactive engagement is the defining method of UCP. It asserts that while the physical presence of UCP practitioners can be helpful in providing protection, real security usually comes through engaging proactively with all appropriate stakeholders, including those who target civilians. Though the term “proactive engagement” is frequently used to describe UCP methodology in general, in this course – and in this section in particular – it is used as a distinct UCP method. As such, it has three different, but closely related, applications: protective presence, protective accompaniment and interpositioning. This section describes these three applications.



### Recommended Resources for Further Study (Read)

- Schirch, L. (2006). *Civilian Peacekeeping: Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy*. Uppsala, Sweden: Life and Peace Institute.

### 3.1.1

## Protective Presence

*Presence has also been important in preventing demolitions. Because demolitions are highly visible, with negative publicity reaching the wider public, Israeli authorities are often deterred from pursuing demolition orders when international or Israeli activists are simply visibly present. Recently Israeli and international UCP groups protected the village of Susiya from demolition thanks in part to coordination from the UN Protection Cluster. UCP groups coordinated a 24/7 schedule of presence in Susiya. Despite standing demolition orders against it, the village of Susiya remains intact as of this writing.*

*Eli McCarthy and Jonathan Pinckney in ‘Unarmed Civilian Protection in the Israeli and Palestinian Conflict’ in *Wielding Nonviolence* (2016), p. 97.*

### WHAT IS PROTECTIVE PRESENCE?

There are two basic types or levels of protective presence (also called accompaniment by some organizations). The first type refers to the long-term presence of international

humanitarian actors in an area of violent conflict. Although many humanitarian agencies are present in such contexts and may provide some protective effect, this is not UCP. Studies show that protection by mere presence, while important, has its limits. In reviewing field-based protection in Darfur, Sorcha O’Callaghan and Sara Pantuliano found that it can even create a false sense of security within communities that feel that the international community has made a commitment to protect them (as referenced in Ferris loc.1518). Mahony (field presence, 2006) notes that human rights staff of the UN and others may provide little protection simply by being present but need to specifically consider how to increase their protective impact. Conscious attention to maximizing the protective presence of UCP teams in a community, and addressing the potential negative impacts, can, however, provide meaningful protection. Thus, the second type of protective presence refers to a specific method by which UCP personnel are strategically placed in locations where civilians face imminent threats. This type of presence is often provided for shorter periods of time, from a few hours up to a few months, but can also be provided for longer periods when the threat level is persistently high. In Central and South America, this is often referred to as accompanying a village or community. This type of protective presence, with its more conscious attention to maximizing protection, represents more accurately the concept of proactive engagement.

*There are always people on the street corners spying on us to watch our movements. When they see that internationals are entering our offices, this helps us tremendously.*

*Farfan, A.E. (n.d.) Families of the Disappeared. Guatemala: Peace Brigades International*

Protective presence is perhaps the most basic application of UCP methods. Although in some cases it is used on its own, it is frequently used alongside other methods. When, for example, monitoring or capacity enhancement is applied in a situation of violent conflict, the physical presence of UCP personnel during monitoring or capacity development activities can be used strategically to increase the feeling of safety among direct beneficiaries or civilians nearby. Of course, people living in their own communities are generally ‘present’. Presence becomes UCP when local people position themselves strategically in places to protect themselves and others in their communities.

## **HOW DOES PROTECTIVE PRESENCE WORK?<sup>1</sup>**

In times of relative peace, most perpetrators carry out acts of violence in private to avoid legal and social repercussions. However, in many situations of protracted conflict, legal systems break down and acts of violence become an everyday occurrence, committed in broad daylight. Efforts to influence decision makers to stop violence are important, but often insufficient. Systemic abuses are the product of collaboration between actors at many levels, all of which need to be influenced. Words spoken at the UN Security Council are unlikely, therefore, to effect change in a conflict zone until they are translated into direct action on the ground by missions, peacekeepers, diplomats, embassies, donor

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<sup>1</sup> This section draws on the work of Liam Mahony; see *Proactive Presence: Field Strategies for Civilian Protection*

agencies, and others. External encouragement or pressure reaching a state or armed group has to go down the chain of command (Mahony, 2006).

