



*transforming the world's
response to conflict*

Field Notes

First Quarter
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A New Narrative In Syria

By Mel Duncan, Director of Advocacy and Outreach

THE SYRIA RESPONSE PROJECT BEGINS! Last month Nonviolent Peaceforce opened its office in Beirut. A two million euro grant from the European Union provides the seed money required to start this project and sustain it for two years. Nonviolent Peaceforce will be working in partnership with TAMAS (The Syrian Civil Coalition), Madani (a Syrian civil society organization promoting a peaceful and democratic Syria) and Cure Violence (a Chicago based violence reduction non-governmental organization). All of these nonprofits are dedicated to building Syria's civil society.

The team is assembling. Natalie Sikorski, NP intern, along with Raed Zeno of TAMAS, has been working since early August finding and setting up office spaces. Redi Mesho and Derek Oakley, our lead trainers, are in Beirut debating pedagogy and ideology. Tiffany Easthom, our project director and former South Sudan country director, arrived mid-October and is providing leadership. We have already hosted a group of TAMAS Syrian activists to discuss our joint work. We also spent time in retreat with one of one of TAMAS's member organizations that has a network of 4,000 members and works closely with sixty peace building organizations.

We are well aware that we are starting this project amid a brutal narrative of explosive violence. Russia bombs and deploys ground troops. The United States spends \$500 million to train a few "good guys." Assad drops barrel bombs. ISIS blows up humanity's heritage while beheading art curators. And millions of refugees

cascade through Lebanon and Turkey.

NP is supporting a stronger, more resilient story emerging in Syria—one that is ignored by CNN and Al-Jazeera and dismissed by the arms peddling nation states. We are learning much from our partners who are forging effective work rooted in 4½ years of creative, pragmatic struggle. Far from giving up, they are claiming ownership over their country's future.

"Others—the US, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, France, ISIS—make a mess in my country feeding armed groups with money and guns. But 20 million Syrians are not fighting. They want their children to sleep in peace. We can create the peace based in our deep culture and history," Redi observed.

Starting in January, Nonviolent Peaceforce will begin a train-the-trainers project. Trainers attending are Syrians committed to civilian protection, and violence

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reduction and interruption. These grassroots leaders will span political, religious, and geographic boundaries. The three initial sessions will be 12 days long, each hosting 15 participants representing 15-20 organizations. Nonviolent Peaceforce will support trainees daily as they develop and use their training to enhance

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localized projects. Periodically, we will reconvene the trainees to reflect on lessons learned and strengthen the bonds among them.

One of our partners recently effervescently described her peacebuilding, “It doesn’t matter whether or not we have money. We are driven by our principles of nonviolence. We know this can be done.”

We have a well developed strategy to interrupt and deescalate violence, and to protect civilians and change norms about relying on violence to resolve conflict. Our goal is to expand the network of civil society by training the committed leaders already working in Syria. As local communities are empowered through NP’s training, they will take ownership over these initiatives, growing the network of those working towards peace. None of us truly know where this work will lead but we do know with whom we stand.

Therein lies the hope.



From Recognition to Implementation at the United Nations

By Mel Duncan, Director of Advocacy and Outreach

After 50 years, nonviolent peacekeeping or unarmed civilian protection has finally become a priority at the United Nations. When we started talking about unarmed civilian protection at the UN over a decade ago, we often found ourselves handing leaflets to the volunteers in the UNICEF shop. The blue obelisk. When we were granted an audience, our presentations were typically brief and at times met with patronizing comments about naiveté.

Today, more people are affected by conflict and disaster more frequently, and for longer periods of time than in previous decades. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection has nearly doubled in the past decade, from an average of 30 to 40 million people per year to an average of 50 to 70 million people per year.

Throughout the UN, diplomats, military attachés, policy makers, advocates and academics grappled with this escalating need. But the total of all approaches does not come close to meeting the still-burgeoning need.

Meanwhile, NP, along with about a dozen other NGOs, built the experience and capacity to effectively protect civilians without the use of arms in some of the most violent places on the planet.

The 70th anniversary of the UN was met with a crescendo of high-level reports and initiatives. The UN Secretary-General appointed three high-level panels to review and recommend changes to the UN peace operations, peace building architecture, and Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. And in a show of unprecedented global participation, groups and individuals interacting with the UN and its agencies developed and agreed on a set of Sustainable Development Goals. These goals serve as benchmarks and will guide the work of the UN over the next 15 years, now known as Agenda 2030.

Why a Syrian Response Project?

Because we know unarmed civilian protection works. Evaluations, case studies, reports, interviews, and observation have made clear:

- Lives are saved.
- Peace and human rights work is more possible.
- Re-establishment of relationships in divided communities is supported.
- Behavior of armed actors is changed.
- Trained unarmed civilian action to reduce violence is demonstrated.
- It takes time.

