



# Lessons Learned about Our UCP/A Community of Practice

Reflections from the Unarmed Civilian Protection/Accompaniment (UCP/A) Virtual Gathering November 2021 and the six regional UCP/A Good Practices Workshops that preceded it

# UCP/A is a paradigm shift.

The UCP/A Virtual  
Gathering and six  
regional UCP/A  
Regional  
Workshops  
revealed that a  
paradigm shift is  
already underway  
and growing!



Current approaches to security and safety are breaking down throughout the world. In light of the existential threats faced by people today, the field of security must shift away from one based on military force relying heavily on weapons and technology, designed to protect the security of nation states and transnational corporations. The current system provides security for the privileged few while dehumanizing those defined as enemies. Unarmed civilian protection/accompaniment (UCP/A) is part of a constructive alternative to the violence and oppression of today.

UCP/A makes a major contribution to such a paradigm shift by demonstrating field tested approaches that are:

- Nonviolent
- Human Centered
- People to people
- Built from the bottom up
- Reliant on leadership of women and youth
- Recognizing the primacy of local actors
- Based on interconnectivity
- Expressing solidarity and nonpartisanship
- Based on relationship and trust building
- Proven effective in some of the most violent areas of the world

# We know UCP/A works.



Evaluations, case studies, interviews, reports, and observation tell us:

- Lives are saved.
- Communities are able to stay at home.
- Peace and human rights work is more possible and involves more people in a wider area.
- Re-establishment of relationships in divided communities is possible.
- Behavior of armed actors is changed.
- Shootings, violent crimes and killings are dramatically reduced.
- Violence can be tackled by unarmed trained civilians.
- Unarmed civilian protectors and accompaniers can do almost every task undertaken by armed UN peacekeepers.
- Armed incidents drop dramatically with the presence of UCP/A.
- Local people report a greater capacity to respond to threats of violence.
- It takes time.
- It doesn't work all the time.

(Sources available upon request)



The UCP/A community is building knowledge collaboratively and intentionally.

Six three-day regional workshops were offered in Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East, North America, Central America, and South America. They formed the basis of the Unarmed Civilian Protection and Accompaniment (UCP/A) Virtual Gathering. Offered via Zoom, 186 registrants from 160+ organizations working in 45+ countries had the opportunity to attend 6 keynote sessions and 9 good practice workshops for 6 days over 2 weekends in November 2021.

### Keynote Topics

- Welcome and Introduction
- Global Trends: Climate Disruption, Pandemics, and the Decline of Democracy
- Decolonializing UCP
- UCP in the Digital Age
- Responding to Transnational Corporate Violence
- Where do we go from here?

### Good Practice Workshops

- UCP and Community Self-Protection
- The UCP and Accompaniment Umbrella: What are We Talking about?
- The Role of Nonviolence in UCP & Accompaniment Practice
- Solidarity and Nonpartisanship
- Evolution of UCP/Accompaniment in Southeast Asia
- Intersections of UCP and Accompaniment with Humanitarian Aid and Strategies for Peace
- Unarmed Protection Missions by States & Multilateral Organizations
- Knowledge Creation and Sharing
- Developing UCP and Accompaniment as a Community of Practice



# Key Learning: UCP/A requires a systems approach.

UCP/A is heavily nuanced and dependent upon changing contexts which requires agility. Choosing which UCP/A methods to use and determining how much each should be applied should be based on the multiple dynamics of the conflict. These choices can only be understood through deep and ongoing engagement with various stakeholders in the local community. Government and regional stakeholders also often need to be included.

Therefore, UCP/A is a systems approach providing much more of a process than a prescription.





Key  
Learning:  
Decolonializing  
UCP/A work  
needs to be a  
focus.

It is important to insure that UCP/A is not done primarily by white people imposing their values and methodologies on local communities. Perspectives from the Global South widen the scope of UCP/A in terms of methodologies, root causes, and self-protection opportunities.



Key  
Learning:  
Violence  
must be  
addressed on  
multiple  
levels.

