

Mohammed Habeeb Aboubaker Zalingei (Central Darfur)



As part of the UNs' support to the African Union's Initiative on Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020, UNAMID has partnered with Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) to provide capacity building on unarmed protection methodologies to African youth and peace leaders in Darfur through an online training course. From June to July, over 40 Darfuris from all 5 Darfur states were trained. Below, you find one out of eight interviews of course graduates who give their insights on how the eight-week course has changed their perspective on how to deal with conflict and how to change behaviours of those around them to prevent or mitigate violence.

originally from Kulbus, West Darfur State. I currently live in Zalingei, Central Darfur State, where I work for UNAMID's Governance and Community Stabilization Section. Before joining UNAMID in 2011, I worked with UNHCR in Darfur. I currently work on my PhD in Development Planning at the Development Studies and Research Institute, University of Khartoum.

How has this course added to or changed what you knew or believed about protecting civilians or securing communities?

Before taking this course, I thought that UCP referred to whoever carried out protection of civilian's activities, whether they are international or national organizations or civilian components of peacekeeping operations. However, after completing the course, I realized that there are mandated UCP organizations working in this field. The course has substantially improved my knowledge of UCP and its objectives, key guiding principles, methods, and core competencies.

Of the things you learned or experienced in the UCP course, what has been the most important for you?

Particularly the methods applicable to Darfur were of interest, notably proactive engagement for protective presence and protective accompaniment of vulnerable people. Also, monitoring for rumor control to share accurate information about protection issues and demands by various groups for early warning/early response (EWER) by appropriate actors were interesting.

Were you able to use the information

and methods from the UCP course in your life, whether in your family, your community, or your work? Can you give one example?

The issue of UCP methods clashing with local customs and traditions is something that got me thinking a lot. Though it is challenging to address this, the gained knowledge from the course helps me to tackle such cases through better planning and strategizing to realize smooth changes in the common local community practices that continue to negatively affect the protection of civilians.

What initiatives in civilian protection have you participated in since you took the course, if any?

I encouraged and supported an initiative that was introduced by a Zalingei youth group to carry out a series of activities in El Geneina, West Darfur, aiming at conducting dialogue forums among community leaders, youth and women groups of both conflicting parties and disseminate a peace culture that would pave the way for jointly and collaboratively addressing root causes of the communal conflict. The initiative is currently reviewed for funding by UNAMID.

What opportunities for UCP do you see in your community?

Increasing security incidents, protection of civilians concerns and frequency of inter-communal violence in Darfur indicate the need for UCP operations. Though I anticipate that UCP in Darfur will meet numerous challenges, existing traditional local conflict resolution mechanisms and other community net-

works may consider UCP as a strength and play a major role to support the implementation of UCP. There is a need to build the capacity of the existing local peace infrastructure.

How do you see that UCP can contribute to silencing the guns in Darfur?

Due to the nature of the Darfur conflict, I expect it to be very challenging to implement a successful UCP operation due to active armed groups/militias. Their interests conflict with UCP objectives and they may target UCP personnel. Therefore, a thorough conflict assessment is required to determine the effectiveness of a UCP intervention. This will help to establish a UCP presence in Darfur where there is a real need to increase the safety and security of civilians.

Many people, including civilians, have and use weapons in Darfur. Do you see that UCP can effectively protect people in this context? How?

The security situation in Darfur is fragile. Intercommunal relations were impacted by frequent tribal fighting that made the situation prone to further deterioration in all Darfur States. The current situation where violence is common and proliferation of illegal weapons in the hands of armed militias, criminals/outlaws, armed movements is rampant, contributed to creating power imbalances among communities and led to a weak rule of law. Nevertheless, an assessment and conflict analysis will help determining the likelihood of UCP effectiveness to protect people in Darfur.