Unfortunately, the transmission of top-level international encouragement or pressure is highly uncertain. States and armed groups can ignore encouragement and have developed nimble countermeasures to side-step pressure. Decision makers deflect and undermine pressure, using propaganda to destroy the legitimacy of accusing organizations. They may also isolate and stigmatize targeted civilian groups, or shift attention to the actions of their enemies. Decision makers, to avoid overt denials, often develop buffer mechanisms to absorb and co-opt international pressure. For example, state agencies are created specifically to deal with international concerns and they may employ lobbyists and public relations firms. This ploy allows the state to claim that it is taking all possible measures to protect people. Non-state armed groups also create such buffers: their political wings absorb international pressure, while their abusing military and intelligence wings remain offstage (ibid. p.14).

States and armed groups can also create smokescreens to evade responsibility for abuses, even while admitting that they occur. A common and devastatingly effective smokescreen is the use of paramilitary or death-squad operations. These are often either secretly under military control, or allowed to act with impunity when their agendas are convenient to the state. In other cases, explanations such as ‘lack of discipline’ or ‘loose cannons’ distance the high-level decision makers from the abuses. Banditry and ‘accidents’ also commonly camouflage political attacks. Smokescreens give both the abusing party and its international allies a level of plausible deniability when faced with accusations. In the face of such countermeasures, international response strategies need to be complemented by more targeted and effective protective action (ibid. p.15). In some conflicts, there has been little or no attention from the UN or other international organizations, so armed actors experience no pressure.

*One of the WASH [Water Sanitation and Hygiene] partners had discovered an old ISIS tunnel [at a displacement site in Iraq]. Security forces were called in to ensure people’s safety in the event any ISIS members or explosive remnants of war remained in the tunnel. We maintained a protective presence throughout the investigation of the military forces in order to monitor any attempts by the security forces to use this situation as a cover to arbitrarily detain IDPs or use excessive force.*

*Staff member of Nonviolent Peaceforce in Iraq (February 2018)*

The presence of international observers—particularly if they are trained UCP practitioners—strengthens the international response to stop attacks on civilians in three important ways:

1. **Targeting the entire chain of command:** International presence projects the visible concern of the international community to the entire chain of command of abuser groups. UCP personnel (whether national or international staff) interact with all ranks of the military and civilian hierarchy, national and local, ensuring an awareness of international consequences for abuse of civilians. No other international effort can match the effectiveness of having trained observers present in the field,

providing direct international visibility of ground-level perpetrators and building relationships locally and regionally. These relationships provide opportunities to build cooperative interactions, so that protection does not rely solely on coercion or pressure. This is particularly relevant because the chain of command is never a unified entity. Building close relationships with amenable individuals within abuser groups allows UCP teams to generate the necessary level of support to maintain their presence. Moreover, UCP personnel can encourage these supportive individuals to reform the group's organizational structure and reduce violence.

2. **Revealing responsibilities:** Monitoring and verification at different levels of society can help reveal relationships of responsibility among armed actors—for instance, between a state and paramilitaries. This increases accountability and, to some extent, combats countermeasures such as smokescreens.
3. **Strengthening international commitment:** When an act of violence occurs despite international presence, the international community is likely to react more quickly than if there had been no such presence. Embassies and home governments usually will engage more forcefully in protection when their own citizens are present in a mission and at risk. This increases pressure on top-level decision makers to take action (ibid. p.16). This does not automatically result in increased protection, but it greatly increases international attention to a situation.

Of course, local people also provide protective presence to each other, without the involvement of external UCP actors. People choose to travel in groups, or have a local respected leader present, or interact with armed actors in a way to let them know they are being watched. Sometimes people from one part of a country or from an ethnic majority group provide protective presence, bringing credibility and helpful attention to marginalized or oppressed groups. For instance, Christian Peacemaker Teams in Canada provided presence as well as advocacy for a First Nations leader who was fasting to protest government actions. International presence may under certain circumstances be more effective at protecting civilians than local or national efforts, but it may also undermine local efforts, exacerbate tensions, or simply be less effective than local or national protection efforts.

