



UNARMED CIVILIAN PROTECTION EFFORTS IN SUDAN

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS



Funded by
the European Union

Nonviolent Peaceforce | Darfur | Sudan | Nov 2022



OVERVIEW

Building on twenty years of expertise in Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), Nonviolent Peaceforce established a formal presence in Sudan early 2022. Our goal is to enhance safety and security of high-risk communities in Darfur by supporting and strengthening local peace initiatives while advocating for the protection needs of civilians.

This snapshot presents the context in which Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) started working in Sudan, in the wake of UNAMID's drawdown. It lays out the preliminary activities and the scaling up of UCP programme activities by Nonviolent Peaceforce teams in North and West Darfur following the establishment of NP's Country Office in El Fasher in May 2022.

“NP is the first humanitarian organization to reach out to our village since the previous year. We feel like we are a forgotten community, nothing is here .. no clean water .. no clinic .. and we can't go out of our village freely because of the security. You are here! We all are happy to see you all!”

-Community Member, Village in Darfur



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BACKGROUND

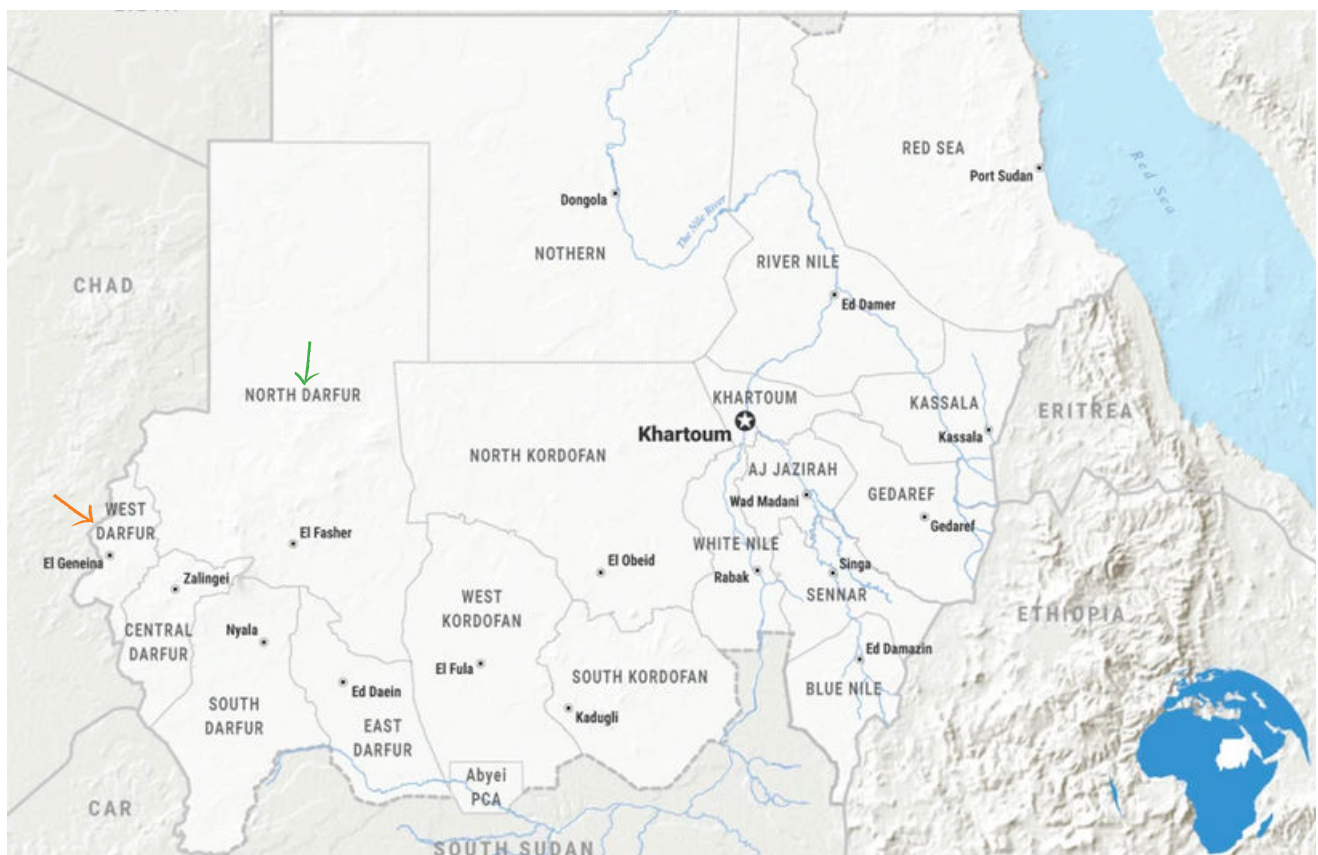
In 2007, the United Nations – African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) was established with the core mandate of providing protection to the civilians caught in the conflict. This was mandated by the UN Security Council due to significant inter-ethnic violence, conflicts over land and resources, and violence perpetrated by numerous armed groups in the region. UNAMID, which was a hybrid mission from the UN and African Union, was one of the largest and most expensive peacekeeping missions ever deployed.

