

Promoting peaceful coexistence between IDPs and host communities in Juba



"I have never come to this place since 2016 war, I was always afraid. When I received the message yesterday, I had mixed emotions and I was wondering what awaits me. Now that I finally reached here, I am very happy."

Those were the first impressions from a female participant during the dialogue between the Moryok host community and IDPs on September 4, 2020, but might as well represent the thoughts of many people who were present that day. In the outskirts of the Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites in Juba, IDPs, members of the host community in Juba, and local authorities met in an initiative to promote peaceful coexistence and rebuilt relationships between IDPs and local community members in Juba.

Fear and uncertainty are mutual feelings between IDPs from PoC sites and host communities in Juba as a result of violent conflicts they have had experienced since 2013. In addition, criminal activities such as killing, thefts, and abuse of women have made the already-broken-trust and shattered relationship more difficult to stitch.

On one hand, incidents of killings in the weapon free zone (WFZ) by what the IDPs called "unknown gunmen" are being blamed towards host communities without clear evidence and thorough investigation. In June 2020 for example, two IDP youths were found dead in the WFZ for unknown reason, by unidentified criminal. On the other hand, host communities are condemning IDP youths for harassing women living in the host communities.

These issues have been on the surface for long without being resolved. In order to address these tensions, and respecting our principle of primacy of local actors, NP team facilitated a meeting with community leaders from PoC sites, host communities and local authorities to discuss current issues they are facing and promote peaceful coexistence. NP engaged in shuttle diplomacy by conducting a series of previous consultations and meetings with separate actors in efforts of trust and relationship building efforts. Another meeting conducted in August 2020 resulted in the establishment of a peace committee in each location – PoC1, PoC3, and host communities. Members of this body were selected by community leaders to serve as representatives from their communities, including block leaders, WPTs and YPTs' members, previously trained on Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), ensuring as well a gender balance and inclusive representation. Besides the facilitation of peaceful dialogues with their neighboring communities, each committee member acknowledged their responsibility for disseminating information, especially related to peace agreements, between IDPs and host communities.

On 4th September 2020, an inter-communal dialogue was conducted between and among host communities, IDPs, and local authorities. Each community was represented by selected members of their peace committee that was recently established. This is the first time that all established peace committee members were brought together to have dialogue for peace and reconciliation. As the deputy chairman of PoC3 expressed "the purpose of this dialogue is for all of us to reconcile as one

community and one South Sudanese.” One representative from the host communities complemented and said “we will not get peace if we continue to live in tribalism, nepotism, and with hatred. We will not get peace if we continue to look other tribe as different from ours.”

Each community was given a chance to express themselves and all of them supported and committed to the idea of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. The commanding officer from the military, also present at the dialogue, expressed his support to the initiative and the peace process in general, he said that “we don’t want to fight.” The head police officer from the checkpoint between the different communities also commended the initiative and was very happy to see host communities and IDPs in one place and discussing about peace and reconciliation. The dialogue served as start of building trust among themselves. To sustain this initiative, participants agreed to establish an executive council that will meet regularly to discuss, address different issue and activities to strengthen their relations.

Supporting the implementation of the dialogue held on the 4th September, NP visited the Moryok host community the following week to understand if one of the resolutions of the meeting, about further spreading community awareness about the peace agreement, were being implemented. The team was received with appreciative reactions from the community about the dialogue taking place, and found out that the community have further selected representatives for a joint executive peace

council with members from the different communities. On 12 September, and again on the 29th, the joint executive peace council had its first meetings after the dialogue, showing a great commitment and improvement in the communal relationships and started developing a work plan on joint activities to be conducted. NP will continue to support the peace agreement by engaging all the involved parties with capacity building on Unarmed Civilian Protection, including topics such as social cohesion, peacebuilding, mediation, dialogue, and other related topics, and supporting confidence building activities between IDPs and host communities.