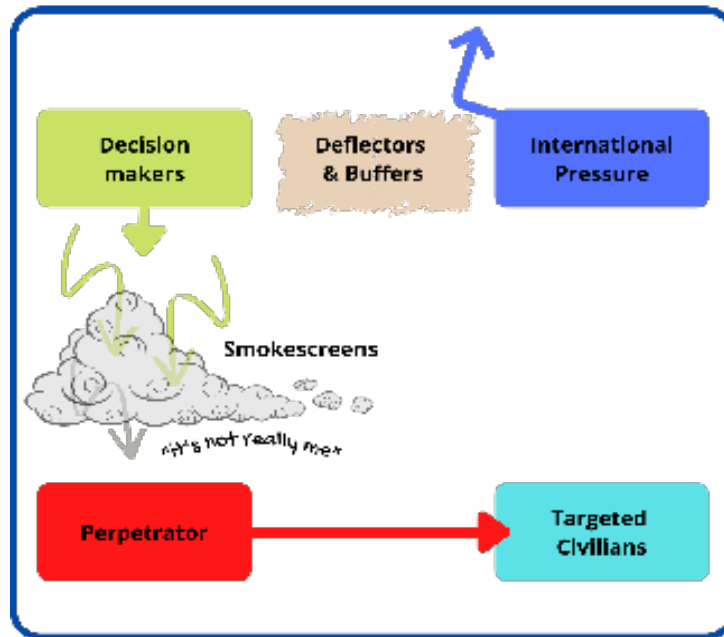


Figure 3: Decision makers evade responsibilities and obscure accountability. Source: Liam Mahoney, Proactive Presence (2006), page 14.

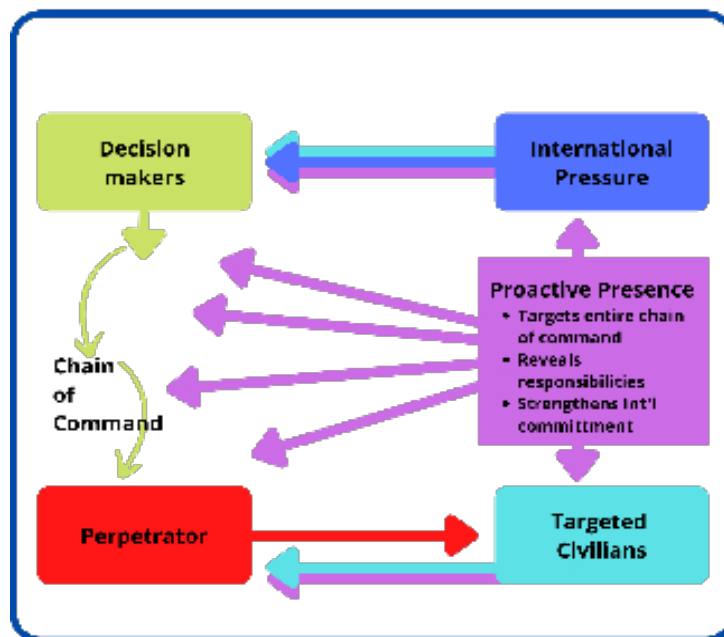


Figure 4: Proactive engagement and presence strengthen pressure at all levels of the chain of command. International pressure is further amplified by bringing firsthand information from UCP actors and targeted civilians on the ground into international advocacy efforts, combining the strengths of targeted civilians, UCP actors and international advocates. Furthermore, UCP actors on the ground support and accompany targeted civilians to proactively engage directly with perpetrators and representatives of the chain of command. The overlapping arrows represent the integration of the voices or sometimes even the presence of different actors, strengthening the message or engagement. Source: Adapted from Liam Mahoney, Proactive Presence (2006), page 16.

## PROTECTIVE PRESENCE IN ACTION

Protective presence is employed in different forms, depending on the nature of the conflict, the context, and the mandate of the organization that provides the presence. UCP practitioners around the world provide protective presence in refugee sites, at offices and homes of human rights defenders, at schools, hospitals and marketplaces, for workshop venues, in weapon-free zones, and in peace communities. Protective presence is also provided alongside the monitoring of demonstrations, trials or tribunals, celebrations, and parades. Finally, protective presence can be provided through patrolling (see box 2, module 1). Although UCP practitioners are active and strategic in their presence, the simple fact of their living in a threatened community may have an impact.

