

Nonviolent Peaceforce featured at high level briefing at the UN

Written by Submitted by Blogger Joy Mosley
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Over 130 representatives of UN member States, Observers, UN officials and civil society representatives met Friday at the UN, for a high level briefing organized by the Permanent Missions of Belgium, Benin, Costa Rica and Philippines, to discuss broadening the concept of peacekeeping to include the contribution of civil society to the unarmed protection of civilians in conflict situations.

His Excellency Ambassador Libran Cabactulan, Permanent Representative of the Philippines, delivered the welcoming remarks. H.E. Ambassador Eduardo Ulibarri, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica, acted as moderator. H.E. Jan Grauls, Permanent Representative of Belgium and H.E. Ambassador Jean-Francis Zinsou, Permanent Representative of Benin summarized the discussion and delivered the closing remarks.

Mr. Tariq Al-Ansari, Deputy Chief of Staff of the President of the General Assembly opened the event with remarks on behalf of the President, Mr. Nassir Abulaziz Al-Nasser: "We all understand that UN Peacekeeping mandates have become more complex. And the protection of civilians is becoming more and more crucial to the work of our Missions." He also affirmed: "To protect them, we need to make sure that all available resources are engaged in a combined and well-coordinated effort." He was followed by Mr. Rafael Seguis, Under-Secretary of the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs who affirmed the strong contribution well-organized civil society can play in protecting civilians amid violent conflict. Citing the choice by both the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front of Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) as the only international nongovernmental organization to be part of the official agreement on Civilian Protection, Under-Secretary Seguis stated, "Both parties were already aware of Nonviolent Peaceforce's presence in the very 'hotspot' areas of Mindanao...it's track record on the ground with respect to conflict prevention activities and the good relations it continues to maintain with local stakeholders."

He pointed out that it was "a unique model of unarmed civilian protection that directly engages civil society groups doing peacekeeping work, and taps into their knowledge, experience and manpower," and that this arrangement has contributed to the peace process.

While the Mindanao peace process is a work in progress, Mr. Seguis observed that the model of incorporating civil society into the process, "Provides options for consideration as we seek to broaden the concept of peacekeeping at the UN."

Ms. Tiffany Easthom, Country Director of the Nonviolent Peaceforce's peacekeeping project in South Sudan described how NP has 65 unarmed civilian peacekeepers in eight locations throughout South Sudan including areas affected by Joseph Kony and the Lords Resistance Army as well as near the country's border with The Sudan.

Ms. Easthom explained how unarmed civilian peacekeepers are protecting civilians and supporting local civil society in preventing violence in some of the most violent places in the world. These peacekeepers engage in a variety of strategies and must remain "nimble and

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adaptable.” She recommended that these, “newly proven practices need to be supported and scaled up...Unarmed civilian peacekeeping is an entirely appropriate response to violent conflicts in many more countries in many more situations and needs to be scaled up,”

The event allowed for a rich discussion on aspects including the contexts where unarmed civilians can play a role in the protection of civilians, the specific role of women in the protection of civilians by civilians, and the ways by which the UN peacekeeping and protection architectures could make better use of trained civilians for the unarmed protection of civilians.

Next steps to advance policy and funding support for unarmed civilian peacekeeping are now being considered.