Greater use of unarmed approaches has loomed large in these deliberations. Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), a tool to create peace, is now increasingly recognized and accepted.

The UN High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations asserted in their June report that “unarmed strategies must be at the forefront of UN approaches to protect civilians.” They recognized the effectiveness of nonviolent practices and recommended:

In view of the positive contributions of unarmed civilian protection actors, missions should work more closely with local communities and national and international non-governmental organizations in building a protective environment.

In their report released on October 14th, the High-Level Advisory Group on Women, Peace and Security highlights UCP as “a methodology for the direct protection of civilians and violence reduction that has grown in practice and recognition. In the last few years, it has especially proven its effectiveness to protect women and girls.” The report

further notes that women make up between 40-50% of deployed civilian protectors, a percentage much higher than in UN peacekeeping missions. It also specifically refers to NP’s work in South Sudan.

The high-level group recommends that the UN in collaboration with member states:

- *Promote women’s empowerment and non-violent means of protection,*
- *Scale up their support to unarmed civilian protection in conflict-affected countries, including working alongside peace operations.*

And Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #16 promoting Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies sets the overall context for the implementation of the above recommendations. It acknowledges that the other 17 Sustainable Development goals can only be realized in a world with peace and security, and possessing respect for human rights. In fact, UCP could well become a significant new tool to help operationalize SDG #16.

Now there is a solid international platform on which to grow the practice of unarmed civilian protection. Non-violent Peaceforce (NP), shifting its advocacy focus from recognition to implementation, has begun working with the UN Department of Peacekeeping and is seeking to intensify its cooperation with other UN agencies. We are exploring ways to operationalize the recommendations through training, inclusion in mandates and advocacy for increased funding.

We are all humbled by the cascading human needs witnessed on NP’s frontlines and now even witnessed on the roads and railways of Europe. Many of us, now numbering in the thousands, have devoted our treasures, intellect, spirits and lives to developing UCP. We have the methodology. We have the credibility and recognition. We must now scale up our effort to something commensurate with the need. Our work has barely begun.



International Peace Institute policy forum on “Unarmed Approaches to Protecting Civilians.” L to R: Tiffany Easthom, Nonviolent Peaceforce, Youssef Mahmoud, Senior Adviser and member of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, Eiko Ikegaya, Deputy Chief in UN Peacekeeping’s Policy and Best Practice Service, DPKO and Rudelemar Bueno de Faria, UN Representative of the World Council of Churches.

Working Together: NP's Many Collaborators in the Field

by Maria Mutauta, Intern for Nonviolent Peaceforce in the Philippines

Maria is a recent graduate of the University of Nairobi in Kenya where she studied law and worked with an NGO that addressed health and sanitation issues in low-income urban areas. Following the political situation in Burundi that resulted in displacement and insecurity for civilians, Maria decided to focus on conflict transformation and improving security for civilians on a non-partisan platform. Maria's internship with Nonviolent Peaceforce in the Philippines is the next step in this goal. It is also an opportunity to gain an understanding of the theory and practical application of unarmed civilian protection. Maria's experience with Nonviolent Peaceforce is a gateway for her future studies and career in conflict transformation and civilian protection.

Many of you reading this are likely well versed in Nonviolent Peaceforce's mandate and the different projects conducted in NP's country programs. However, perhaps you are not fully tuned-in to the dynamic entity that is the NP field team. As the newest addition to NP Philippines, I want to share my revelations about daily life and work in the field with the South Central Mindanao Team (SCMT).

I arrived at the SCMT field site in Datu Piang, Mindanao, not knowing what to expect. My knowledge of Mindanao prior to arriving

was limited, but I knew the area is prone to tensions and outbreaks of violence related to protracted conflict in the region. I'd already experienced the hospitality of the Filipino people, but anxiety got the best of me during my orientation. Needless to say, my worries quickly proved unfounded. The members of my team accepted me as one of their own from day one and gave me great advice on how to handle culture shock. I also received a warm welcome from the many communities I visited with the team. In fact, after only a couple of weeks, the armed actors I had initially deemed unapproachable no longer intimidated me.

One of the first aspects I came to understand clearly about working with a field team is the level of planning and coordination required to effectively conduct fieldwork. From sketching out a monthly plan to fine tuning activities with a weekly plan, everything was

discussed in depth and all avenues for facilitation explored. Through this, I witnessed the team's ability to adapt to different situations in the AOR (Area of Responsibility). The flexibility and vast knowledge of NP's Civilian Protection Monitors inspired me immensely. The team, consisting of National Civilian Protection Monitors (NCPMs) and International Civilian Protection Monitors (ICPMs), seemed to work in perfect harmony. Everyone brings something different to the table and all the experience, skills and



Farewell party in the Philippines for colleague Georgi Engelbrecht. Fourth from the left is intern Maria Mutauta.

personalities combine to create a well-oiled machine.

