

South Sudan

a Field Notes
Special Report



*transforming the
world's response
to conflict*

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Doris Mariani, NP Chief Executive Officer, Visits South Sudan

Nonviolent Peaceforce's new CEO Doris Mariani and Atif Hameed, Director of Programs, recently made a trip to South Sudan for ten days to visit the field team. They were enthusiastic to begin their journey guided by Tiffany Easthom, the NP County Director in South Sudan. Upon arriving they were whisked away for security briefings and introductions to the program support team. During this meeting the team also discussed the program's evolution since 2010 into being NP's biggest country team. Nonviolent Peaceforce has nine field sites in South Sudan, located in six states.

The next day the team moved out of Juba to the other states, where the real story of NP is happening. They headed north to the state of Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBeG). This state is situated at the border and has a long, difficult history of being heavily affected during the civil war. Tired of war, the area along the border has formed a joint border peace committee (JBPC). The NP team is working with the committee, facilitating safe migration agreements, the protection of the trade routes and markets and the implementation of peace agreements.

For the next journey the team went to the state capital of Aweil where they met up with NBeG Team Leader Thiago Wolfer. Joined by Thiago, Doris, Atif and Tiffany headed into town to meet with two of NP's important government partners. These partners, the Coordinator of the State Peace Commission and the Director of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, couldn't have praised NP more highly. The peace coordinator said "We couldn't be making this kind of progress



Doris and Atif with the Nonviolent Peaceforce team in South Sudan

without NP."

Once this meeting was complete, they headed to the NP compound in a small village called

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Wanjuk. Electricity was only provided by a generator and there was no running water. Doris experienced her first shower using a bucket.

The following day they went to meet with the JBPC in Majok Itu, the last point before crossing into Sudan from South Sudan. Along the way the group picked up members of the committee managing to squeeze 13 people into the vehicle. Many of the Misseriya tribe had come to meet their Dinka counterparts as a follow-up to the peace conference that NP facilitated the previous week. This was to encourage a violence free migration, as dry season was settling in.

The day after they flew to Rumbek, the capital of Lakes State. This area was experiencing inter-clan violence. NP was providing violence reduction initiatives and protection during this conflict. Many women and children had been displaced so NP spent time with them. They patrolled the area and raised concerns with authorities.

For their final journey Doris, Atif and Tiffany went to Mayom with half of the women's peacekeeping team (WPT). In Mayom, conflict among two clans of cattle keepers last year had resulted in the death of more than 100 people. Progress was not being made, so the WPT decided to jump in and take the lead in finding a resolution.

In Mayom the clansmen took an hour to come forward, but they eventually approached. They said they believed the peacekeeping team was truly interested in peace because they were women. After four hours of dialogue the group realized they shared similar experiences of conflict and everyone came to the agreement that they were tired of the violence. Afterwards Doris and Atif were asked their thoughts about the process. Atif said it was "truly a force for peace." Doris noted "it was so evident that peace is not fast, it is not instant and it takes time."

This is revised and abbreviated version of Tiffany Easthom's story. For the full version go online to:

<http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/np-ceo-visits-south-sudan>

Waiting No More

by Tiffany Easthom, Country Director in South Sudan

Women in South Sudan are not waiting for peace to be delivered to them. Tired of violence, women are forming women's peacekeeping teams (WPT) to bring security to their communities. To support these groups, Nonviolent Peaceforce has provided training, logistical support and proactive protection when needed. These women are courageously taking action to challenge those bringing violence into their communities.

The WPT program began in 2011 when women in Western Equatoria decided they were tired of their communities being terrorized by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). NP was one of the first international organizations to establish a full time presence in supporting these remote communities. Given safe space, training and encouragement, women have engaged in creative strategies that significantly increase everyone's safety and security. The WPTs are working together with the government, organized forces, teachers and families to provide coaching, leadership and guidance for reducing violence.