By 2019, the UNAMID mission had brought some stability and the large presence of peacekeeping forces, to a certain extent, deterred violence; mainly due to the fact that there were so many observers to the violence that armed groups lost the sense of impunity in the global context. The nonviolent revolution of 2019 led to the removal of Omar Bashir's government and it looked as if there would be a new era of stability in Sudan. The final indicator that peace was returning to Darfur came with the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) in October 2020. In 2020 and throughout 2021 UNAMID forces began withdrawing. However, on 25 October 2021, Gen. Al Burhan (the head of the Sudanese armed forces) arrested the civilian Prime Minister leading to a new wave of resistance and protests.

Even prior to the government change, violence was erupting once more in West Darfur due to the withdrawal of UNAMID, which led to a dangerous and growing protection of civilians gap. Violence became more prevalent throughout the region of Darfur and old patterns of inter-communal violence have become more regular. It can also be said that the JPA merely brought about a cessation of hostilities among the signatory armed groups and had little influence on civilian groups and on reducing underlying tensions.



Several of the most influential rebel groups remain outside of the peace process, some of which continue to fight government forces, particularly in the Jebel Marra area. Even those who participate in the peace process are wary of its ability to ensure future peace. While the conflict's intensity abated somewhat from its nadir in the early years of the millennium, the underlying economic and political grievances remain, as do the inter-communal tensions broadly between groups identifying as Arab and those who identify as African, which have been exacerbated by the conflict. The underlying environmental factors which bring herders (Arab) and farmers (African) into conflict have become ever more intense as climate change continues to put increasing pressure on dwindling natural resources such as land and water.



*Map courtesy of OCHA & Relief Web



START-UP OF NONVIOLENT PEACEFORCE IN DARFUR

The withdrawal of UNAMID resulted in immediate gaps in the civilian protection infrastructure. UNAMID was replaced with a UN political mission which was created to support and guide the transitional government towards the civilian rule and free elections. Its mandate was established at a time when stability and peace were seen as achievable goals following the revolution. However, the political landscape changed significantly on 25 October 2021. UNITAMS (The United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan) is now the UN's Special Political Mission based primarily in Khartoum. It is much smaller in size than UNAMID and without peacekeeping troops. It does not have the mandate nor the capacity to address the Protection of Civilians (POC) needs that persist in the country. Meanwhile, UNITAMS' proposed Office of Civilian Protection and Rule of Law has fewer than fifty staff to cover human rights, child protection, Woman Peace and Security, and protection of civilians for the entire country.

NP commenced online training for Darfuri youth peacebuilders in unarmed civilian protection (UCP) with funding from UNAMID in 2020 to fill the protection of civilians gaps arising upon UNAMID's drawdown. In September 2021, NP deployed a team to Darfur to build upon the online UCP training and further assess the protection needs of civilians affected by violence to inform NP programme development in the region. In particular, the team sought to understand sources of violence against civilians to determine how unarmed civilian protection (UCP) could be scaled up in the Darfur context. Following the assessment and a pilot programme, a small number of NP national and international staff deployed into North and West Darfur to achieve the below objectives.

NP OBJECTIVES IN DARFUR



Fill in protection gaps left by the withdrawal of UNAMID through the deployment of UCP teams in locations previously served by UNAMID.



Conduct shuttle diplomacy and engage with influential actors and tribal leaders to trigger timely interventions and accompany local communities, especially IDPs, in engaging with these actors.



Build the capacity of civilians to improve their own security and develop self-protection strategies through establishing Community Protection Teams.



Facilitate civilians' ability to access available humanitarian services by constructing and strengthening referral pathways, while providing protective accompaniments to ensure civilians' safety and dignity.



Increase accountability and protection for civilians through engagement with duty bearers and communities



Mainstream protection through the efforts of humanitarian service providers located in Al Fashir and surrounding areas.



NP ACHIEVEMENTS IN NORTH & WEST DARFUR

New Relationships

NP established the country office in El Fasher, North Darfur, with a small start-up team in May 2022 and established the first sub-office in El Geneina, West Darfur, to execute UCP effectively with close proximity to the communities in Darfur.

