



Women Civic Action Group members. Melut County, Upper Nile, South Sudan. 2023. ©NP

Leaders for Peace in the borderlands of South Sudan

In the Upper Nile state of South Sudan, tensions keep violence present.

Tensions between Arab nomads and local villages. Tensions between refugees from Sudan's civil war with South Sudanese communities. Gender and sexual-based violence is rampant. And climate change worsens conflict over resources.

But this is nowhere near the whole story. Local leaders like village chiefs and women's groups are stepping into this space to keep their community safe and interrupt cycles of violence. Nonviolent Peaceforce accompanies and supports these leaders as they build transformative change.

In Remote Areas of South Sudan, Chiefs Lead the Way for Peace

"So long as you are here you become part of us," affirmed Chief Dak from Lelo village.

The majority of Chief Dak's community are farmers and for years, the Chief and his people have dealt with destroyed crops when the cattle and goats of Arab nomads come into the area. Frustrations over lost food and land bubble over into violent confrontations.

NP's team has been working with both the Chief Dak's community and the Arab nomad community since early 2023—listening to their concerns, working with neighbors to build trust, and holding trainings that build on the communities' skills in nonviolent communication and de-escalation.

In March 2024, NP was able to bring together representatives from the local community and Arab nomads in a pivotal dialogue.

Chief Dak highlighted that he saw this dialogue as an opportunity to address all these problems and continue with peaceful coexistence. A representative from the Arab community emphasized that it is not all the Arabs moving with their cattle and goats that are causing the problem.



Conflict and violence prevention training. Malakal County, Upper Nile, South Sudan. January 2023. ©NP

The dialogue concluded with an agreement: local community members will continue to cooperate with Arab nomad representatives to resolve any outstanding issues with cattle keepers. And, Arab nomads, especially their leaders, pledged to identify wrongdoers who commit offenses such as theft or property damage, ensuring they are warned or disciplined accordingly.

All the participants assured NP they will keep in touch and cooperate whenever there are any conflicts or issues between their communities.

“We are here facing a situation of hunger. Here in Gelachol, we don’t have networks—even if you are starving, there is no way to reach out to your relatives or friends in other places to tell them that you are starving in hopes that they could help you.” Chief Manute* in Gelachol village

Chief Manute, from a very remote community in Upper Nile State, works for peace, while also advocating for his community to receive support to alleviate their dire need for medical care, food, and infrastructure.

In response, Nonviolent Peaceforce facilitates access and accompanies Solidarités International (SI) to visit the community. During the visit with NP and SI, Chief Manute reiterated: “We need food, we need boats, or at least fishing nets. We need roofing for our hospital, sick people here do not have any ward for nursing. We need fencing for the local school, children are at risk of wandering away during the rainy season.”

By working together to access remote communities, SI and NP listen to what the community needs. Today, SI has committed to assisting Gelachol with various projects, including hospital roofing, school fencing, and community latrines.

New Leaders Make a Difference for Safety

It isn’t only traditional leaders who are making a difference in keeping people safe and interrupting cycles of violence. Women are also creating Women Civic Action Groups (WCAG) across the Upper Nile State.

Following a series of training sessions and mentorship meetings with NP, the WCAG now sustains and leads activities on their own. The women have intervened in domestic disputes, which have included cases of gender-based violence (GBV) between husbands and wives, as well as between parents and children.

“Our group is taking issues of protection for our community seriously. Every Sunday we conduct meetings to discuss protection issues.”

Sunday Dau, Women Civic Action Group (WCAG) group leader

The WCAG encourages women to move as a group when collecting firewood in the forest to deter violence against them. And they create awareness-raising campaigns about gender-based violence and women’s rights.

When a young boy was killed in a violent clash, the WCAG brought the community together to facilitate a discussion and agreement that stopped a cycle of retribution and violence from the beginning.

Because of cultural norms and expectations, it’s uncommon for women to take the lead in community issues. However, WCAGs challenge the status quo by spearheading peacebuilding initiatives and actively ensuring the protection and safety of their community.

**Name changed for anonymity*

Aceh’s Next Generation

HEALING GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Twenty years ago, a 9.1 magnitude earthquake off the coast of Indonesia caused the deadliest tsunami on record. In the wake of its devastation, a Peace Agreement ended the 30-year active conflict in Aceh. But after all these years, the compounded trauma of conflict and devastation still affects the people of Aceh – even its youth.