In some cases, protective presence is provided to individuals (e.g. human rights lawyers, journalists), and in other cases to large groups (e.g. refugees, groups of farmers or communities under threat). In high-risk situations the presence of UCP personnel can be sustained twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, with UCP team members working in shifts. In low-risk situations UCP presence does not need to be continuous. UCP teams typically range from two to twelve members, depending on the context.

Though UCP agencies do not all operate in the same way, there are many similarities in the ways they provide protective presence. Conscious visibility is one commonly shared tactic among international UCP interventions. Among local actors there is more variability, again depending on the context. Many UCP agencies use clearly identifiable uniforms, cars, flags and other markers to strengthen their visibility and increase their security.<sup>2</sup> Uniforms are especially important for local staff members, who could easily be mistaken for bystanders without their distinctive uniform.

*If we surprise armed actors in the field we have not done our job.*

*Tiffany Easthom, Former Head of Mission, Nonviolent Peaceforce, South Sudan.*

## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR PROTECTIVE PRESENCE?

Challenges in providing protective presence include the following:

- Effectiveness is based on the acceptance of UCP personnel by conflict actors—relationships and lines of communication need to be established with conflict actors before the presence can be used to provide protection;
- Being present and being visible is the foundation of this technique, but does not provide protection in and of itself unless it is used strategically. If acceptance of UCP presence fails, protection strategies need to be backed up by credible pressures

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<sup>2</sup> Some argue that UCP practitioners should strive for a minimum amount of visibility necessary to get the job done. Over-exposure may provide the opportunity for a political attack or a slide into dependency. Under-exposure nullifies the benefits of UCP presence to a conflict and may decrease its credibility (Schirch, 2006, p. 93)



from other international actors and institutions;

- There must be real (soft) power and influence behind the pressure for it to be credible: i.e. political, economic, legal, religious, cultural or social pressure such as disruption to tourism, indictment by a court or tribunal, imposition of economic sanctions, or cancellation of contracts, investments, or aid packages;
- Protection strategies must be based on careful research. It is important to identify which actors are causing the threat and what kinds of pressure they may be susceptible to, who will be supportive, what influence they have, and to what extent will they use their influence to support the protection of civilians. Research must also clarify the likelihood that intervention will not increase risks to individuals and communities;
- It is usually helpful to have direct lines of open communication to the perpetrators somewhere along their chain of command in order for influence to be effectively applied; moreover, not all abuser groups have clear chains of command; and there are groups which it is hardly possible to influence;
- Even if UCP presence is accepted by the major parties involved in the conflict, armed splinter groups or criminal groups can target UCP personnel and take actions against UCP teams working against their interest.



#### CASE STUDY: PROTECTIVE PRESENCE AT A HOSPITAL AMIDST TRIBAL VIOLENCE IN JONGLEI

On 4 January 2012, the Government of South Sudan declared the state of Jonglei a disaster zone as a result of massive tribal clashes that occurred in late December 2011. While there is a long history of violent and brutal conflict between the Lou Nuer and Murle tribes, the situation escalated dramatically when an estimated 5000 Lou Nuer and Dinka combatants marched on town for an apparent retaliation attack. The combatants burned down entire villages en route to Pibor and wounded, killed, and abducted numerous Murle women and children.

Victims of the violence with life-threatening injuries from all three tribes were evacuated to the Juba Teaching Hospital (in the capital city). Patients in the hospital included two infants who had been found lying beside their dead mothers with their skulls cut open, and a four-year old girl found with her abdomen slit open and her intestines exposed.

Members from Nonviolent Peaceforce went to the hospital to assess the situation after members of the three tribes started visiting the hospital and threatening each other. When injured Lou Nuer combatants at the hospital claimed they would ‘finish the job’ and kill the Murle patients, Murle patients began locking themselves inside their ward with a chain and padlock and were not letting anyone in. As a bystander said: “It was awful. It smelled like rotting flesh. They were all on top of each other because it was too small but they were too scared to come out or to let anyone in.”

