

High-Level Briefing at the United Nations



BROADENING THE CONCEPT OF PEACEKEEPING:

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY TO UNARMED PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Hosted by the Missions of Belgium, Benin, Costa Rica and Philippines
New York, 23 March 2012

Aide-Memoire prepared by Nonviolent Peaceforce

Background

On 23 March 2012, the Permanent Missions to the UN of Belgium, Benin, Costa Rica and the Philippines in New York hosted a High-Level Briefing entitled “*Broadening the Concept of Peacekeeping: The Contribution of Civil Society to Unarmed Protection of Civilians.*” Sixty missions to the UN attended as well as numerous UN entities and nongovernmental organizations sent representatives.

The present Aide-Memoire was prepared by Nonviolent Peaceforce to offer a summary of the presentations and responses at that meeting. It is intended to serve as an input into the briefing and dialogue on the topic of *Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping: Has Its Time Come?* This meeting has been cosponsored by the same Permanent Missions in Geneva and co-organized by United Nations Institute for Training and Research, Nonviolent Peaceforce and Manchester University Humanitarian & Conflict Response Institute on 20 September 2012 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

Welcome and Introduction

*The event was initiated and opened by **Ambassador Libran Cabactulan**, Permanent Representative of the Mission of the Republic of the Philippines. Here follow some of his remarks.*

“The nature of war has changed dramatically over the past century. During WWI over 90% of the casualties were soldiers. Today, at least 75% of the casualties of war are civilians. Increasingly, civilians are targeted. The World Development Report 2011 states that no less than 1.5 billion people are living in countries where repeated violence disrupts economic development and precludes the chance of achieving even the minimum Millennium Development Goals.



Such is the continuing plight of hundreds of millions of civilians, men, women and children, often displaced, caught in conflict cycles and trapped in war, facing unprecedented hardship, injustice and even deliberate targeting.

Military peacekeeping has been one response and has produced limited positive results in certain situations, but its cost, effectiveness, timeliness and efficiency for the protection of civilians has come under scrutiny. The world is witnessing the limits of meeting violence with only armed, military means—and this is happening right at the time when the world of civilians needs much *more*, not *less* human protection: direct physical human protection should be an imperative.

When confronted with the imminent threat of violence to civilians—or worse, the actual mass violence against civilians—the world should have more options to choose from than the dilemma that all too often poses itself: namely the choice between doing nothing and launching the bombers.

And, in any case, armed peacekeepers may not always be the best answer.

Unarmed Civilian Protection and Peacekeeping (UCPP) is a newly organized peace tool that was not available in past. It would be suitable long before military peacekeeping may be deemed necessary. And it would be good as well in post-war conditions, once a ceasefire or peace treaty has been concluded, to help prevent a relapse back into violence.

Cost-effective, 'soft power' approaches to civilian protection have emerged over the past decade. Newly organized by global civil society organizations, these approaches help deter and prevent violence and provide physical protection to vulnerable civilians. But these unarmed, not-for-profit civilian capacities have thus far largely remained under-recognized and underutilized.

In The Philippines one such UCPP project is currently being carried out by Nonviolent Peaceforce... The world community needs to be better informed about the 'what' and 'how' of these emerging civilian protection and peacekeeping capacities.”

*Welcoming remarks were also offered by **Ambassador Tariq Al-Ansari**, Deputy Chef de Cabinet, on behalf of **Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser**, President of the 66th session of the General Assembly. His statement, in part, follows here.*

“...We are witnessing the significant and increasing role of civil society organizations in conflict and post-conflict situations. Ever more, we see civil society actors supporting - directly or indirectly - the UN's efforts to protect those in need.

Worldwide, many violent conflict situations arise that would greatly benefit from an early and deliberate engagement of unarmed civilians, to better guarantee the protection of civilians under threat...

Through their broad experience, civil society actors have developed and implemented innovative, local methods for protecting civilians, without relying on the use of force on the ground...

But no single actor can do it alone.

