



Qayyarah Peace Festival. Iraq. September 2023. ©NP

## A Call for Peaceful Coexistence



### How a Peace Festival brought together a divided community.

**On September 21, 2023, women, youth, community leaders, artists, security actors, and families from around northern Iraq gathered in the pursuit of peace.**

Organized by three Youth Peace Teams supported by Nonviolent Peaceforce, the Peace Festival brought together more than 1,700 people – including Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, and Arabs – for the first event of its kind since the occupation of IS/Da'esh ended in 2016.

Typically in northern Iraq deep divisions keep communities separate and suspicious of each other. **People rarely interact outside of their extended family or tribal group. Public spaces like parks and markets are divided.** In a community that is home to diverse peoples such separation fuels negative stereotypes and fear of the other, and when there is conflict it can quickly lead to violence.

These community tensions were only made worse during the occupation of the area by IS/ Da'esh from 2014 to 2016. Families and tribal groups had differing experiences. Some families lost members at the hands of IS. Others may have members who participated in IS.



**Violence is the basis of the disintegration of communities and the destruction of social connections. Therefore, on Peace Day, this is a call for peace and peaceful coexistence between all.**

- Haneen, Protection Team Coordinator, during Opening Remarks to the Peace Festival



Within this divided ecosystem, women bear the brunt of isolation. Often, women have a hard time accessing public spaces outside of their homes, and with what access they do have, they become vulnerable to normalized gender inequality and sexual harassment.



Peace Festival Attendees. Iraq. September 2023. ©NP

Around the world, Nonviolent Peaceforce uses a set of tools called unarmed civilian protection (UCP). UCP can be used to keep people safe in the midst of a war or conflict, *and* UCP can be used in communities with no active war like northern Iraq, to build trust and relationships among groups in tension. In this way, we keep people safe by preventing violence before it starts. The Peace Festival is just one example of UCP in action - building trust and relationships among divided groups.

The first barrier to a successful Peace Festival was ensuring people would come. Without trust of one another - who across the community would show up? Women and girls, especially would be worried about being harassed or hurt on their travel to the Festival.

To encourage inclusive participation, NP's Community Protection team provided protective presence - physically traveling with the women and girls to the Festival - so they felt safe to attend.

The Peace Festival was an eye-opener to many. It debunked inter-ethnic, religious, tribal, and linguistic stereotypes that commonly feed hatred, fear, and mistrust between communities.

One female Yazidi attendee, Najat, told NP that attending the festival led her to change her

mind about Sunni Arabs, whom she had been very suspicious of since the IS/Da'esh occupation.

Najat shared, "They were kind and generous to the guests and treated everyone with kindness. Some people [in my community] were surprised by what I said given the bad history they still remember about IS, but many of them were happy with what I told them, and they got a positive impression. I expect that they will visit the Arab regions a lot in the future after I encouraged them to do so."

Such positive interactions during the festival have served as a catalyst for ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and relationship-building in the region, beyond the festival. **This is what NP does: uniting people across religious, socio-economic, ethnic, gender, and tribal lines and giving them the support they desire to foster peace within and between their communities.**



Yazidi and Kurdish women from Sinjar and Zummar join stage to pay tribute to Iraq's national anthem. September 2023. ©NP



# The 'Whiplash Reality' of War



## LIFE IN UKRAINE ON THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE FULL-SCALE INVASION

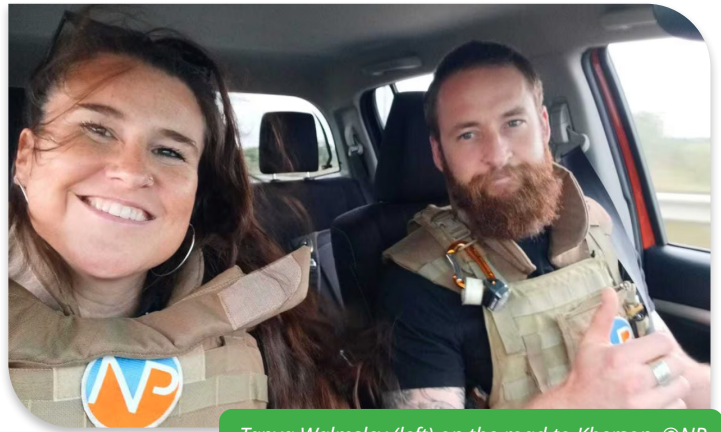
Tanya Walmsley has always wanted to make a difference. In 1984, she raised money to support communities facing famine in Ethiopia, and at age 10, she wrote a letter to Saddam Hussein in an attempt to persuade him not to launch his invasion of Kuwait.

In the years since, Tanya has worked in many of the world's worst conflicts, including Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, and DR Congo. And since November 2022, Tanya has been heading NP's programming in Ukraine, spending her time in some of the country's worst-hit areas, including Kherson, Kharkiv, and the Donetsk region.

On February 24, the second anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine, Tanya reflected upon the reality of war she's been surrounded by:

"The beauty of Ukraine is constantly coupled with the whiplash reality of war from one moment to the next.

In the frequent air raids, you can hear the drones that are targeting the city and then the Ukrainian air defense kicking off to repel the attack. And you have to remind yourself that it's not normal, even if it feels like it is. Too much desensitization is dangerous for us.



Tanya Walmsley (left) on the road to Kherson. ©NP

At the same time, holding onto what is normal and beautiful in your day-to-day is an act of defiance and resistance for Ukrainians. It's an important part of being able to sustain yourself through the horror of the war."

**"There is this sense of normality coupled with the extreme at the other end, with several daily reminders that you are, in fact, living in a war zone."**

Since April 2022 NP has supported local Ukrainian volunteers who have been working relentlessly to help people trapped near the frontlines, at huge risk

to their own safety, with protective equipment, mental health support, and life insurance policies that can support them and their loved ones if the worst happens in the course of their work.

[Read more at bit.ly/Tanya-Ukraine](https://bit.ly/Tanya-Ukraine)



# STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Ethan Quezada (Left)

As **Ethan Quezada** was finishing his undergrad in Global Studies, he was constantly reflecting on this question: *"How do we transform the present calamity into a safer, more beautiful future, and what will my role be in that transformation?"*

Discerning his next stage in life when finishing college, Ethan came across a Community Peacebuilder position at NP. Though interested, he wasn't sure about how effective the role would be in creating the change he hoped to see – until he read about Will Wallace, NP Director of Community Peacebuilding.

"[Will] outlined the grit and hard work it takes to rebuild a community of love, and how he imagines a neighborhood that looks out for itself and maintains its safety through deep, caring relationships, rather than increased militarization and greater capacity for deterrence through violence," said Ethan.

Today, Ethan works as a Community Peacebuilder, building relationships with community members and like-minded organizations to enhance community safety and end cyclical violence affecting North Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**"Transforming the way we approach conflict requires transforming our relationships to truth, nature, justice, life, other people, and ourselves... we have to first turn inwards."**



## We've Moved!

**Nonviolent Peaceforce U.S. is now located at:  
2143 Lowry Ave N, Suite A, Minneapolis, MN 55411**

In November, Nonviolent Peaceforce U.S. opened its doors to the Hub for Nonviolence and Safety – a co-office and convening space for NP and other like-minded, safety-oriented organizations in North Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Through the Hub, we aim to enhance collaboration among organizations working for community safety and peace, while also providing more readily available resources for the community.



**For more information on ways to give, go to [NonviolentPeaceforce.org](https://NonviolentPeaceforce.org) or call +1 612-871-0005**