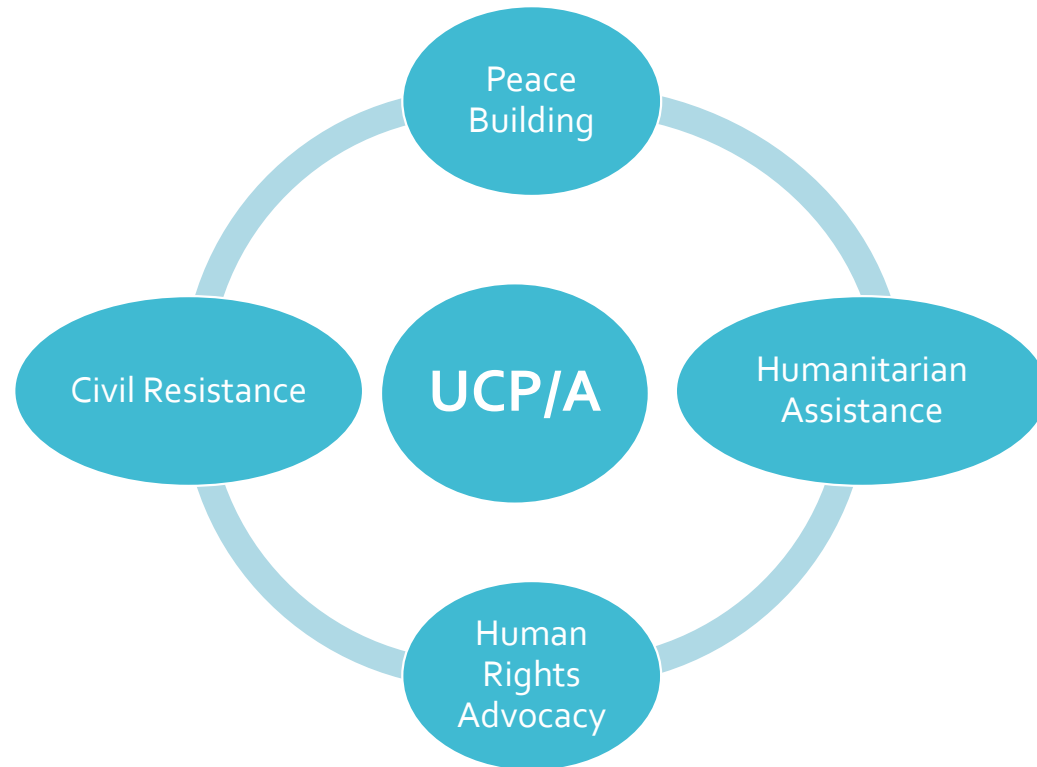
It is difficult to separate political violence from other forms of violence. For example, a single incident of family violence can ignite a clan feud which can then feed into larger scale political violence. These larger conflicts almost always include sexual violence. Therefore, preventing many kinds of localized violence, including gender-based-violence, is key.



Key Learning:  
UCP/A is connected to other fields of active nonviolence.

UCP/A is connected to many other fields of active nonviolence but is not identical to any of them.

For example, while some measure of civil resistance can be part of UCP/A and while civil resistance can sometimes protect (and sometimes do the opposite), there is a need for UCP/A dedicated organizations and a clear division of labor between UCP/A and organizations from other fields.





Key  
Learning:  
Invitation  
and consent  
are critical.



Nonviolence must be centered on consent. Trust cannot be built without it. UCP/A work cannot proceed without an invitation to engage and the ongoing consent of community partners. Consent must also be given to initiate research and share information or photographs.

Key Learning: Mutual protection should be acknowledged and nurtured.

UCP/A is always mutual and needs to be acknowledged as such. Sometimes people in the community provide as much or more protection to companions as the companions do to the community.



Individual safety and mutual protection are nourished through hyperlocal relationship building. Strengthening mutual and complementary roles creates more effective protective accompaniment and advocacy.

Key Learning:  
Local communities can protect themselves nonviolently.



- Many local communities have developed methods to protect themselves.
- Supporting, enhancing or protecting the space for nonviolent community self-protection is a major role for many UCP/A groups.
- For example, over 60 Women's Protection Teams in South Sudan provide protection against child abduction and gender-based violence. They employ a variety of UCP/A methods and negotiate directly with local and military officials.

Key Learning:  
When women are actively involved, UCP/A is more effective.



While it is important that all stakeholders are involved, many examples were given of women leading violence prevention, conflict mitigation, and local ceasefire negotiations. Women's groups were also observed protecting survivors of gender-based violence, mediating between husbands and wives, and dealing with community tensions like water issues with experience and understanding that men don't have.



Key  
Learning:  
Engaging  
youth in  
UCP/A is  
critical.



Youth have credibility with young perpetrators that others don't have, and they provide positive role models. Training initiatives for youth have prevented them from becoming perpetrators. Youth of conflicting ethnic groups were successfully trained to provide UCP/A together.



Key Learning:  
Actively involve local communities in monitoring and evaluation.

Best results come from a mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis and storytelling where local people are actively participating.



Key Learning: Engage with multiple stakeholders including armed actors when possible.

It is critical to maintain independence and not be seen as allied with state or non-state actors.



Key Learning:  
Others use UCP/A methodologies but have challenges fully providing UCP/A .



While state and multi-lateral actors as well as humanitarian NGOs can sometimes utilize individual UCP/A practices, they are structurally incapable of employing full UCP/A. For example:

- UN Peacekeepers rely upon weapons for protection and cannot live in the community.
- Humanitarian groups have mandates that require them to primarily focus on humanitarian assistance.
- Many multi-lateral unarmed monitoring efforts are limited by political agendas and/or mandates to uphold a specific government.



# Our UCP/A Community of Practice is evolving.



From December 2017 to February 2021, a series of regional workshops followed by a global Virtual Gathering came together to share good practices, grapple with shared issues, and talk about next steps. All together, 300 participants representing 160 organizations from 45 countries participated in the process. These experiences produced a growing sense that UCP/A practitioners, partners, and related academics belong to a Community of Practice (CofP) whose power could be harnessed for the benefit of all.