For Aulia, a 17-year-old youth leader from Mon Ikeun, a beach town in Aceh, the wounds of her community’s history are still felt today. Through Flower Aceh, a local organization empowering women throughout the region, Aulia uses her voice in song and poetry as a way of collective healing to honor both memories of hardship and strength.

Working with Flower Aceh, Nonviolent Peaceforce is supporting young women like Aulia with training in violence prevention and de-escalation as they work to revitalize their communities and empower others to use their voices.

Wounds and I

by Aulia

In the darkness of night
Where the stars refuse to shine
There’s a world that feels their pain
So heavy.

A hidden pain
like a black mark
I’ve felt it
A lasting trauma that will never go away
Even with millions of dollars.

A hidden pain
like a nightmare, repeated
for me who suffers
my voice is fading
and my call for help is almost
completely unheard
oh...
If they need
love and support
to free themselves from trauma
The mental torture.
because behind the pain
violence and abuse
of children

there is a need for love
and for a ceasefire.



Aulia at a hydroponics farm. Indonesia. February 2024. ©NP

Rebuilding Iraq



A FIRSTHAND LOOK OF NP'S WORK IN IRAQ BY DEEPA SUREKA

Earlier this year, as a Board Member, I had the extraordinary opportunity to witness firsthand the crucial work of NP in Iraq. Operating in four war-torn towns near the Syrian border, NP's mission is clear: to extinguish the embers of sectarian violence, nurture trust and cohesion within fractured communities, and empower youth and women with the tools of nonviolent conflict resolution.

My journey began in Erbil, the Kurdish capital, where a sense of hope filled the air amidst bustling construction projects. A few days of security briefings, cultural immersion, and strategic planning sessions later, I felt equipped to embark on the real purpose of my visit – understanding NP's impact on the ground.

Our road trip to Sinjar, a Yazidi village, took us through Mosul. The stark reality of the situation quickly became apparent; just a few kilometers outside the city, heavily armed checkpoints guarded every movement, a constant reminder of the region's fragility. Even after seven years since ISIS's defeat, the scars of war were evident in destroyed villages and still-active internally displaced person (IDP) camps.

Reaching Sinjar, a small Yazidi village brutally affected by the ISIS genocide, proved to be a humbling experience. The pain of thousands lost lingered heavy in the air. We were warmly welcomed by local leaders (mukhtars) who discussed their struggles: slow reconstruction, simmering distrust with the neighboring Sunni town of Baaj, and feeling neglected by the central government. The town is still uncovering mass graves, the emotional toll of searching for missing loved ones is an unending nightmare. We also met a survivor of captivity, her voice filled with a mixture of anger and despair as she recounted her harrowing ordeal.

What struck me most was the trust NP had built within this community. Their investment in youth training programs fostered communication channels between Sinjar and Baaj, facilitating dialogue with authorities and ensuring local representation in rebuilding efforts. Notably, NP hires locally, fostering a sense of ownership and strengthening the

community from within.

A short 20-minute drive took us to Baaj, a conservative Sunni town with a starkly different atmosphere. As a sign of respect, we donned headscarves before meeting with local leaders (Sheiks) and the head of police. The gratitude towards NP was palpable. Their efforts in promoting peace and normalizing relations with Sinjar were widely lauded. Here, NP established and trained Women and Youth Protection Teams (WPT & YPT), acting as agents of change within their own communities. These teams tackle critical issues like domestic violence, child marriage, and digital extortion, while also fostering stronger ties with Sinjar.

The warmth and hospitality we received throughout our trip were truly heartwarming. **There was a clear awareness of the past wrongs and a collective desire to rebuild, not just infrastructure, but trust and a shared future.** The community's appreciation for NP's work was undeniable, as evidenced by the outpouring of support and gratitude expressed towards the organization and its dedicated team members.

This experience has solidified my commitment to supporting Nonviolent Peaceforce. As a board member, I will strive to advocate for their work in every way possible – financially, with my time, or by spreading awareness about their invaluable mission. While government funding, their primary source of income, can be fickle, **your contributions allow NP to remain steadfast in their commitment, ensuring that communities like Sinjar and Baaj can build self-sustained, lasting peace.**

Make an Impact

Give today to support conflicting communities resolve tensions in Sinjar, Baaj, and beyond.

nonviolentpeaceforce.org/donate

For more information on ways to give, go to NonviolentPeaceforce.org or call +1 612-871-0005