

What priorities should be addressed to strengthen the work of the United Nations on peacebuilding and sustaining peace?

Peace operations, confronting volatile political instability and grievous security situations, are facing unprecedented challenges to protecting civilians. Missions are not meeting local expectations as communities often feel excluded from meaningful roles in planning, analysis, and implementation of protection activities ostensibly designed for them. Protection of civilians (POC) requires **greater engagement with local peacebuilders and implementation of unarmed civilian-led protection (UCP) methods** so that communities can gain knowledge and skills and use their agency to protect themselves nonviolently.

Recent articles on peacekeeping have emphasized that: **“Peacekeeping missions need to build inclusive mechanisms for civil society participation in transition processes, ranging from initial planning to monitoring a mission’s withdrawal”**.¹ Missions need to maintain local (civilian) protection networks during and after missions because **community engagement is integral to the mission’s governance** and needs to be a ‘foundational element around which the entire rest of the mission would revolve.’² **“Civil society engagement and participation is indispensable to peacebuilding”**.³

In this context, it is proposed that the SotF includes recommendations that future POC policy and practice undertake:

- deep, sustained, consistent and ongoing, committed, two-way, local-level **community engagement** in POC, *normalizing the primacy of local actors and locally-led approaches to POC as a primary form of UN engagement; and,*
- adoption and absorption of **UCP for community-led protection especially preparing for drawdown**

Unarmed civilian protection (UCP), cited in numerous Security Councils resolutions⁴, involves practices used by civilian-led teams for immediate direct protection of civilians and long-term violence reduction using: protective accompaniment, protective presence, community-led security initiatives, early-warning/early-response mechanisms, Women Protection Teams, Youth Protection Teams, conflict de-escalation techniques, civilian ceasefire and peace agreement monitoring, establishment of weapons-free zones, and other unarmed, nonviolent methods.

¹ CIVIC, Prioritizing the Protection of Civilians during Peacekeeping Transitions-Lessons learned from MONUSCO, 2022; <https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Prioritizing-the-Protection-of-Civilians-During-Peacekeeping-Transitions.pdf>

² Carver, Fred. “Linked Up Peacekeeping: Community early warning of atrocity risks as MONUSCO prepares to withdraw”, 2022. <https://protectionapproaches.org/linked-up-peacekeeping>

³ 2020 SG's Report on ‘Peacebuilding and sustaining peace’ (A/74/976-S/2020/773)

⁴ UNMISS-S/RES/2459 (2019); UNITAMS S/RES/2524 (2020) ; S/RES/2594 (2021)-resolution on transitions

Steps UN peace operations missions could take to advance locally-led civilian protection in preparation for transition:

- Peacekeeping could expand and diversify their repertoire of approaches to POC beyond primarily military means and employ more unarmed approaches;
- Missions could seek to work beyond their normal UN partners from agencies, funds and programmes on direct civilian-led protection;
- UN police and civil affairs can play a greater role in integrating unarmed approaches into their approaches and cooperating with UCP civilian actors;
- UN entities could work more directly with increased numbers of civilian actors engaged in UCP for greater mutual complementarity.⁵

The deployment of UCP teams should be regularized and become an established part of transition protocols when peacekeepers are drawing down and withdrawing. As Timor-Leste President Ramos-Horta suggests, the UN should look at how to 'make non-armed peace observers, peace protectors, ***a fundamental pillar of UN peace operations doctrine and practices throughout the world.***'⁶

The future of the UN's success in protection of civilians is inexorably tied to engagement with local communities and community-led unarmed forms of protection. It would be a major, substantive step forward for the SotF and PB Architecture Review to include UCP as ***a regular part of the menu of policy options*** that UN policymakers consider when preparing for drawdowns and building sustainably peaceful societies in transition settings.

Nonviolent Peaceforce, Sept 2023

⁵ UCP UN Retreat Summary: Examining Unarmed Civilian Protection in the UN Context: A Complement and Contribution to POC, May 2019

⁶ Video speech Pres Jose Ramos-Horta, November 2021
<https://vimeo.com/user8196671/download/644082550/51bc5679d5>