Coordination, internally and externally, is fundamental to the success of all NP activities as well as overall security. Coordination begins long before the team heads out on an activity. Text messages and phone calls are

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exchanged with NP's networks of local partners and stakeholders to organize activities and meetings. Once activities are confirmed and the team heads out, coordination of another type begins –coordinating movements of the team in the field. Via a security text to the main office the security coordinator is informed about the details of who is heading where and when.

Mindanao's beauty took my breath away. The humongous hills and the comforting coastline are picture perfect. The fact that I am in the midst of an area that has been in conflict for forty years slips my mind once

Minneapolis Office to Move

The Minneapolis office of Nonviolent Peaceforce will move on January 28th and 29th, 2016. Please update your records with our new address as of February 1st:

Nonviolent Peaceforce
2610 University Avenue West, Suite 550
St. Paul, MN 55114

I stare out the window. During monitoring patrols and visits to surrounding communities, I often find I lose myself in the landscape. The team has a large AOR and activities might be in the next Barangay (village) over and require many hours of travel or an overnight stay to access. Sometimes, the journey requires us to venture off the

national highway and onto roads that seem better suited for Carabaos (domesticated water buffalos) and tractors. At one point, the NP vehicle had to cross a sizeable river to visit an area recently affected by fire fights. The road trips are often filled with laughter and karaoke, which emits positivity and good energy into everyone in the car. Car rides were also used to help me continue learning about the context of the monitoring patrol or activities planned. The team members were more than willing to explain to me all the details and even taught me a couple of Tagalog phrases with which to introduce myself upon arrival.

NP meets with all kinds of actors (armed actors, civil society, religious leaders, government and ceasefire mechanisms)—these meetings are central to NPs role in successfully implementing activities and receiving crucial information on security concerns on the ground. Even when I met with Commanders and Mayors, I noticed one thing - seniority does not necessarily mean scary! Everyone I met was polite and supportive, and made me feel comfortable in my experience as an NP intern. I've witnessed the excellent relationships and acceptance NP has in the communities. I've also seen how these relationships translate into receiving and sharing information that contribute to achieving NP's mandate.

I feel very happy to be a part of NP's family. I immediately felt the strong family bond that each employee feels towards each other. Within my first two weeks, I felt I had brothers and sisters in the Philippines. The field site office doubles as the staff house, meaning we work and live under the same roof. Everyone has their own room but meals are communal. Meal times ensured I didn't miss home cooking too much – we all eat as a family and share the day's experiences as we discuss our progress. Some of the national staff stay over during the week and commute back home to their families come weekend. Though the day's activities



outside the field site are done, evenings were dedicated to writing reports on these activities and on incidents that happened in the AOR. I especially enjoyed this time of day; while I wrote the report, I smiled to myself as I played out the productiveness of the day in my head.



Legacy Circle

Give future generations a chance to live in a world without war.

Join the Legacy Circle by remembering Nonviolent Peaceforce in your will.



For more information contact Marna Anderson at (612) 871-0005 ext. 222, or manderson@nonviolentpeaceforce.org or visit:

www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org and click on DONATE NOW/MAKE A PLANNED GIFT.



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Donor Profile: Thor Wagstrom



Nonviolent Peaceforce is a global community of people who believe in nonviolent solutions to the world's conflicts. Our supporters come from countries all around the world and have a genuine concern for the flourishing of all of humanity. To help you get to know each other, we will feature in each issue of Field Notes one of our supporters whose personal commitment to peace and protecting others inspires us. We hope you will be inspired too.

In college, I studied Buddhism in India, then became interested in Gandhi's theory and practice of nonviolent activism, particularly his idea of a nonviolent Shanti Sena or Peace Army. I began to imagine how this could work in our world, with all its violent conflicts.

About five years ago, I heard Mel Duncan speak at my church about the work of Nonviolent Peaceforce. I was surprised; I hadn't known that an organization like this had roots in my own community. I went to an open house event and then became involved in the Minnesota chapter of NP.

I helped with two art sale fundraising events that were a lot of fun and introduced me to many like-minded people, and I have been grateful for the opportunity to speak to a number of audiences about NP's work of Unarmed Civilian Protection.

I love the grassroots nature of NP. It has certainly grown into more than that, but it continues to be driven by ordinary, yet extraordinary people who dedicate themselves to making this vision a reality—and it's happening!

NP is about solidarity. It's about people around the world seeing the suffering that results from the horrific conflicts of the 21st century, and saying, "We see you, we care about you, and we are with you." Those three statements are empowering for people fleeing violence in South Sudan as well as for people watching with concern in Minnesota, because NP makes those words reality. Armed policing may bring stability, but it will not bring security. NP helps communities find their way back to security by encouraging dialogue and building relationships.