

On 23-24 October 2023, **Bakhita Stephen Guet**, National Protection Officer, and **Tiffany Easthom**, Executive Director, advocated for more recognition and investment in civilian protection at the [UN Preparatory Conference in Kigali, Rwanda](#).

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**Bakhita's remarks below ([or listen/watch here](#)):**

Our mandate is UCP, maybe you've heard of it? As NP and unarmed civilian protection (UCP), we believe in community engagement and that it is a powerful tool for sustainable peace in the community.

I was in an IDP since 2020, since the company started in South Sudan and I was among the beneficiaries of the UN peacekeeping, I'm very happy. Also, that was hosted by the UN peacekeeping— but for the long run, we have also seen the need to support the UN peacekeeping through the civilian protection skills as well.

Because NP and other civil society organizations, they are focusing more on how to engage the local community to take ownership of the POC or protection of civilians. Because we cannot say that peace should be sustainable if we always talk about having the resources only for the mission to continue. Until when is that going to be sustainable? That means we are creating dependency for the government not to take responsibility for the protection of civilians. And then the government will continue buying time because they would know that it is their responsibility to protect their civilians. Therefore, as the person who was and still is a civilian, because I'm still living in Bentiu IDP camp up to now because it has been transitioned from POC to Bentiu IDP camp.

I'm talking from experience and the work, the great work the UN peacekeeping is doing on the ground, but is limited due to this flooding, as well as the Unity state is flooded, and also is limited because there is a need for cooperation between the UN peacekeeping and the civil organizations on the ground.

As much as we need the presence of the uniformed men and women, we also need the civil society organizations to build the capacity of the local community so that this community will be sustainable. One of the great things that NP is doing on the ground is having local Community Protection Teams (CPTs).

I think our coalition came from basically you know that we have Community Protection Teams (CPTs) and we have Youth Protection Teams (YPTs) and also we have male Gender Champions. These are locally trained men and women and youth so that they can train other communities and they are trained based on the local capacities and they, they apply the cultural values since in many cultures men they were assigned to provide protection.

Now these women and men, their work is to remind the community that we are not violent, we are naturally created. We are loving fathers, we are loving brothers. So what happened in the middle? I believe there is a need for the mission and the civil society organization to work together so that while the mission is carrying on the uniform work, the civil society organization because they have that capacity as well, this will enhance the sustainability of peace.

We don't need to live in POCs any longer. Maybe many of you do not know how it's hard to live in a POC— it creates the dependency syndrome to the extent that you think you are vulnerable forever, but yet you are strong. We need that spirit to build their capacity so that they know there is wrong. I have lived for more than eight years in POC and it felt so bad because even if you have the talent, you cannot express it because you will be only seen as a vulnerable person. I don't need anyone to live like that because it's not good to be in POC. The real POC is when I'm living and I'm saying like when I came to Kigali, I felt so safe with the women when I landed. This is the safety we need.

This is the real POC we need. We don't need POC where it is guarded by the military and then me, I'm being protected from my own government. Is that the real peace we need? It's not that real peace we need— we need sustainable peace, where even the mission is that peace continues to rise and then the world will have fewer POCs, then the world would have very peaceful communities.

How many times are we going to ask for resources to build our seeds? The world is going bad. As we know now, in many countries there are many wars and civil society organizations and UN peacekeeping need to work for sustainable development activities rather than dependency activities that will keep us hostage all the time.

I appreciate you and peacekeeping a lot and I appreciate all the civil society organizations and therefore it's good to work together instead of competing for one civil society or for one civilian. Let us work together as one so that all these resources we put in one basket and then help the community rise. And then we leave them while they continue with the projects that we have done with them. And then we go to other places where we are needed the most. Thank you.