Reports may be found at <https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/good-practices/>





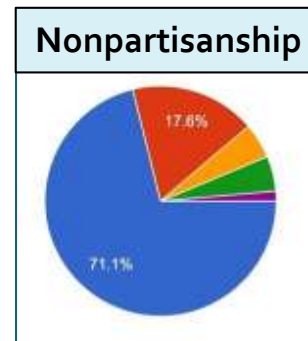
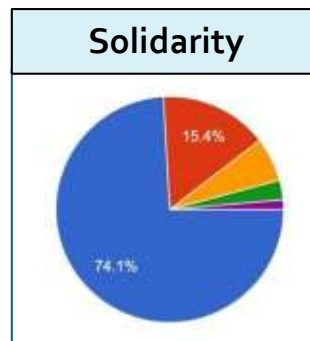
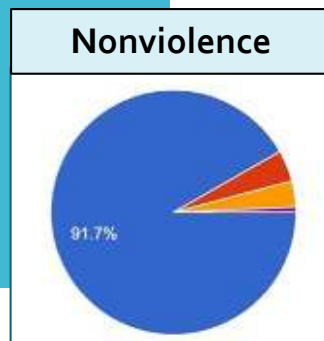
# UCP/A organizations share many values.

Shared values emerged as a result of the electronic survey at the Virtual Gathering.

- 92% agree that the principle of nonviolence is central to their work.
- 74% strive to express solidarity with those oppressed by violence.
- 71% strictly adhere to the principle of nonpartisanship.

Discussions at the Regional Workshops and the Virtual Gathering revealed other important shared principles.

- Overcoming colonialism is critical.
- Recognition that everyone has power and agency to contribute to nonviolence and protection is central.



An engaged  
UCP/A  
Community  
of Practice  
offers many  
advantages.

Improved sustainability with reduced burn  
out because there is . . .

<b>More learning from each other</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perspectives from communities doing self-protection</li><li>• Good practices and successful experiences from other organizations</li></ul>	<b>More sharing of resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training curriculums</li><li>• HR polices</li><li>• Monitoring and evaluation tools</li><li>• Academic research</li><li>• And more</li></ul>
<b>More awareness of UCP/A</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More easily demonstrate growth and effectiveness</li><li>• Raise the visibility of this kind of work with governments and donors</li><li>• Increase awareness of the broad array of UCP/A methods through collective advocacy</li><li>• Increase trust and credibility for UCP/A methods</li><li>• Advocate for funding and policy support</li></ul>	

It all adds up to more security  
for more communities.

# A UCP/A Community of Practice could benefit the world.

A vibrant, effective UCP Community of Practice benefits many constituencies.

- Communities in conflict – Supporting communities to protect themselves.
- UCP/A practitioners – Improving our understandings and effectiveness.
- The global community – Providing and accelerating a sustainable approach for the protection of civilians and prevention of violence at a time when the need is dramatically escalating.



# The UCP/A Community of Practice faces important challenges.

In light of growing climate chaos, authoritarianism, transnational corporations violating human rights and ignoring the interests of local populations, disregard of international human rights and other norms, pandemics, and a widening wealth gap, how can we respond to growing needs for community security and protection?

- How can we ensure that racism, white privilege, and colonialism are not perpetuated in our work?
- How do we address transnational corporate violence?
- Can we document our success in a participatory way?
- How do we build a Community of Practice that doesn't reinforce existing power imbalances?
- How does UCP/A recognize, support and/or encourage community self-protection?



# Where do we go from here?



## **Together we can make progress.**

- Create opportunities to learn from each other and share resources
- Build more awareness of UCP/A with governments, donors, and the public
- Launch Working Groups on De-colonialization of UCP/A and Engaging Community Voices
- Plan for a Face-to-Face Gathering starting with the creation of an Advisory Council and the identification of more UCP/A networks or projects
- Expand the existing network of UCP/A researchers by working with the creators of Creating Safer Space to include more UCP/A researchers
- Explore the creation of a shared definition of UCP/A and work together to create a set of UCP/A common standards



You can get  
involved  
today!



- Volunteer to participate in one of the Working Groups to help make good practices more widely available to UCP/A organizations – contact [mduncan@nonviolentpeaceforce.org](mailto:mduncan@nonviolentpeaceforce.org).
- Join the Face-to-Face Gathering Advisory Council to provide leadership about the content of the structure of the next important Community of Practice event - contact [mduncan@nonviolentpeaceforce.org](mailto:mduncan@nonviolentpeaceforce.org).
- Volunteer to work on the Face-to-Face Design Committee to contribute to the ideas and experiences that will be available at this global gathering – contact [adele\\_lennig@outlook.com](mailto:adele_lennig@outlook.com).
- Read the Virtual Gathering Summary Report and the reports of the six Regional Workshops to expand your understanding of UCP/A, its benefits and its challenges at <https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/good-practices/>.