The alarming number of conflicts and associated civilian casualties worldwide emphasizes the need to find resolution through peaceful means. The many methods of unarmed civilian protection (UCP) often prove successful in solving or calming conflicts with the long-term benefit of strengthening communities, infrastructure and ongoing dialogue that are needed to sustain hard-earned peace. Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) is a global civilian protection agency, working in some of the world’s most troubled zones to promote peace through civilian protection, reduction of community violence, and self-protection, conflict prevention, conflict management capacity development. Currently, NP has approximately 300 protection officers deployed in our programs in Iraq, Myanmar, Philippines, and South Sudan and we are collaborating with more than 50 implementing community organizations in 24 countries. To interrupt cycles of violence and facilitate sustainable peace, we work through five avenues, one of which is protecting children.

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This summary is based on the full version of the NP core competency program document “Protecting Children” that contains additional examples of interventions, methods, and guidance as the basis of work in this field by NP, partners, and other collaborating bodies.

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2. Protecting Children

The Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) underpins the work of many NGOs on protecting children. CRC’s four pillars are the right to survival, protection, development, and participation, supported by access to health, legal processes, education, humanitarian assistance, information, and justice. A Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) refers to “grave violations” listed as:

- Killing and maiming of children
- Recruitment and use of children in armed forces or groups
- Attacks on schools and hospitals
- Rape and grave sexual violence
- Abduction
- Denial of humanitarian access
- Child protection issues also encompass:
  - Female genital mutilation or cutting
  - Child trafficking and sexual exploitation
  - Child labor
  - Child marriage
  - Child migration and separation
  - Landmines and other explosives
  - Children in contact with the law – those under the age of 18 who are alleged offenders, victims or witnesses of crime
Multi-level support

According to a leading report, “grave violations” rose worldwide from just under 10,000 in 2010 to more than 25,000 in 2017 and nearly one in five children were living in conflict-affected areas. NP works to protect children in situations of violent conflict and of humanitarian emergencies with sometimes inherent overlap between both, applying unarmed civilian protection (UCP) methods that may include:

- Creating child-friendly spaces and other psycho-social support activities, activation of social networks such as women’s groups and youth clubs, and psychological first aid.
- Capacity-building for service providers including training programs for local social workers.
- Monitoring and reporting of child rights’ violations
- Family tracing, reunification and reintegration of children who have become separated during emergencies.
- Procuring legal documentation for displaced or stateless children and facilitating the
access of children to legal aid and appropriate counselling services

- Advocating, for example, against the use of orphanages and international adoption in response to humanitarian crises.

UCP to meet the needs of children in conflict

Drawing on our presence and visibility, community relations and networks, we apply UCP methods and principles to help strengthen aid and community-based infrastructure. Prevention and sustained support are two defining characteristics of UCP. The proactive engagement, rumor control, and shuttle diplomacy used in UCP help avert trouble so as to facilitate aid efforts. In addition, being accessible at all stages of a conflict and conducting ongoing training helps to address gaps that might arise and even prevent latent conflict from erupting.

“When a graduation ceremony in Maguindanao, Philippines, was interrupted by a fire fight of rivalling clans, many community members were fearful of sending their children back to school. In response NP provided a regular protective presence in the area for one year and maintained relationships with all relevant stakeholders, including security forces, school principal, teachers and community leaders. At the next graduation ceremony NP held a visible presence and supported initiatives for a ‘No Firearm Policy’. NP also systematically raised the profile of preservation of schools as ‘zones of peace’ and monitored instances where armed actors occupied or operated in close proximity to schools. It would raise these ‘proximity concerns’ immediately with the relevant parties and encourage them to reposition themselves.

(NP team member in the Philippines)

In the Philippines, NP conducted 421 orientation sessions on child protection over a six-year period for more than 24,000 participants including government agencies, religious leaders, community leaders, youth groups, and women’s networks. Between 2016 and 2017, in support of
the ‘Children Not Soldiers’ campaign, NP Philippines conducted 83 orientation sessions for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) communities and reached out to 6,580 individuals on the legal framework for child protection and on the prevention of child recruitment within the ranks or armed groups.

“When a 16-year-old boy in South Sudan was accused of murder he was arrested by the police. Despite his arrest, relatives of the deceased person came and shot the boy to avenge his death. The boy survived and was brought to a hospital in Juba. NP provided 24-hours protective presence in the hospital, as the boy’s family was afraid that people would come and kill him during the night. We sat in the hospital for weeks on end and also cared for the boy, because he was not cared for properly by the medical staff. When the boy was cured, we accompanied him to a police station to await his trial.”

(NP team member in South Sudan)

Additional examples of NP’s accompaniment, training and re-insertion activities include:

- Provided protective accompaniment and training to women as they negotiated the release of their children recruited by armed actors in Sri Lanka.
- Provided protective accompaniment to human rights’ defenders investigating violations of child rights in Sri Lanka and to state duty bearers handling child protection cases in South Sudan.
- Provided protective presence at schools that had been attacked in the Philippines and for children who were threatened for their alleged role in extremist groups or crimes in Iraq and South Sudan.
- Accompanied former child soldiers to their villages, assisting with community and family reintegration in Sri Lanka and South Sudan, identifying educational and vocational opportunities and possible obstacles in the reintegration process.
- Trained and coached local ceasefire monitors in UCP to protect schools from military occupation and negotiated the release of child soldiers in Myanmar.
- Trained and supported women’s groups to address child protection issues or advocate for increased child protection measures in their communities in South Sudan, the Philippines, and Myanmar.
“In West Mosul NP was able to support reunifications for seven children who had become separated from their parents. The relationships that NP developed with the local security forces were leveraged to support in the immediate tracing of relatives. In two instances, soldiers at checkpoints were able to alert relatives to where their children had been found. On another occasion NP was able to elicit information from the military regarding two children who were being held in abusive conditions by security actors and subsequently worked alongside UN Civil-Military Coordination and the Child Protection Sub Cluster to negotiate their release. This information, reported by junior officers concerned with the conduct of their superiors, was obtained through sustained relationship building and placed those soldiers at risk of reprimand or retaliation. It was testament to the discretion and sensitivity of all involved that the children were rescued without repercussions for the sources of the information.”

(Internal report, NP in Iraq)

**Safeguarding rights and needs in humanitarian emergencies**

NP has strengthened the protection of children including through the following:

- Provided protective presence at registration points of refugee camps to ensure that newly arrived, unaccompanied minors and children are registered, re-united with their families, or taken to appropriate care immediately upon arrival.

- Provided Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR) of separated and abducted children in South Sudan. NP usually works with other actors on FTR, including ‘Child Protection Clusters,’ local Women Protection Teams (WPTs), government departments, and international agencies such as UNICEF and Save the Children. Activities include identification of cases, interviews, tracing the child or the family, verification interviews, referral, cross-checking of data, reunification, monitoring, and related follow-up.

- Provided child protection case management and developed referral mechanisms in humanitarian emergency settings in South Sudan: identification of resources, registration and assessment, case planning, regular review meetings, and referral services.

- Provided protective presence at child friendly spaces at displacement sites in South Sudan.

- Supported the establishment, training and mentoring of local Child Protection Committees (CPCs) or working groups and promoted their transformation into Community Based Organizations. Helped establish community-driven child protection networks and connected them to national child protection mechanisms.