Nonviolent Peaceforce engaged with patients and hospital staff, as well as with representatives from the different tribes. NP provided a protective presence in different wards of the hospital. They also convinced the hospital staff to request police presence

to guard the injured Lou Nuer combatants, and they worked together with the police to maintain a safe space inside the hospital. Members of Nonviolent Peaceforce stayed at the hospital twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for a period of three months. No violent incidents happened during those three months.

SOURCE: Nonviolent Peaceforce South Sudan



### Recommended Resources for Further Study (View)

- Mahony, L. (2006.) Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping: Part 1. Geneva: Switzerland: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. [http://www.fieldviewsolutions.org/fv-publications/Proactive\\_Presence.pdf](http://www.fieldviewsolutions.org/fv-publications/Proactive_Presence.pdf)

## 3.1.2 Protective accompaniment

*It was thanks to these foreign nationals, so concerned for our situation, who worked with dedication and deep respect. I was fully aware that without their presence the threats might turn from words into actions. They stayed with us one night in November when we had to move urgently because a man telephoned to inform me that my daughter would be raped, mutilated and tortured using unimaginable means because I had got involved with the wrong person. [Forced into our second exile] PBI accompanied us in the sad walk towards Immigration and went with us as far as the door of the plane. One of its members had to literally push me onto the plane whilst I cried uncontrollably.*

*Claudia Julieta Duque, Colombian journalist for Radio Nizkor. Peace Brigades International (2009).*

### WHAT IS PROTECTIVE ACCOMPANIMENT?

Protective accompaniment is protective presence in motion. It is the best-known application of UCP methods. Protective accompaniment is practiced by almost all UCP agencies in nearly all types of contexts. UCP practitioners have been described as ‘unarmed bodyguards’ because they are frequently walking at the side of threatened

human rights defenders in areas of violent conflict. Protective accompaniment is provided to civilians because they perceive a threat either during their journey from one place to another, or upon arrival at their destination. It can be undertaken by outsider ‘third parties’ or undertaken as a self-protection strategy where certain people in a community protectively accompany each other.

Next to protective accompaniment UCP practitioners also provide other forms of accompaniment. These are referred to by some as ‘strategic accompaniment’ or ‘physical accompaniment’, though protective accompaniment is both strategic and physical. They have also been further defined as ‘political, psycho-social, legal and medical accompaniments. Political accompaniment will be discussed later in this module under the section of advocacy. Legal accompaniment refers primarily to the presence at courts and prisons or the accompaniment of survivors to report human rights abuses. Psycho-social accompaniment usually refers to the provision of moral support to actors that may not be at immediate risk of violence, but feel unsafe due to past trauma. Medical accompaniments connect survivors of violence to designated service providers. Some organizations, particularly in Latin America, say they ‘accompany a process’, not just people or communities. In this sense it is an understanding that there is a whole process, such as refugees returning to Guatemala, that need to be accompanied.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas protective accompaniment is used for the purpose of providing protection, other forms of accompaniment are used as a way to build confidence and connect vulnerable civilians to designated service providers. While fear may play a role, there may not be an immediate identified threat or a potential perpetrator to be deterred. In these cases there is usually little or no need for elaborate protection strategies, conscious visibility, or the establishment of a support network of influential actors. Blending protective accompaniment and other forms of accompaniment together has led to a watered-down understanding of protective accompaniment. This strips the concept of protective accompaniment of its power and may create security risks. When UCP practitioners confuse the accompaniment of traumatized refugees to humanitarian aid agencies with ‘protective accompaniment’ they will more likely abandon the preparatory work and security strategies that protective accompaniments require. When these practitioners then take on the accompaniment of a threatened refugee leader or a human rights defender in a similar manner, they could easily put themselves and the people they accompany in danger. In this section ‘accompaniment’ is understood narrowly as protective accompaniment.