In some cases, civil society organizations act in a more informal, timely and flexible way than State actors or international organizations... This advantage is to be benefited from.”



Three Keynote Presentations

Ambassador Rafael Seguis, Ambassador Rafael Seguis, Undersecretary for the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs was Chair of the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process' Panel with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) when Nonviolent Peaceforce was invited to serve in the Civilian Protection Component (CPC) of the International Monitoring Team. Here follows a selection of his presentation of his country's experience working with civil society to protect civilians in the armed conflict in Mindanao.



“The Philippines comes fully aware of its fundamental duty to ensure the security and safety of civilians. The existence of conflict does not diminish that obligation in any manner. Perforce, it highlights the need to exert any and all efforts to protect innocent lives by all parties concerned.... Our approach has been holistic and comprehensive.

I share with you the Philippine experience in tapping civil society in the protection of civilians... We have actually advanced, and in fact operationalized, a rather unique model of unarmed civilian protection that directly engages civil society groups doing peacekeeping work, and taps into their knowledge, experience and manpower. This arrangement we have set up in Mindanao contributes to the practice of the peace process in the following ways, among others:

First, the concept and practice of “civilian protection” based on our own experience is relatively non-contentious. The presence and engagement by civil society groups does not pose a threat to the country’s sovereignty, and neither does it lead to the risk of “internationalizing” an internal conflict such as we have.

On the contrary, unarmed international presence especially by INGOs helps confer vital protection and assistance to threatened, vulnerable populations and communities when done effectively, intentionally, proactively, and humbly, in critical areas close to where these threatened communities live, and in full coordination and cooperation of all the parties involved.

Second, by adopting such a model of civilian protection, civil society has now become a direct player and contributor to the overall peace effort... Indeed, the formal entry into the peace process of solid and committed partners as part of the civilian protection component effectively sets the precedent for civil society to cross the threshold from peripheral involvement to co-initiating and co-creating a future for Mindanao peace with greater possibilities.

Third, by creating a mechanism on unarmed civilian protection, the focus of monitoring work became no longer confined to ceasefire and security-related

issues but broadened further to provide equal emphasis on civilian protection, and the observance of human rights and humanitarian laws on the ground.

Whereas before, ground-based issues tackled in the peace negotiations only pertained mostly to ceasefire violations and uncoordinated movement of armed troops, the CPC reports documenting displacements and specific human rights violations on the ground have also been carried into the Panel level discussions.

Fourth, the purely civilian character of the members comprising the CPC makes them more acceptable to communities... Unarmed civilian protection workers are given broader access to move around in these communities with ease and familiarity, thus enabling them to provide protective presence and accompaniment. They also serve to liaise with the bigger international agencies which can then safely monitor, assess and assist the needs of civilians.



Trust-building and creating spaces for continuing dialogues are also among the important tasks of the CPC to ensure that people open up and engage each other in a non-threatening atmosphere, respecting each other's beliefs, thoughts and emotions.

Fifth, the CPC structure also becomes a conduit for advocacies and education on issues of human rights and humanitarian laws...

Lastly, where the CPC mechanism is concerned, the principles of impartiality, objectivity, and balanced reporting are more or less assured... In addition, the CPC is an affordable, cost effective, efficient, and close-to-the-ground local peace monitoring instrument.

By adopting this model of engagement, we are on the right track insofar as providing a wider space for inclusiveness and transparency in the process.... This experience also provides options for consideration as we seek to broaden the concept of peacekeeping at the United Nations.”

Ms. Tiffany Easthom, Head of NP's Mission in South Sudan, presented the theory and practice of unarmed civilian peacekeeping. Here are some of her remarks.

“Because the vast majority of the victims of conflict today are civilians, *not* combatants, the requirement, the urgency of the need of broadening the concept of peacekeeping is distinct at this period in history.

NP was set up to promote and provide direct physical protection of civilians under threat of violent conflict. We work to support local civil society to protect itself, and

also to prevent further outbreaks of violence. We support and continue to build the capacity of the existing protection mechanisms that are already there: the community leaders, the police, the military, the government— to support and build the capacity of those local structures.

