



In April 2023, 1,566 internally displaced persons (IDPs) – nearly two-thirds of whom were children – living in Jeddah 5 Camp in the South Mosul area in Iraq were given 48 hours to disassemble their tents and vacate the premises. After several government attempts to close the camp, most of the 342 remaining families had stayed because they were afraid to return to their areas of origin. They were seen as being “IS-affiliated”, as many had family members who, for different reasons, had joined the extremist group. Once compelled to leave the camp and return to their villages, many of these families faced threats of violence, rejection and discrimination. In some cases, community leaders and security actors had already signaled they would be unable to protect returnees. While in certain villages returnee families were able to successfully reintegrate in previous years, in others rejection and violence remain a reality.

From 2018 to 2023, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) worked inside Jeddah 5 IDP camp. Among other activities, NP facilitated training in Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), capacity-strengthening and confidence-building to encourage and support women and youth to actively participate in community protection and advocate for solutions to address community needs. Over time, participants gained a deeper interest in UCP tools and advocacy and, with further NP training, coaching and organisational support, were able to establish Community Peace Teams (CPTs).

NP and the CPTs started gradually carrying out joint patrols to prevent sexual harassment of women and girls in the camp and facilitated community meetings to ensure duty bearer responsiveness. Before camp closure, the CPTs were already facilitating sessions and conducting patrols and community mobilization both independently and jointly with NP.

One of these CPTs was the Women Protection Team (WPT). After the camp was disbanded, the women of the WPT carried their learned knowledge and skills in protection, advocacy and nonviolent conflict resolution to their areas of origin, inciting transformation beyond Jeddah 5 Camp.

One WPT member, a 29-year-old woman who returned to her area of origin, Jemisa Village, was met with violent rumors being spread online. Several returnee families faced threats of violent attacks and the burning of tents, creating a climate of fear and limiting the freedom of movement of the returnee families.



NP meeting with WPT family in Jemisa Village, June 2023

While showing empathy for those violent towards her, the woman nonetheless took a stand for herself and the families living in fear. Leveraging the skills she acquired as a WPT member with NP, the woman mastered the confidence to directly contact the security officers – something usually reserved only for men in this society – and explained what was happening. She also engaged with those who were spreading harmful rumors. This woman’s firm stance prompted the security actors to instruct the publishers of the rumors to stop their threats. The confidence, experience, and skills she was able to develop with the support of NP enabled her to take control of the situation, ensure her own safety and contribute to the safety of others around her.

Transformation was seen in other villages as well. Once in their areas of origin, returnees – mostly women-headed households – faced a dire lack of basic services, including electricity and water, adding to the complexity of their repatriation process. One such case was that of a 42-year-old WPT member who returned to Jadala Village.

*"When we returned, we found ourselves devoid of services," she recounted. "We needed to advocate for ourselves, to demand essential amenities, even electricity from private generators." (June 2023)*

An encounter with the mayor of Qayyarah was a pivotal moment in her story. She took the opportunity to make an official request for water and electricity in her area of origin. She told him her family and many others wished to return and could not settle in other areas, as they would be subjected to assault and rejection. The WPT member's advocacy efforts on behalf of her community soon yielded positive results. The area now has electricity, and a water project is to be implemented. The woman boldly stated,

*"Before, I was afraid to confront the army or face accusations of being a 'Daesh.' However, the trainings I received at NP completely altered my condition. Now, I am confident in standing up for my rights and the rights of my community. The trainings empowered me and instilled a sense of self-confidence in me." (June 2023)*

These situations highlight how WPT members, supported by NP's trainings on nonviolent conflict resolution, leadership, and advocacy, as well as its ongoing support and coaching, have the capacity and position to successfully advocate for their protection needs to be met with duty bearers. Their actions not only improved their personal lives but also impacted their communities by pushing duty bearers to become more responsive to civilians' needs, whether physical protection, or water and electricity. The active role WPT members continue to play even after camp closure is a testament to women's skills and strength as agents of change in their communities. It further underlines the need for a locally-owned and driven approach to protection: equipping individuals and communities to engage in nonviolent conflict resolution, advocating to increase duty bearer responsiveness, and transforming societies from within.

Importantly, these stories of transformation provide insight into how NP's capacity-strengthening contributes to community-driven change and resilience. They offer clear examples of how WPT members have utilized their training and knowledge to effect change in their communities. They demonstrate NP's work's profound and lasting impact in the Jeddah 5 Camp and beyond.

