



Peace in Sight

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD'S RESPONSE TO CONFLICT

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Daily Briefings, Philippines. 2017 ©NP

Revisiting Marawi

A look at NP's response, eight years later

The Marawi Siege, which unfolded between May and October 2017, marked one of the most devastating urban conflicts in the Philippines' modern history. Five months of fighting between government forces and Islamic State (IS) affiliated groups displaced more than 360,000 people, shattered communities, and exposed the significant threats posed by armed insurgency in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

During the siege and in the fragile months that followed, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) worked to keep people safe through unarmed civilian protection, using tools of nonviolence to de-escalate threats and reduce harm.

Initial Response

As fighting erupted, nearly the entire population of Marawi attempted to flee. The

mass exodus brought traffic to a standstill, further slowed by police and military checkpoints filtering traffic to Iligan City and beyond.

On the second day of fighting, the NP team became trapped alongside civilians while attempting to reach their office in Iligan. Drawing on trusted relationships with local officials, they negotiated with police to allow a convoy of 20+ vehicles to pass the checkpoint and travel with NP on an alternative route to safety.

By the third day, full-scale urban warfare had broken out. The IS-affiliated group had seized control of the city center and key bridges, leaving many civilians stranded. NP activated pre-existing Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) networks to share real-time information about evacuation routes, best practices to avoid being detained at IS-affiliated checkpoints, and how to help hostages when attempting to leave



the city. For example, many Moro Muslim community members shared Muslim dress and taught non-Muslim neighbors to answer questions about the Quran.

Sustained Presence

By June 4th, evacuations became more regulated with the establishment of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Action Center (JCMAC), a negotiated rescue zone facilitating safe passage for civilians. As the only civil society organization involved in the JCMAC, NP designated staff members and volunteer EWER monitors to receive rescued civilians. That month, 217 people were safely rescued.

With a Peace Corridor established, NP relied on local volunteer EWER monitors to accompany authorities in delivering food to communities around Lake Lanao, which were cut off from essential supplies. NP's presence and coordination helped maintain the integrity and neutrality of the corridor, providing interpretation services and identifying community-specific needs and protection concerns.

Towards the end of the conflict, NP also helped reunite more than 60 formerly held hostages with their families and connected survivors to psychosocial support.

“After we crossed the bridge and the trapped civilians saw us coming, they felt safe, and we saw how relieved they were.”

JCMAC Volunteer

Coordinating Role

At the time of the siege, NP and the World Food Program were the only international organizations with offices in nearby Iligan City. As other organizations arrived in the region, NP provided them with security briefings, office space for meetings, and accompaniment through checkpoints to ensure aid safely reached its intended target.

By acting as a trusted intermediary, NP helped bridge the gap between military forces, international groups, and affected communities – fostering a humanitarian response that more effectively addressed the concerns of the most affected civilians.

Today, the rebuilding of Marawi is slow and complex. The presence of explosive ordnance, economic hardship, and entrenched social and political divides has left many displaced families in a state of prolonged uncertainty.

NP continues to support humanitarian needs in the area, having played a key role in securing accommodations for survivors in Iligan City, advocating for improved support for survivors through livelihood and cash assistance, reunifying children with their families, and training new EWER monitors in displacement camps, empowering them with the tools to evaluate safety, report incidents, and coordinate responses. As a result, disputes that once had the potential to reignite violence are now being addressed through dialogue and mediation.

Though challenges remain, the Marawi response demonstrates the power of civilian-led protection, trusted relationships, and long-term commitment to recovery.



Life After War

YURII'S STORY OF REINTEGRATION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

When Yurii returned home from the frontlines in Ukraine, civilian life felt unfamiliar. Before the war, he had worked as a lawyer. But back at his desk, the focus and client engagement his job required felt overwhelming. The transition strained not only his career, but also his relationship with his wife, Katya.

Then came an unexpected opportunity: a six-day veterans' retreat along the Danube. Supported through community-based reintegration efforts led by NP, the retreat offered Yurii and Katya space to reconnect, reflect, and begin healing together.