Bearing this in mind, clear distinctions between protective accompaniment and other forms of accompaniment can rarely be made. The various forms of accompaniment exist on a spectrum ranging from medical accompaniments to the accompaniment of, for example, high profile lawyers under death threats for investigating claims of genocide. In Sri Lanka, UCP actors accompanied farmers to local government offices after the tsunami of 2004 to be a supportive presence. As land records had been washed away, people needed to re-establish land ownership, but were afraid to approach the appropriate officials. More than merely building confidence, however some of these

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3 Some of these actors describe protection as a smaller activity of a broader accompaniment process that includes advocacy and relationship building among others. Following this line of thinking UCP is a part of accompaniment instead of the other way around.

accompaniments prevented farmers from being turned away or denied their land. Thus what started off as moral support gradually transformed into protection.

*We can not make the soldiers leave, but we can stand for something else. By accompanying these children to school we deter soldiers and settlers from harassing them and make the children feel safer. In addition our team's presence – giving a “high five”, a handshake or a smile – acts as a counterbalance to the stress that these children face on daily, living under military occupation. We hope that our presence allows the kids to focus on us more than on the rifle butts.*

*Josefin, EAPPI in Nablus (2016)*

## HOW DOES PROTECTIVE ACCOMPANIMENT WORK?

Protective accompaniment works in a way similar to protective presence. However, accompaniment often means travelling through, or to, an area of violent conflict. This means that extra precautionary measures have to be taken. There may be roadblocks or mines on the way, or the road may pass through territory controlled by opposing military forces. Just as UCP practitioners build relationships vertically (up and down the chain of command) to provide protective presence, relationships also need to be built horizontally when they travel through different areas. In different areas there may also be different chains of command.

Protective accompaniment is a preventive, not a defensive strategy. UCP personnel use their physical presence, visibility, and relationships to prevent threats from being realized. In case threats *are* realized and the accompanied individual or group is attacked during the accompaniment, UCP personnel will not use their presence to engage in physical struggle. However, they will try to stay with the individual or group as long as possible, even if they are taken away or arrested. UCP practitioners in such situations can spend days on end going to police stations, jails, or government offices, trying to obtain information about the whereabouts and wellbeing of their local partners. They may also use their local, national, and/or international response network to advocate for the release or return of the arrested or abducted individuals.

Local actors that request protective accompaniment sometimes misperceive this as nothing more than an extra safety net. When threatened, these actors often keep a low profile and continue their activities underground. They sometimes believe that they can continue to keep a low profile, while adding international accompaniment as a precautionary measure. Protective accompaniment, however, like any other UCP method, generally cannot be carried out secretly. In fact, abandoning transparency and visibility opens the door to suspicion, mistrust and the perception of partisanship. It undermines the entire system of proactive engagement. Accepting accompaniment means raising visibility. It means that local actors step out of the shadows, showing that with the international community on their side, there are going to be serious consequences for the perpetrators if threats are realized. Therefore, in accepting accompaniment, local actors accept that potential perpetrators will be informed about their whereabouts, at least during the time

of accompaniment.

In cases where threatened civilians do not wish to raise their profile, but still wish to benefit from the presence of UCP personnel, patrolling is sometimes applied instead of accompaniment. UCP teams may move around in a specific area where threatened civilians are travelling, without the responsibility of providing direct physical protection to these civilians. If accompaniment is a close perimeter presence, patrolling is a wide perimeter presence. Patrolling is also used by UCP practitioners as an alternative to accompaniment in situations where threatened groups are very large or specific agreements about conduct and values are difficult. Large groups of IDPs may, for example, travel through hostile areas and some of them may insist on carrying weapons. Direct accompaniment of the entire group may compromise UCP's principles of nonpartisanship and nonviolence or may result in unwanted consequences. Therefore, UCP teams may decide to accompany the IDP leaders and through them provide protection to the large group, or choose to patrol the area instead.

### **PROTECTIVE ACCOMPANIMENT IN ACTION**

Protective accompaniment is provided to both individuals and groups. Individuals in most cases are human rights defenders, journalists, environmentalists, and leaders from targeted minority groups as well as their relatives. Groups may include IDPs, youth at risk of forced recruitment, or humanitarians delivering aid.