NP peacekeepers are specially trained professionals. They work deeply embedded in communities, full time, 24/7 to deal with the protection of civilians. We provide direct protection and we are available. Our civilian protection teams are made up of both nationals and internationals, people who are trained in these skills. We hire directly from the community so that we can work on local capacity building. When Nonviolent Peaceforce is no longer in the area, the capacity and skills will have been transferred to the local people who become the leaders in their communities in nonviolent conflict reduction and direct civilian protection. It opens up a world of possibility for women to participate in direct community security and community protection in a way that is often not afforded when the primary actors are, indeed, armed.

We are strategic. We work daily on conflict analysis, on the security analysis to allow us to constantly re-strategize. What are the best protection mechanisms? What are the best strategies, what are the best deterrent models that we can put into place to reduce violence.

We are nimble. We are able to move and adapt to situations. We are flexible and deeply immersed in the community. We are often working in places that are very difficult to get to for others, where there are very few other internationals, and where the international protective presence is very helpful.

We work on the principle of nonviolence and we are a neutral force. And ultimately it is a cost-effective tool that is available.

Some of the activities that make unarmed civilian peacekeeping and protection are:

- We provide accompaniment. Some people are probably familiar with the concept of protective accompaniment for vulnerable individuals.





- We provide a strategic protective presence. It is simply not enough to be just *present*, we need to be strategic in *how we are present*, who we build relationships with, and how we make ourselves available to deter violence and to increase safety and security.
- We are consciously visible and go to hotspots when and where we know tensions are rising and to make sure we are in the right place.
- We provide a local-level shuttle diplomacy, often missing in those hotspots when complex conflicts are arising. There is a lot of diplomatic work that happens at the higher levels, but often a lot of local-level shuttle diplomacy is needed to engage local leadership.
- We provide local-level facilitated dialogue.
- We provide mutually safe spaces for the conflict parties to come together.
- We also work on confidence building between state actors and local communities. For example in South Sudan, we are working in very remote communities that often don't have access to their local government, they are simply too far away. We will help bring them together.
- We help control rumors. One of the most dangerous things in a conflict is a false rumor. A single rumor can cause massive displacement and unnecessary fighting. One of the things we are able to do is to verify information and control rumors.
- We engage in interactive monitoring. We have already heard about ceasefire monitoring and supervision of truces, that kind of activities.
- And most importantly, we serve as a force multiplier, with the implementation of the early warning/early response mechanism, with a very heavy emphasis on *response*.



In South Sudan, on one recent occasion we were able to help broker a ceasefire agreement on the border between two states. It took 5 months and 110 separate interventions that ultimately resulted in the return of 76,000 IDPs. We were able to get them home. In the Philippines, another example of many: a thousand community members were removed from the battlefield through a humanitarian corridor; we could do this protective presence on the basis of the trusted

relationships we have with all conflict parties. In Sri Lanka, children abducted to be trained as child soldiers, we were able to negotiate their return to their mothers. In Guatemala, we provided the protective accompaniment of human rights defenders under threat around the time of elections.

In conclusion, unarmed civilian peacekeeping is an entirely appropriate early response to violent conflict for many more countries than we are presently working in and in many different situations. And it needs to be scaled up!”

Mr. Christopher Coleman, Director of the Civilian Capacity Project at the United Nations, is spearheading improvements in UN support to countries emerging from conflict. Prior to this assignment, he played a central role from 2006 to early 2011 in strengthening the UN’s practical work in the prevention and mediation of armed conflict. He led the establishment of the Policy and Mediation Division in the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and also served on a one-year assignment (2007-2008) as Director in the Office of the Secretary-General. Here follow his remarks.

