



## UNARMED CIVILIAN PROTECTION UPDATES, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

### SUMMARY NOTE

#### **Background:**

On Thursday 12 May 2022, the Permanent Missions of Australia, the Philippines, and Senegal co-hosted a lunch meeting of UN delegates and staff featuring Ms. Tiffany Easthom, Executive Director of Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), an INGO with Consultative Status with ECOSOC. This meeting followed upon a 2019 UCP/UN retreat that examined unarmed civilian protection (UCP) methods related to the direct protection of civilians (POC) at risk of violence in diverse conflict-affected areas.<sup>1</sup>

Unarmed civilian protection (UCP) utilizes a mixture of methods and practices for the ***immediate, direct protection of civilians at risk***, for ***localized violence reduction***, and for ***supporting local peace infrastructures that can sustain peace***. Practitioners of unarmed civilian protection (UCP) engage with affected communities at the grassroots level for varying periods of time ranging from a few months to several years in order to work with and protect communities as they acquire and/or enhance skills for self-protection. UCP provides unarmed, specially trained civilians, recruited from many countries and cultures including the host country, to live and work with local civil society in areas of violent conflict to:

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<sup>1</sup> The meeting opened with remarks from the Permanent Representative of the Philippines, HE Enrique Manalo, and James T. Bot, Head of Civil Affairs in MONUSCO; was hosted by the Military Advisor of the Permanent Mission of Australia, Group Captain Jarrod Pendlebury; and closed by Minister Counsellor, Diamane Diome, Charge d'Affaires of the Permanent Mission of Senegal.

## PROTECT

Unarmed civilians, nationals and internationals, providing direct protection to civilians under threat of physical violence without resort to weapons.

## SUPPORT

Supporting local civil society organizations and communities to better protect themselves, build peace, and prevent further outbreaks of violence.

## BUILD

Strengthening the capacity of existing protection mechanisms and local peace structures to sustain peace.

# Nonviolent Peaceforce

Ms. Easthom provided an overview of the practices that NP uses in its current UCP programming in Iraq, Myanmar, Philippines (Mindanao), South Sudan, Sudan (Darfur), and the United States. She highlighted that UCP focuses on local grassroots conflict, is conducted through deep community engagement, relies on relationship-based protection done from the bottom up, and that because it is community-owned protection it contributes to sustaining peace over the long term. The principles and practices were elucidated with examples of: community-led early warning/early response, accompaniment of women to prevent gender-based violence; direct protection of peacebuilders and human rights defenders under threat; strengthening of local capacities for dialogue and dispute resolution; civilian ceasefire monitoring; providing protection in IDP camps; forming and supporting women's protection teams for on-going violence reduction and self-protection. The main methods (proactive engagement, monitoring, relationship building, and capacity development) and their practical applications are illustrated below:



The presentation contextualized the work of unarmed, civilian-led protection of civilians in different environments and illustrated how UCP can complement both multi-dimensional peacekeeping missions and Special Political Missions (SPMs), support the work of the UN

during transitions, and work in cooperation with other humanitarian and development actors in complex political situations.

***New challenges:*** UN and international actors are grappling with new challenges to Protection of Civilians (POC) such as: increasing civilian harm perpetrated by state and non-state armed actors in local level conflicts; the protection of civilians gap exacerbated during drawdowns and transitions; and new and emerging threats to human security, i.e. stress by worsening climactic conditions, pandemic restrictions and policies, and the impact of technology used malignly (hate speech, extremism, misinformation and rumor amplification). There is also an incomplete body of knowledge about multi-dimensional ways to contribute to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus that fully recognizes and utilizes local civil society in all phases of planning for and sustaining peace.

***Opportunities:*** UCP provides opportunities for proactive prevention, protection, and response to these emerging threats through its long-term, on-the-ground presence; deep, trusted relationships with local communities; and working at the cusp of the triple nexus with a multiplicity of local civil society actors to reduce violence and create conditions for long-term peace. UCP can complement the UN's higher level, national activities by engendering greater, meaningful inclusion of civilians and CSOs, especially at the grass roots level, in implementing responses to POC challenges, in working across sectors in formulating UN transition plans, and in implementing community-led violence reduction and peacebuilding activities.

***Next steps:*** The 12 May 2022 meeting helped to develop understanding and interest among those newly introduced to UCP and rekindle knowledge and commitment among those already familiar. NP hopes to stimulate more examination and discussion on the application of UCP in complex political situations. Some areas for further exploration:

- UCP good practices can highlight the essential role that local actors can play in POC and promote the integration of unarmed civilian approaches into the UN's basic protocol for transition planning and processes that protect civilians.
- More virtual UCP training will be rolled out to youth peacebuilders in sub-Saharan Africa in the coming year. In-person and online training has and can be made available to civil society, local police, and UN Mission and Country Team personnel.
- Explore how UCP can further complement the Secretariat's work in SPM and peacebuilding contexts. Member States are welcome to visit UCP field sites as they have in the past to see the work.
- NP would welcome developing partnerships on POC with Member States, regional and sub-regional organizations, and other relevant actors to expand awareness of and work in unarmed civilian protection in new environments as needed.
- NP wishes to explore how UCP can add value in the on-going consultations on the UN's New Agenda for Peace particularly related to these core areas of focus: reducing strategic risks; supporting regional prevention; putting women and girls at the center of security policy; and investing in prevention and peacebuilding.