There has been a very positive reception of NP's work from various actors in the areas of operation. Over the last three months, NP was able to meet with over 1,000 different stakeholders: women, youth, and men in IDP camps, and nomadic groups in North and West Darfur. Additionally, NP conducted a number of patrols to seldom reached areas to build the confidence of the civilians. Furthermore, NP engaged with local authorities (native and local administration), community leaders, government authorities, and humanitarian actors in North and West Darfur.

Outreach Mission to the Arab Nomad Areas Around Kereneik

NP conducted its outreach mission to the Arab nomad areas around Kereneik and in Gallab localities in West and North Darfur, respectively. NP collated protection needs and concerns from nomad communities for advocacy on the humanitarian presence, which tends to be more limited among those communities than among sedentary ones, and sought to identify entry points for NP programming activities in the area. NP shared a comprehensive mission report with humanitarian partners in North and West Darfur.



Proactive Presence in IDP Camps in North Darfur

NP, through its presence in IDP camps in North Darfur, held a number of proactive presence activities. NP provides direct physical protection through presence in hotspot areas. Protective presence is in itself a deterrent. Despite the potential volatility of the situation, NP leveraged the relationships built with the community leaders and government authorities, and reached the areas which were not served by other humanitarian organisations due to perceived security threats. By not considering the humanitarian needs of one group in such a situation, humanitarians may involuntarily exacerbate conflict. From the beginning of its operations, NP acknowledged this imbalance and sought to address it. We were eventually able to provide protective presence in some of these volatile areas. This was achieved through NP's continued engagement with the community and building relationships with the community members at various levels.

“I like this Community Protection Training because it allowed me to think outside the box and find creative approaches for community protection. We protect each other in the community instead of waiting for others to protect us.”

– A women representative of IDP community

Expanded Outreach to Tawila

NP conducted a scoping mission to Tawila locality about 65 km west of El Fasher, North Darfur. The NP team met with community leaders, government authorities, women, men, and representatives from five IDP camps in Tawila locality. The team held a number of community protection meetings with vulnerable communities to further understand the protection and safety concerns of the communities and strengthen local protection mechanisms in Tawila locality including the five IDP camps.



300+

civilians, including **women and men** in **IDP and nomad communities** of North Darfur, have attended NP's community protection orientations & awareness-raising trainings.

“I’m happy. I enjoyed the Community Protection training. Look, even my little child is also smiling. Thank you, NP, for the opportunity. And thanks again for your effort to keep the community safe!”

– A women member of IDP community





REMAINING PROTECTION RISKS

Security Risks

Generally, in Darfur, one of the main protection risks is attacks on civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Inter-communal violence is most common in Kereneik, Tawila, Kutum, Kab kabiya, and Gallab areas between IDP farmers and nomads in North and West Darfur.

Lack of Basic Services

No or lack of service provision for communities, including IDPs in El Fasher, Kereneik, and Tawila localities. Even though WFP food assistance and minor health care services are functioning in some areas, the inadequate WASH facilities are not meeting minimum standards to assist the community and prevent diseases. For example, One Primary Health Care (PHC) facility serves 400,000 IDPs residing in Zamzam IDP camp in El Fasher locality. Mobile clinics run by international organizations in El Geneina and Kereneik are not even meeting the minimum healthcare needs of the community.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV remains the most significant protection risk for women and girls in Darfur. Regular displacement, lack of privacy at home, and reliance on women and children to fetch water and firewood are factors which expose women and girls to significant risk. During the agricultural season, women and children are regularly attacked by armed individuals/groups during transport from farming areas and while conducting agricultural activities. According to reports from humanitarian agencies, during the attacks in Kereneik in April 2022, two women and girls' safe spaces were looted, and one burnt whilst over 65 cases of SGBV were reported. SGBV goes



underreported because of social stigma and ineffective legal frameworks. Lack of community awareness is also noted as a barrier to SGBV response and prevention.

Violations Against Children

According to UN's Sudan Protection Sector Report, children in North and West Darfur continue to be the most affected by grave child rights violations in Sudan and children in rural areas such as Jabal Mara, Kereneik, Kutum, and Kab Kabiya, and internally displaced children are extremely vulnerable. Access to conflict-affected children and populations for monitoring, reporting, and response purposes remains a continued challenge. The access restrictions for most humanitarians were mainly due to security concerns and administrative impediments. Therefore, no figure provided will indicate the overall scope of grave violations against children in North and West Darfur.

In light of the risks of violence and insecurity, Nonviolent Peaceforce plans to scale up its unarmed protection teams in North and West Darfur at present and hopes it can continue to address the evolving needs of all communities for protection and security.



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