Encouraged by the achievements of the WPTs in Western Equatoria, NP expanded the program to include 4 other states. Each women's peacekeeping team focuses on different localized issues. Certain areas focus on domestic issues while others focus on reducing armed violence between civilians and organized forces. Every case takes action requiring courage, patience, creativity and commitment.

Today the people of South Sudan are reeling from the shock of violent conflict. In six weeks the conflict caused half a million people to flee their homes and more than 10,000 people lost their lives. The intensity and scale of the violence has caused people around the world to lose confidence in the future of South Sudan. Although certain people made terrible decisions that negatively impacted thousands, most of the population simply wants to live in peace. The people of South Sudan are willing to work to make peace happen and this is clearly evident through the efforts of the women.

On January 21st, 2014 the WPT drafted a letter to the governor of Unity State, Joseph Maytuil Wjang, calling for an end to the conflict and asking for the pro-

tection of civilians. They marched 12 km from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) base to present the letter to the governor in Unity State. The NP team provided accompaniment walking silently alongside the women through the devastated town of Bentiu. The women saw for the first time the extent of the damage to their community, which made this a very emotional journey. NP together with UNMISS colleagues are providing ongoing support to implement local reconciliation and peacekeeping efforts through the WPT.



Women's Peacekeeping Team meeting in Juba, South Sudan

Reading the Signs

*by Calista Pearce, NP Team Leader for the Unity State
Emergency Response in South Sudan*

The Early Warning Early Response (EWER) analysis used by Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) identifies conflict indicators that warn of impending violent conflict. These can be political, economic, environmental, or security related. In one community where NP has been operating for the past eighteen months, we noted such activities as the appearance of new armed actors, local government officials being absent for extended periods and threats to civilians as well as NGO staff. There was also the looting and destruction of property. Eventually, violence did occur, and the town's residents and the few International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO) such as NP had to leave.

Paying attention to indicators contributes to being able prevent violent conflict, and can also mitigate its impact when it does occur. So, what are the indicators to look for when a community is coming back to life? What does peace and security look like?

Most of this town's residents fled in January and May of 2013. The few who stayed were displaced to makeshift shelters within a government compound. They lost most of their possessions and livelihoods. They had lived through the shootings, shelling, and beatings in their community. Many had their homes destroyed. Surrounded by armed actors, they lived in fear – their town had become military camp more than a civilian community.

One day in the midst of the conflict, we heard the sound of children singing. It was as if we had heard a siren's call. In the middle of the town there was an open space filled with children. A few young boys were playing drums in the front, and four young men led the group. In total there were around 70 children singing and dancing. It is difficult to explain how beautiful and incongruous this sight was.

The young men were a mix of civilians and soldiers from the local community, and this was the start of a regular activity that culminated in singing in church on Sunday. One young man explained, "Many people have died, but we are alive. We need to share what we have. We need to praise God and pray and sing and dance for peace."

The community also first restarted their Sunday service under a tree, and as the situation stabilized they were able to hold their service in a nearby primary school. Most

recently, they reclaimed their actual church building across town. Volunteers cleaned and cleared the compound to make it useable again, as it had been looted and was overgrown. This was not just a physical relocation of their Sunday morning gathering place; this action also carried a greater message about self-determination as a community and everyone's sense of security.

NP has also collaborated during the past year with an amazing local women's leader, Nyandit.* We turned to her again last month for help getting emergency assistance to the most vulnerable in town. This emergency assistance, distributed by INGO's and UN humanitarian agencies, comes in the form of food, plastic sheets, mosquito nets, soap and such. Nyandit worked tirelessly to help locate and identify the elderly, mothers who had newly delivered, the sick, or those who were disabled. She mobilized volunteers for collecting and delivering of distribution items in the community.

We are amazed at the resiliency of the community and the dedication of its leaders.

NP does not rely solely on our own determination of indicators. We also ask the community what peace and security look like. One local woman explained that she now feels safe enough to go to the river to bathe whenever she wants. There is no one at her door at night threatening her either.