Yurii had attended similar programs alone in the past, as most programs are designed for the veterans themselves. But this retreat focused on supporting families, recognizing that reintegration begins at home. Through outdoor activities, small-group conversations, and sessions with psychologists, veterans and their families were given tools to better understand stress, trauma, and communication.

For Yurii, the natural setting in Vylkove, surrounded by water, birds, and the smell of wood, felt deeply personal. “Here, I felt alive again,” he shared. “The smell of wood in the house... It is pure magic. Like returning to childhood.” For Katya, it was her first experience of this kind. Recovery did not feel like another task to complete. It began with something simpler: the ability to exhale.

Conversations at the retreat reflected broader challenges facing veterans across Ukraine: stigma around seeking psychological support, difficulty navigating the job market, strained relationships, and feelings of isolation. For veterans, everyday stressors can quickly escalate without the right tools and support.

That's where NP comes in. By working directly with veteran groups, psychological support centers, and civil society partners, NP is strengthening local capacity for reintegration—offering training in de-escalation, conflict-sensitive communication, and self-regulation. NP also facilitates dialogue spaces and community safety planning to ensure veterans are welcomed back into their communities, not as problems to solve, but as active contributors to community resilience. The retreat is part of this broader effort.

For Yurii and Katya, the retreat provided renewed connection and strength. Eventually, Yurii left his legal career and took a maintenance job at a sports school, finding that predictability and routine calmed his nervous system. Wanting to support others, he later founded a nonprofit woodworking workshop for veterans, offering art therapy sessions using wood and tools.

By investing in preparedness early, NP is ensuring that veterans are not left to navigate the return home alone—reducing isolation, preventing harm, and building safer communities for all.



Retreat center. Ukraine. 2025 ©NP

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Minneapolis resident of over 30 years, **Christina Nicholson** is a mom, a wife, and a former NP volunteer who has been active in social and political movements since high school.

After the uprising following the murder of George Floyd, she saw an opportunity to join NP's Safety Team Training. With over 25 years of experience working in cooperatives, she wanted to learn all she could to support community members who gathered to witness the Derek Chauvin Trial and demand accountability.

Today, she puts those lessons into practice—maintaining situational awareness, identifying entry and exit routes, knowing how to react if shots are fired, and staying calm under pressure—all to help keep her neighbors safe.

“When ICE began being deployed here, the build felt slow, then sudden,” Christina recalled. “The killing of Renee Good within a mile of the murder of George Floyd in 2020 creates a sense of déjà vu and a very clear message that once again, it was necessary for community members to push for accountability.”

In response to the escalation of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Minnesota, Christina worked with her community to ensure that no ICE activity occurred without community awareness of their actions. This included reaching out to neighbors, immigrants or not, and distributing whistles and training packets about what to do when ICE approaches you. “My training with NP helped me understand how to connect with others intentionally and be specific about how to pay attention to surroundings.”

For others interested in getting involved in community safety efforts, Christina says, “While the saying is a bit worn, we are indeed the ones we have been waiting for. While we don't have any misconceptions that ICE has left, it is clear that the organizing here was unique and much more strategic than anything DHS anticipated. Showing up matters, and showing up prepared matters more.”



To build a better world, we have to be the embodiment of the world we want to see. I believe that is the training I received at NP—how to better embody my beliefs in a better world while loving the hell out of the one we are in.



Tax-smart giving

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With tax season already here, learn how you can optimize your giving while investing in a safer future. By donating appreciated stock, making a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from your IRA, or even giving cryptocurrency, you may be able to reduce your tax burden while maximizing your impact.

Expecting a refund? Consider investing in something that lasts far beyond tax season: safety, dignity, and peace for communities facing violence.

If you're interested in making a tax-smart gift but aren't sure where to begin, contact Anna Zaros, Director of Advancement, at azaros@nonviolentpeaceforce.org.

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