Many international UCP organizations have stressed the importance of including international UCP personnel on high-risk missions, based on the notion that national security forces would be less likely to target foreigners. These missions often consist exclusively of internationals. Gender, nationality, race, and ethnicity, as well as personal skills, are important factors to be considered while identifying the most effective accompaniment team for a specific mission (perception is key). Low-risk missions often include national or local UCP personnel. They may even consist exclusively of national and/or local staff. A national actor from another part of the country may be perceived very differently from a local actor from the affected community. The strategic use of (white) privilege or any other identity as a means for protection remains a contentious topic for many UCP actors. While using such identities saves lives they also may reinforce colonial, racist or other systems of oppression. Thus, practitioners must be well trained and aware of the dynamics they are reinforcing (see module 5 for more information). Like with every aspect of UCP, context analysis is of the utmost importance - determining the makeup of accompaniment teams is no exception.

International UCP organizations have become increasingly aware of existing capacities or track records among local communities to provide accompaniment to each other. Nonviolent Peaceforce in South Sudan, for example, encouraged women threatened by sexual violence to accompany each other or move in groups when fetching water or cutting grass. This proved effective. Some human rights defenders in Indonesia already applied proactive engagement methods, but felt that the international accompaniment of Peace Brigades International volunteers further enhanced their deterrence effect.

Before any accompaniment mission, UCP teams will assess the threat: where does the



threat come from, why does the threat exist, and is there an identifiable pattern? UCP personnel also assess the risks that the threat poses to the targeted individual or group. Some threats are very serious, but because the individual or group is capable of dealing with them, the risk they run may not be high. Conversely, a threat may appear to be rather insignificant, but the targeted individual or group is extremely vulnerable and has no capacity whatsoever to deal with the threat. UCP practitioners will also assess if accompaniment is the appropriate methodology and agree with local actors on the form and intensity of the accompaniment. Furthermore, they will inform the appropriate authorities and other actors about the accompaniment. Ultimately, the decision-making on all these matters lies with those who request the accompaniment. They may decide that keeping a low profile will be more effective or safer in a particular situation. Dealing with these dilemmas requires sensitivity and creativity.

During an accompaniment mission UCP team members usually use a strict check-in call system to keep their home base updated about their progress and safety. They may also bring a list of telephone numbers and official support letters from high-ranking government officials or military commanders who are supportive of the accompaniment. These actors can be contacted in case there are complications. Though protective accompaniment involves close physical presence and visibility, UCP practitioners make sure that they are not perceived as involved in the activities of those whom they accompany. Especially in sensitive cases like the accompaniment of lawyers who are investigating human rights violations, UCP personnel make sure to maintain a safe distance for the duration of the investigation. By doing this they send a clear message of nonpartisanship; they are present to protect the lawyer, but they are not involved in the actual investigation.

*In Catatumbo, we did a visit accompanied by Peace Brigades International. We were stopped at a paramilitary roadblock. PBI made phone calls and the paramilitaries made phone calls and they let us through. The paramilitaries respect international presence ... they are trying to institutionalise themselves legally. The collaboration with the state is very clear... The paramilitaries are steadily occupying government positions, and this makes the situation more delicate for them.*

*Colombian human-rights lawyer quoted by Mahony, 2006*



#### Recommended resources for further study (View)

- The work of Peace Brigades International: <http://www.peacebrigades.org/publications/dvds-and-videos/?L=0> (choose one of the 6 available videos)
- Mahony L. *Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping Part 2: Accompanying the return of child soldiers*, 00-1:51 <http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/unarmed-civilian-peacekeeping-pt-2>



- Geleta, A. (2013) *Kidnapped Boy Reunites with Family*, Brussels, Belgium: Nonviolent Peaceforce. <http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/kidnapped-boy-reunites-family-0> (Geleta 2013a)

Recommended resources for further study (Read)

- Ridd, K. *El Salvador: You know what it's like to be separated from a comrade*. Turning-the-Tide, [http://www.turning-the-tide.org/files/3%20NV%20power%20stories%2016\\_oct.pdf](http://www.turning-the-tide.org/files/3%20NV%20power%20stories%2016_oct.pdf)

### 3.1.3 Interpositioning

*Across Africa, there are stories of unarmed women interpositioning themselves as peacekeepers between warring tribes. In many traditional African communities, it was prohibited to kill women. Only other warriors were allowed as targets. In some societies women would walk between armed groups to prevent them from fighting each other.*

*Schirch, L. (2006), p. 17*

#### **WHAT IS INTERPOSITIONING?**

In 1931 Gandhi spoke of the possibility of overcoming violent conflicts with ‘a living wall of men and women’ who would interpose themselves between conflicting parties, without any weapons but only their bodies (Weber 1988). Interpositioning is the act of physically placing oneself between conflicting parties in order to prevent them from using violence against one another. Of all UCP methods interpositioning comes perhaps closest to the traditional notion of peacekeeping.