“Having begun my career in a regional organization, then continued it in a non-governmental one, much of my work since then has been for the United Nations. And I believe that this Organization—its member states, the Secretariat and especially our missions in the field—have a lot to be proud of in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. Peacekeeping, Special Political Missions, Mediation, Preventive Diplomacy, and the conflict-sensitive development work of UN Country Teams, have accomplished an enormous amount. But we in the UN must be the first to acknowledge that our systems have a long way to go in order to be sufficiently responsive, and that we need continually to adapt our instruments—and our partnership with others, especially governments, regional organizations and civil society—to be effective. The armed conflicts, actual and potential, that we must address are ever-changing, and we have to continuously innovate in order to keep up.



It is quite interesting and encouraging to hear the field-based examples—which my two fellow panellists have provided—of how the instrument of Unarmed Civilian Protection is working. I always find it easier to discuss innovative instruments when they are grounded in real-world examples rather than in the abstract.

One of the things we have learned over the years is that an international presence is sometimes absolutely necessary in the short to medium term but can’t by itself solve the underlying problems that have led to armed conflict. Ultimately those differences will have to be resolved by the parties themselves. And the solutions will have to be owned by the population. Otherwise, they’re not solutions.

What this says to me is that international instruments need to be particularly attuned to national concerns—the concerns of the host country, including the

government, civil society and the population as a whole—to ensure that our response resonates positively with the host country. Absent that kind of connection, the international community may do what we think is a marvellous job, invest a lot of time and energy and resources, and then walk away puzzled when we're asked to leave and find that very little of what we have done has had an impact that will endure after we've gone. It seems to me that a civilian instrument like this one is well-suited to maintain the kind of connection to the host population that is required.

It also says to me that any international presence has to pay attention to national capacity-building if the host country faces critical gaps—which countries often do when they've been wracked by war. It's not just about the international community doing a job, it's also about handing over a job—mentoring, transferring skills and capacities. Otherwise the international community is stuck in the conflict zone for the long term, and any foreign presence over time may become a source of resentment within the host population. Again, an unarmed civilian presence, in its best form, often pairs international with national personnel, laying the groundwork for a full handover as soon as the circumstances permit. And we have heard good examples of that today.

During the mediation of peace agreements, one of the challenges is to reach an outcome that will have popular support. For this to happen, it is important for mechanisms to exist through which the broader population can express its views. This doesn't mean that the whole country has to be at the peace table—that's obviously untenable. It does mean that channels are required through which popular interests and popular feedback can be expressed. And those same popular voices are important after the agreement has been reached, in order to remind leaders on all sides of the commitments they have made to safeguard the interests of the people.

I conclude from this 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.

I think we can anticipate—and should head off—a debate about whether unarmed civilian protection is somehow a cheaper version of more conventional UN peacekeeping. I don't think that it is. I would rather think of this as choosing the right tool for the task. When the task requires military expertise or military capabilities, let us not be shy to send a military component. And when the more appropriate tool is an unarmed civilian presence, let's also not be shy to respond accordingly.

Unarmed civilian protection is not a perfect instrument. It is not a panacea. It is not always the right tool, and it should sometimes be avoided. It is, however, a tool that in some circumstances is the right one, the appropriate one, the most effective one. It is a tool that can sometimes be productively deployed on its own, sometimes alongside other instruments, for example within the context of a more

conventional peacekeeping operation. Let's make sure we have the systems in place to use it when we need it."

Summary of Responses to Audience Queries



Ambassador Eduardo Ulibarri from Costa Rica, who chaired the briefing, also moderated the Q&A.

Most questions touched on relationship of Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping to the UN and other entities, including coordination, complementarities, acceptance, coordination and funding. Here are some responses.

Raphael Seguis: "Nonviolent Peaceforce had been working in Mindanao and was acceptable to both sides, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Government of The Philippines... The fact that they were able to interact quite efficiently and effectively with all parties, we concluded that they would be useful to help us in the peace process."

Tiffany Easthom: "We work very closely with the whole UN family... real coordination happens at the field level-- but we do both. To give you an example: when the recent escalation of violence happened in Jonglei state, both Civil Affairs and Child Protection unit from the mission invited NP to come with them on an assessment mission; we were the only INGO that was invited along. Coordination and collaboration is absolutely critical to the work we do. We always say that if we surprise somebody, we are not doing the job properly. We have received funding from the Governments of Belgium, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand and the European Union. And, as I said, we also have significant funding from UNICEF and UNHCR."