We do not know what the next couple of months will bring. Dry season is coming. That has the potential to change the situation for better or worse. We continue to watch the indicators and do what programming we can. We hope to see many more signs of the community returning to its normal life.

*Name changed to protect privacy.



Calista with local community members



Calista "in the field"

Life in the Field: Eat, Drink, and be...Merry?

by Calista Pearce

In NP South Sudan we have joked about making a field cookbook for the creative, strange, and delectable concoctions international protection officers have invented. One of the best is my former program manager's tuna salad. Take Ramen or instant noodles, break it up and mix in canned tuna. Add some canned peas or corn. Season with whatever herbs or spices you have. Enjoy! The craziest: a toast raised to my team leader's one-year anniversary in South Sudan with shots of balsamic vinegar!

My favorite is that team leader's signature field dish: tuna spaghetti. How unappealing it sounded! Tuna in a spaghetti sauce? But with a taste I was quickly converted. My team leader made it for my birthday and we were just set to enjoy it when the shooting started--flashes of gunfire, tracer bullets streaking. One landed in our compound near where we hunkered down. We made security phone calls and it later died down.

We knew we might be evacuated to the UN peacekeepers' base nearby. Dinner there would be mostly rice. Not able to let the spaghetti go to waste, we grabbed our quick-run bags (passport, money, drinking water, emergency food, flashlight/torch--essentials) and headed for the Land Cruiser. Ready to go, we finished the tastiest birthday dinner ever, my teammates insisting they arranged the "fireworks" show, and shared some laughter.

Taste buds are not the only things that transform in the field. International nongovernmental organizations field staff (not just NP staff) tend to develop a dark sense of humor to cope. The day of my birthday was memorable for terrible reasons. In the morning a UN helicopter was shot down nearby, the 4-person flight crew killed. In the afternoon we managed, after weeks of trying, to have a meeting with a former non-state armed actor who had accepted amnesty and was a re-instated state military commander. I encountered my first child soldiers in the process: boys of 10 or 12 lounging by the water borehole in fatigues and carrying guns. Smaller boys hung around them looking like they could not wait to join. By the time it got to the birthday dinner under the "fireworks" it had all been a bit much. We needed to laugh.

We weren't evacuated that night. The next day, the next week and the next month we kept on with our work of protecting civilians. We ate rice and beans or lentils, enlivened with a few field specials like pumpkin roasted on a charcoal stove. We experienced more gunfire, shelling, and eventual evacuations. The things we found to laugh at got stranger. That is part of what makes it possible for us to keep peacekeeping when our best efforts seem like a drop in an ocean. Change is heartbreakingly slow but change does come. In the meantime we continue to eat tuna spaghetti, drink balsamic vinegar, and be a little merry in the field.

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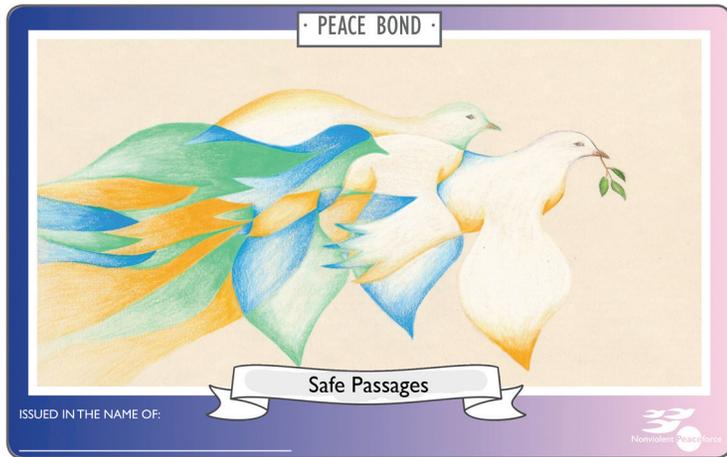
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