



Peace in Sight

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD'S RESPONSE TO CONFLICT

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Scenic view of Lake Kivu. 2022. Source: Wikimedia, Reshlove.

The answer is *us*

By Douce Namwezi, Head of Mission, NP DRC

In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), from Kalehe to Bukavu, people have always looked out for one another. Mutual aid—sharing food, shelter, and support—has long been part of how communities survive. But when it came to protection and safety, many traditionally looked to outside actors: the government, UN peacekeepers, or security forces. There was an expectation that someone else—someone in uniform—would take responsibility for keeping people safe. *Now, that's changing.*

There's no shortage of headlines about predatory mineral deals and international agreements. But for people in eastern DRC, these negotiations are nothing new. They've been happening for years—and they haven't brought the safety communities need. What's different now is what's happening at the community level.

Amid escalating violence and the collapse of formal authorities, communities are no longer waiting for the outside actor for safety. They are doing what they've always done—relying on each other—but with a renewed clarity: protection is something they must lead themselves. They are redefining what safety means and who holds the responsibility for it. More often than not, the answer is: us.

[See how communities are leading their own protection in these stories:](#)

Securing a Path to Water

On the remote islands of Lake Kivu, this looks like a community creating its own humanitarian corridor to reach water.

In January, the M23/AFC armed group's rapid advance in South Kivu disrupted the region's fragile balance—placing urban centers like Kalehe, Goma, and Bukavu on

the frontlines of conflict. Fleeing violence, looting, and forced recruitment, many families sought refuge in the forest or neighboring countries. While others took to the islands of Lake Kivu.

Though these remote islands offer distance from armed groups, they lack basic infrastructure and clean drinking water. But the displaced families were determined to remain together and take charge of their protection—starting with access to water.

The only path to a water source was risky. “You never know who you might encounter,” people would warn. To reduce danger, residents devised a collective solution. Each day, a small group of men walks the path first, scanning for threats. If it’s clear, they return to escort women, children, and elders. Volunteers then position themselves along the route, offering protective presence until everyone has returned safely.

Rebuilding Safety Networks

In Kalehe, another form of community protection has taken root.

Furaha*, a 40-year-old mother of nine, once ran a thriving restaurant that sustained many local farmers. But the war upended everything. After her home was looted and her aunt and nephew were killed in nearby bombings, she fled with her children to the mountains. Two weeks later, she returned to a broken supply chain.

“I hold on because I talk with my customers. It makes me forget the lifestyle I’ve lost.”

**Name changed for anonymity*

When the women who once supplied her restaurant refused to travel—“it’s just too risky,” they told her—Furaha realized she had to adapt. She began reaching out to her suppliers directly, arranging discreet meetings, mapping safer routes around armed groups, and sometimes traveling to the suppliers herself.

Gradually, this grew into a community-led early warning system: neighbors sharing updates through calls, texts, and quiet conversations in markets or prayer gatherings; youth on the football field passing along news to guide at-risk families away from danger. And Furaha, without training or a fancy title, is one of the people helping hold it all together.

These daily practices show that community safety is not only possible—it’s already happening. This isn’t to say that people don’t need support. They do. What’s dangerous is assuming they are passive victims waiting to be saved. What they are asking for is support that strengthens their own protection mechanisms, not sidelines them.

At Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), we recognize this. That’s why we don’t introduce security from the outside—we build on what already exists. Our work in Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) begins with listening: understanding how communities have already been keeping themselves safe, and asking how we can support them to do it more effectively and sustainably.

These communities are meeting with each other. They are mapping their own risks. They are creating safety where none is offered. And they are asking us to show up not with ready-made solutions, but with humility and tools they can use on their own terms.

As one community member put it, **“We are the ones who have to be responsible for our protection first.”**

Protection in Isolation

HOW A GAME NIGHT SPARKED A COMMUNITY’S RESPONSE IN MYANMAR

A few months ago, Lin, a young man in Myanmar, was playing video games with five friends at his home when suddenly, authorities arrived. Lin and his father were taken away in unmarked vehicles, beaten, and placed in jail.

What many would consider an innocent gathering of friends is perceived as a potential threat in Myanmar, where young men can be arrested for organizing in groups for fear that they are conspiring against the government. And gathering isn’t the only risk young people face—so is movement.

In certain areas, young people can be arrested or forced to enlist in the military while walking down the street. Every aspect of their lives is monitored—with people having to pass through up to 10 checkpoints each kilometer to reach some areas. The ease of going about daily life is a luxury as people live consistently under the threat of harm, isolating neighbors and entire communities from each other.

By partnering with local church networks, NP leads initiatives to reach civilians who are most impacted and isolated, just like Lin. Religious

figures and church members are not seen as a threat to armed actors and can therefore move easily through communities.

Working through these networks, NP’s team has facilitated access to water, food, and medicine, which became vital after the 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck in March. Our faith-based partners have also been key supporters in the release of political prisoners and provide safe gathering places for our staff to hold safety trainings.

It’s at these trainings that a volunteer, community-led Early Warning Early Response team was created—made up of both church members and local people. And when Lin and his father were arrested, it didn’t take long for the EWER team to hear the news. Quickly, the group came up with a plan to visit the jail and speak with the military officials.

Within a couple of hours, the church elders and EWER team convinced the officials that Lin was not a threat and secured his release. As a result, both Lin and his father were allowed to return home that night. “Your team’s awareness efforts saved them,” one church elder shared.

Earthquake Response

In the days since March 28, your support has enabled NP’s team in Myanmar to:

- Relocate 1,200 people to safety in one community
- Train 45 workers in psychological first aid
- Reach over 2,100 people in psychological first aid listening sessions

To find out how you can support this work, check out our Appeal for Myanmar at bit.ly/NP-Myanmar

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT



Christine Sheff

Born in occupied Germany, two years after WWII ended and peace declared, **Christine Sheff** is one of seven siblings, a mother to three daughters, and a longtime volunteer of Nonviolent Peaceforce residing in Missoula, Montana. “My best friend asked me to come to a Friend’s meeting in Denver over 20 years ago. A woman from NP was there and told us all about your work!” Christine shared. “All I could think was how courageous you all are—I’ve been a member ever since!”

As a self-proclaimed hippie, supporting peace work is central to Christine’s values. It is what brought her to India with a small Peace and Environmental organization, where she met and shook hands with the Dalai Lama, an early endorser of NP.

“Besides courage, I love that our teachers teach others, who in turn teach even more—so peace grows exponentially throughout communities. You help women get water safely, you protect civilians. You matter! Without donations, we cannot continue this work.”



Donations allow us to stand together firmly for sustainable peace. I may not have the strength or courage to do what these committed people do, but I can help get them there! With the collapse of USAID, it is even more important.



Be an Ally for Peace

Visit nonviolentpeaceforce.org/give-monthly for more information.

Recurring giving provides steady, reliable funding that keeps our teams on the ground and communities safer. With your monthly support, you sustain programs that build peace and resilience, like Women and Youth Protection Teams, Early Warning Early Response networks, and community trainings in nonviolent tools to interrupt and prevent violence.

Becoming a monthly donor is effective for you, and a lifeline for communities facing violence, conflict, and war—especially as we continue to see humanitarian funding shrink.



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