Chris Coleman: "With regard to how this will fit officially within a UN context, I can very easily envisage circumstances of missions in the field which are mandated to carry out functions and this is could very well be one of the instruments which is deemed to be the right one to achieve whatever mandate it is selected to fulfill. I can also easily see of course more of the partnerships as already described."

The next set of questions revolved around field operations.

Chris Coleman: “What we have seen since 1998 to the present is a steady broadening of the complexity of DPKO mandates, reflecting the fact that the challenges operations face in the field are more complex and that the military is not the only issue or supplier... We got to a point where unarmed civilian protection was part and parcel of each and every new mission. It [unarmed civilian peacekeeping] would really be more of a continuation of a trend, not some kind of revolutionary shift-- which makes it altogether easier to accomplish.”

Tiffany Easthom: “With regard to early warning/early response, what we have been doing in South Sudan is that we have been working with two other INGOs and the Peace Commission to implement a pilot project of conflict early warning/early response that is building up to a ten-state roll-out... What we are really working to implement is how to shift the global norm of most of the resources going to the warning side-- so we tend to put all of our resources on the early warning, and fewer resources in early response. We have found that really focusing on the community level, doing skills and capacity building transfer at the community level helps them to map out the dangers in their communities, to recognize trends, to connect the dots and to recognize when things are going to escalate, how to intervene themselves when they can, and then how to mobilize more resources... The work we always talk about is taking the idea of nonpartisanship and using it as a verb rather than a noun... Remember that we are all committed to the protection of civilians and ultimately the end of violence.”

Closing Remarks

*In his summary remarks **Ambassador Jan Grauls of Belgium** made the following observations.*

“I find this very important and interesting and we have made a good beginning... that is my first point... There's been a lot of convergence by the speakers and in the Q&A session... The consensus included inclusiveness, transparency, presence, monitoring ceasefires locally and observing human rights, confidence building, local ownership, rumor control... There are a lot of links between what is said here and other debates that have been held and are continuing to go on: Protection of Civilians was very much at the center of what was said, but an



element that I would like to add that has not been mentioned is R2P. There is an important link between peacekeeping and R2P, and there's an ongoing debate on Libya and R2P. The Civilian Capacities will get more debate with the upcoming review. Then there's the relationship between this and Development work. Mediation was mentioned. Preventive Action. Women-- very, very important, not just as women as people but also women as actors: women as 'glue' as was said. I also think there is a lot of material to continue to think through and consider. Today's debate shows that there is interest, and strong motivation, and a lot of energy, so this issue is perhaps ready for further discussion in the next weeks and months.”

*In his closing remarks **Ambassador Jean-Francis Zinsou of Benin** cited the need for capacity building in countries affected by violent conflict and called for more unarmed civilian peacekeeping efforts, in cooperation with DPKO missions where they are deployed.*

“To my mind, unarmed civilian peacekeeping by local and global NGOs is a new and promising way of tackling the protection of civilians, monitoring ceasefires so that they hold, and preventing local violence from escalating. It is good to have impartial professionals who will do capacity building in countries affected by conflict. Specially trained staff from international and local NGOs need to work in teams and jointly cooperate to provide proactive protection and mediation on the ground. Let us use this promising tool whenever this is possible and appropriate. This can be done in cooperation with DPKO missions that have an integrated mandate, but *also* in the many conflict situations where UN or other military peacekeepers are not needed. We need altogether to be more preventive rather than coming in after a conflict has already gone violent. In fact, we are reaching the limits of what armed peacekeepers from the UN can do. Making space for unarmed civilian peacekeeping should be given favorable consideration within all our institutions that carry responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, including the UN and African Union. In this context I also welcome and support the idea of introducing the concept of unarmed civilian peacekeeping in the draft Declaration on the Human Right to Peace.”