#### **HOW DOES INTERPOSITIONING WORK?**

Interpositioning works in a similar way to protective presence and accompaniment, although it often requires mobilizing a larger number of UCP team members for just one activity. It also requires a more prominent involvement and greater risk-taking by UCP practitioners than other UCP methods. Many UCP agencies refrain from using this method or make limited use of it, because they consider the security risks to be too high. Interpositioning is sometimes misperceived as a spontaneous action of jumping in between already fighting parties. Though this is part of interpositioning and can be done in certain situations, interpositioning is in most cases a calculated and strategically planned intervention. In order to use interpositioning it is vital to have well-established

contacts with all the relevant stakeholders, especially the leaders involved in that specific intervention and communicate with them before and during the intervention. Moreover, it is important to gain recognition by key stakeholders and to have in-depth knowledge of the context and conflict.

Commonly, it is assumed that interpositioning owes its effectiveness to the conflicting parties' unwillingness to harm an innocent bystander, or internationals from a particular region (typically the Global North). However, there is also a more subtle and compelling effect of interpositioning: violence against another human being depends on the ability of the perpetrator to dehumanize the intended recipient of the violent act. This means that the perpetrator has to numb him or herself to the targeted person's humanity. When UCP practitioners interposition themselves, they are, in effect, saying: 'I put myself at risk to protect this human being's life.' It has the effect of awakening the potential perpetrator to the humanity of the intended target, and, momentarily, to their own humanity. This makes proceeding with violence much more difficult (Metta Center for Nonviolence, 2013).

Analysis of different cases of nonviolent interpositioning shows that the presence of international, but also at times, national staff, trained in nonviolence and willing to risk their lives, can be of great help in scaling down a conflict. It can also increase the visibility of local nonviolent groups of activists who strive for justice and human rights.<sup>4</sup> However, it seems to be most effective when people related to the fighting groups (wives, parents, children) carry out interpositioning. When such people put themselves between two fighting groups, the latter tend to interrupt the violence, fearing that they may accidentally kill their own relatives (L'Abate 1997).

Eli McCarthy and Jonathan Pinckney describe in *Wielding Nonviolence* (Furnari 2016) how UCP organizations operating in Israel and Palestine differ in their views and practices of interpositioning. "Some UCP respondents strongly encouraged pure monitoring or presence, and, while not condemning intervention, explicitly discouraged it in most circumstances. Some organizations only allow verbal intervention, such as verbally de-escalating when a child is in danger. Other groups that allow interposition do not require it of their members but will support them if they make such a choice. Several respondents reported that interposition has helped prevent the arrest of Palestinians. Even UCP practitioners whose interpositions did not prevent arrests often secured less serious consequences for the Palestinians they were supporting, when they were arrested too. Others indicated that interposition has helped prevent checkpoint harassment, house demolition, violation of sacred sites, and both settler and Palestinian violence."

*One prominent example of interposition came early in CPT's [Christian Peacemaker Teams] time in Hebron, when several CPT activists interposed themselves between a Palestinian youth demonstration and a line of Israeli soldiers with their guns raised to fire. Following the interposition the soldiers lowered their weapons and did not violently suppress the demonstration...*

*Eli McCarthy and Jonathan Pinckney in 'Unarmed Civilian Protection in the Israeli and Palestinian Conflict' in Wielding Nonviolence (Furnari 2016), p.98.*

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<sup>4</sup> Environmental groups are increasingly using interpositioning to protect the environment, putting themselves between whales and hunters or between trees and loggers (Schirch, 2006, p.37)