

Talking Points for
**The Role of Unarmed Civilian Protection in the Future of
Peace Operations: An Integrative Approach**

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Every morning in the Jordan Valley, families awake, not knowing if they will have been forced to flee their homes by nightfall. That uncertainty is what Unarmed Civilian Protection works to confront.

We are here today because of the UN Peace Operations Review Week to look deeply and learn from past peacekeeping missions and contemplate how peace operations need to evolve to meet the pressing new challenges of violence in today's conflict contexts. I am going to share what we are doing in the West Bank and why we think this is important for future UN and other international peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts.

1. UCPiP is a Palestinian-led organization that provides direct protection to Palestinians who are under threat of violent attack and ongoing harassment from Israeli settlers, police, and the Israeli Defense Forces, who work in close cooperation with each other throughout the West Bank. They comprise the shock troops for the government of Israel's active annexation campaign.
2. Extremist settler violence (ESV) is **well-documented**. Much of the worst violence is connected to so-called "**outposts**" and "**farms**" that are illegal under Israeli as well as international law. Since the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, ESV has reached unprecedented levels. Settler outposts have increased by **nearly 50%**. In the first half of 2025 alone, there were **757 settler attacks** causing casualties, both animal poisoning, theft, and killing, plus many personal injuries and deaths, as well as property damage.
3. Unarmed civilian protection (UCP), or "protective presence," is a strategy that Israeli and international civil societies and groups use to support communities facing high levels of violence. Building on **successful UCP initiatives** globally that you will hear about later, UCP strategies in the West Bank de-escalate, deter, and limit violent incidents and, by doing this, increase efficiency of agricultural activities; help safeguard land and resource access; bolster legal processes against perpetrators; and provide feelings of security and solidarity that increase communal resilience. And, most importantly, UCP helps families stay in their homes and live their lives **as close to normal as possible within the occupation, and there is NO NORMAL in living under occupation.**
4. Based on an assessment report we did last year, in September, more than 22 groups are providing UCP or protective presence in the West Bank, some are international, some

Israeli, some local. Some are highly organized, well-trained, and professional; others are ad hoc. All work closely with and are appreciated by the communities they serve.

5. These groups use a number of field-tested UCP methods that have been proven to work in a variety of violent conflicts in the world. The methods most often used include accompaniment (e.g., schoolchildren, shepherds, and the olive harvest), proactive presence (e.g., Masafer Yatta), interpositioning (e.g., Ras al Auja), de-escalation, and early warning/early response. All these methods are responses to the community needs doing it 24/7 baring all kind of attacks from spitting to beating to harassing to shooting, (example of Mel Duncan, and Aycha Noor)

5. With relatively few additional resources, the number of well-trained, civilian protectors could be scaled up to live in the most vulnerable communities throughout the West Bank, like our team does in Ras al Ein Auja, and provide rapid response and 24/7 presence to other communities in the area.

6. Again, with relatively few additional resources, the infrastructure of existing organizations could be strengthened through advanced, ongoing training; assistance with recruiting and screening; and on-the-ground coordination.

7. The UN and other multinational bodies must not ignore the resources of UCP as they construct peacekeeping plans for Gaza in the International Stabilization Force. And such an international protection infrastructure must be equally planned and implemented in the West Bank.

Advantages of UCP in the role include:

- UCP is designed to bring people together as opposed to keeping them apart, as traditional armed peacekeepers inherently do.
- UCP introduces and encourages active nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution rather than relying on violence and force.
- Unarmed civilian protectors are able to work and live in areas where traditional peacekeepers cannot or will not go.
- UCP actively engages the community in violence deterrence and peacebuilding, which builds in sustainability.
- UCP can be relatively quickly mobilized, drawing on the experience from the West Bank.
- Because UCP does not rely on large overheads and equipment, it is affordable.
- UCP comes from civil society and so does not represent particular national or multinational interests.
- Because of the growing involvement of people providing UCP throughout the world over the last 20 years, there is now a pool of experienced and trained veterans who could be recruited.

I want to end my remarks by noting that people providing direct protection to Palestinians do so at great risk. For example, at a little after 4 am on this past Monday morning, an armed unit of the Israeli Defense Forces arrived at the quarters where our civilian protection team stays in the

South Jordan Valley, looking for me by name. Later Monday morning, at a little after 9 am, an Israeli police officer arrived again, asking for me by name. This was the same police officer who brutally beat an Israeli member of our team in late September. I am happy to provide video and eyewitness evidence of these incidents. I do not know what awaits me upon my return.