

Increasing the Safety and Security of Civilians in Bentiu Town through Night Patrols

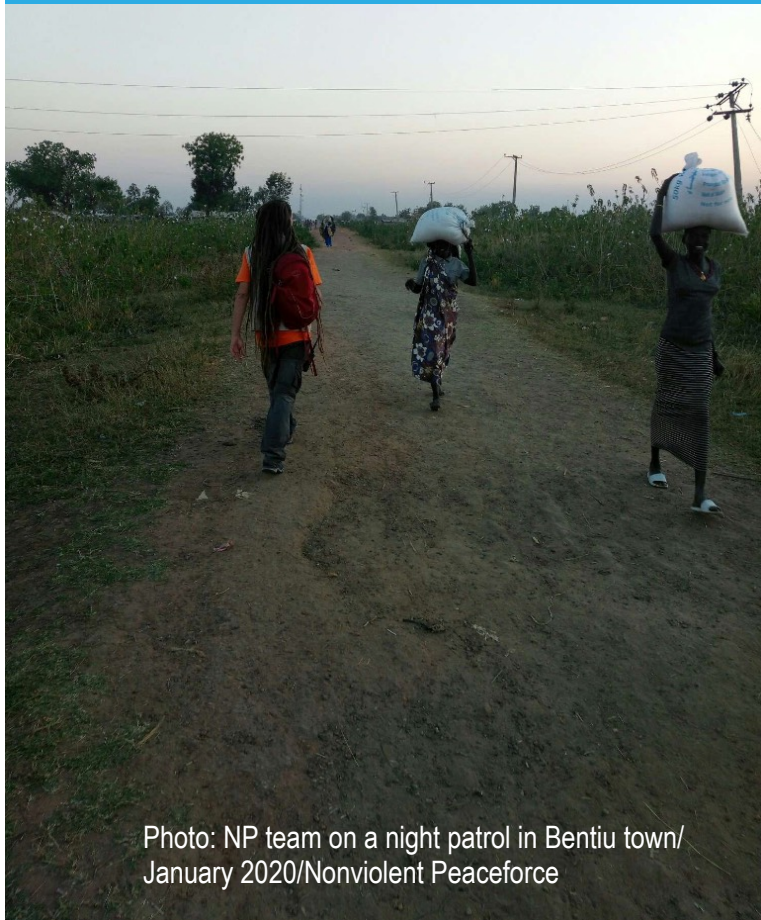


Photo: NP team on a night patrol in Bentiu town/
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Proactive and deterrent patrolling is a signature activity of Nonviolent Peaceforce's (NP) UCP methodology that utilizes unarmed international and national protection officers to deter violence, enhance understanding of the context dynamics, and foster a positive relationship with members of the community. These patrols are regularly conducted by all NP South Sudan field teams throughout the country, including the Beyond Bentiu Response team in Rubkona County. Prior to the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), patrols were typically conducted during the day as movement after dusk was restricted due to hostilities between parties to the conflict. Since the signing of the agreement, while violence between signatory armed groups has decreased and the overall security situation in and around Bentiu town has improved, criminality remains high with civilians reporting a lack of safety and security.

The need for night patrols became particularly evident in April 2019 when, during NP's monthly protection meeting with the community, women reported facing gender-based violence and other forms of violence when returning home from the market at night. Female traders feared robbery and shoppers reported being assaulted and harassed. As a result, the NP team decided that evening patrols around the market would be a positive step towards protecting the community, especially women, in Bentiu town by both preventing violence from occurring and providing immediate response to violent incidents.

The objectives of the activity were to provide a protective presence in and around the market at the hours when high incidences of security and safety concerns were reported and to accompany vulnerable people when needed.

In May 2019, the NP team began conducting weekly night patrols, lasting approximately two hours per patrol. Comprised of two to three national and international members, the team would leave the NP compound at 7 PM to go towards the market in Kalibalek or proceed through Hai-Ingas, Khordapdap, Hai-Ingame, Suk-Saba neighborhoods. When patrolling the market, the team would engage with women selling milk and firewood to identify locations or situations of concern. Then the team would walk through surrounding neighborhoods such as Koithey, Dera A and Dera B.

In July 2019, while returning from a night patrol on the Hai-Ingas - Khordapdap border, NP came across a group of four unaccompanied minors returning home after fetching water at a borehole. The youngest child in the group was about 2-years-old. NP helped the children carry water and safely accompanied them home.

In November 2019, while on an evening patrol in Bentiu town, the team heard a woman screaming. After a short time, the team located a group of women carrying a woman in distress to the hospital. It became apparent that NP needed to provide assistance to the group as carrying the patient on foot would take another hour to reach the hospital. NP staff radioed staff in the compound and called for the driver to come urgently to where the women were. NP then accompanied the woman and two relatives to the hospital where the medical team on duty said that they would need to admit the patient overnight as she had severe malaria. After NP established that the family members and patient were safe and receiving appropriate treatment, NP team left to continue the patrol from the hospital along the Rubkona road where the team was stopped by an officer in civilian clothes.

The officer questioned the national team member about why he was walking through the area at night with foreigners, to whom he was concerned something would happen. The team politely listened to the officer and proceeded with the activity. The next day, the team set up a meeting with the chief of police and with the governor's security advisor to address what the officer in civilian clothes told the national staff members the previous night. At these meetings, NP explained the purpose of the night patrols while highlighting the benefits to the community. The security advisor welcomed the team and thanked them for their efforts. He also said that he would instruct all the security organs in the town to allow NP to continue unimpeded. Later that day, the team met with the chief of police who responded in the same manner — thanking NP for their work.

NP presence in populated areas of Bentiu town after sunset has been greatly appreciated with community members recognizing NP staff during night patrols and warmly greeting them when they are passing. During one of the patrols, NP heard people saying: "That's Nonviolent. They move around at night to protect us".

Seeing NGO staff at night has given community members a sense of security, protection and hope that peace is progressing. Female traders also confirmed to NP that security situation improved as more people have been seen outside late at night. A young female trader selling milk remarked that she and other women now feel safer walking back home at 10 PM.

Further, night patrols have strengthened NP's trust and acceptance, thereby contributing to a greater understanding of the context and of the needs of the community. Moving forward, NP will continue conducting night patrols paired with advocacy for increased action by the government and the police to ensure the safety and security of the community.



Photo: NP team on a night patrol in Bentiu town/ January 2020/Nonviolent Peaceforce