Format Annual Progress Report

Contributing to Peaceful and Safe Societies 2024-2031

Due to the adaptive programming approach and check-ins throughout the year allowing for regular updates on progress towards achieving the agreed upon (intermediate) results, the function and timing of the annual progress report differs from traditional programming. Emphasis of the annual progress report lies on explicitly linking progress achieved as well as evidence, insight and knowledge gained to subsequent programming and policy influencing. The annual progress report will feed directly into the annual plan and budget as part of a combined reporting cycle. The indicated number of pages is between 15 and a maximum of 25 pages.

Following an adaptive programming approach, the annual progress report should focus on changes and opportunities related to the programme; progress made vis-à-vis the foreseen outcomes; and where relevant intermediate results. The report will specifically focus on:

(1) presentation of results;
(2) summary of adaptations made to the annual plan and lessons learned;
(3) change stories (linked to outcomes).

See the guidance per section below.

Section 1 - Results

Presentation of results on agreed upon annual indicators related to the MFA results framework (in a table) – including narrative.

Since starting the Nonviolent Engagement for Safety and Security Transformation (NEST) Project in June 2024, as part of the "Contributing to Peaceful and Safe Societies 2024-2031" grant programme, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) has concentrated on establishing foundational operations, engaging with key stakeholders, and launching strategic activities across our country programmes in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sudan, Iraq, and South Sudan. Despite challenges such as security concerns and dynamic conflicts in our implementation settings, significant progress has been made in team recruitment, operational setup, strategic planning, and policy advocacy. In parallel, global policy and advocacy efforts have strengthened, expanding NP's presence in key arenas such as the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN), positioning NP to further influence key international policy discourses on civilian safety. These efforts have laid a solid foundation for advancing the promotion of Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), strengthening support for community-led initiatives, and shaping policies to enhance civilian safety in conflict-affected regions.

Outcome 1: Increase Policy Support, Recognition, and Funding for Unarmed Approaches for the Security of People and Communities

Since the start of the NEST Project, prioritization has been given to recruitment (see below), amplifying the impacts of the crisis in Sudan on civilians (see change story), and centring civilians in ongoing humanitarian debates on food security. The Change Story provided in this report gives a sense of the collaboration between and across NP teams and networks, and the impacts we have been able to achieve in amplifying the civilian protection crisis in Darfur. In addition, NP has established connections with several other organisations within the grant framework, including

Search for Common Ground (exploring Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEAL) collaboration possibilities), as well as CIVIC and PAX (exploring opportunities for joint advocacy).

In the period covered by this report, NP has engaged in a range of policy events, including participation in the World Summit on Humanitarian Negotiation (Geneva), PeaceCon (Washington D.C.), United Nations General Assembly High Level Week events (New York City), and dialogue meetings with EU officials organised by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (Brussels). The presence of conflict-affected civilians able to directly advocate based on their own experience and their visibility as advocates in these forums is a critical component of NP's policy influencing strategy. The cross-cutting ways that people-centred security and unarmed civilian protection themes featured in these discussions is testament to previous influencing efforts from NP and others and provides a strong foundation for further impact over the course of this grant.

Significant groundwork has been laid in growing NP's global and regional advocacy and policy influencing capacity. At the end of October, the Global Policy and Advocacy team welcomed a regional Policy and Advocacy Manager for Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (based in Beirut) at a critical time for amplifying civilian protection concerns. The EU Representative in Brussels moved from half-time to full-time beginning of October 2024. Recruitment processes for an African Union manager (based in Nairobi) and a full-time UN representative in New York have been finalised (both positions starting in mid-January 2025); recruitment of a Media Adviser is well underway. At the country programme level, Sudan, South Sudan and Iraq have all recruited Senior Policy and Advocacy Officers or equivalent, the first time NP has had dedicated advocacy capacity at country programme level. This increase in capacity is critical for us to increase policy support and recognition for UCP and civilian-centred approaches, with now more entry points from which to launch these efforts. The make up of the team – which will now include two French speakers, an Arabic speaker, expanded geographic coverage including in the Global South, and increased specialist research capacity – will enhance NP's ability to reach policy audiences in a greater range of institutions, forums, and communities.

Country programmes have made meaningful progress in increasing recognition of UCP across their respective contexts. In **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, for example, NP team has been invited to participate in several provincial level workshops to present the UCP approach. As a partner of UNFPA and with strong relationships with MONUSCO leadership, NP has an unusual level of visibility for a smaller organisation, and we will continue to use these entry points to sensitise UCP as a concept and practice. One example is NP's invitation to participate in the MONUSCO Civil Affairs Retreat, the "Atelier USAID-ONGI Protection des Civils au Sud Kivu" and more recently a three-day meeting of the Inter-Provincial Security Council in North Kivu. These workshops have comprised key stakeholders involved in the transition process and have presented key opportunities to sensitise various entities on UCP and how NP intends to move forward in support of community-led unarmed protection. The fact that NP is invited by a UN peacekeeping mission to speak about UCP is a testament to the longstanding efforts of NP UN advocacy for many years, particularly at Headquarters in New York, and speaks to the utility of having an advocacy representative in this location. In DRC, this invitation in the early stages of NP's efforts suggests a change in perception and greater openness towards UCP (and/or NP) from UN bodies – previously, such an invitation has come at much later stages of engagement. Whether this is a sign of recognition of potential utility, the extent of MONUSCO buy-in, and/or the impact of such invitations on UCP practice (the acceleration of application, or perhaps the stifling of community-driven UCP initiatives) will take time to be observed.

Together with the **South Sudan** Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN), the Union of Journalists of South Sudan (UJOSS), and Women for Justice and Equality (WOJE), NP has contributed to strengthening capacities and agency of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) to advocate for protection outcomes. In July 2024, NP and said partners held a HRDs Speaker Tour and helped organise a mentorship visit to the Netherlands. In addition to strengthening HRDs' understanding of UCP, the initiative connected Dutch human rights organisations with their counterparts in South Sudan and the wider region. NP also brought together over 150 actors (community peace committees, youth peace teams, HRDs, youth and women networks) together for the National Stakeholders Consultative Peacebuilding Forum, convened by NP in Juba in September 2024. This created a space for community-level structures to interface with key duty bearers, including the legislature, judiciary, Under-Secretary for the Ministry of Peacebuilding, and the Minister of Gender. This then enabled NP to shortly after work directly with government officials at a 2-day training on UCP and psycho-social approaches NP are currently integrating into our work (EMDR). Many of those who attended – including senior representatives from the Ministry – had never heard of UCP previously or considered how to use such strategies in conflict transformation. A good indicator for positive impact and impression is that the attendees immediately asked for follow up sessions in January 2025. In general, this also strengthens our relationships with key state-level policy actors and lays groundwork for further advocacy engagement in 2025 and beyond.

Outcome 2: Mobilise National and Regional Networks of Practitioners, Researchers, and Supporters Around Unarmed Approaches to Security and Nonviolence

During the first stage of implementation, efforts have been made to broaden mutual support networks and create opportunities for learning and collaboration, especially in Iraq and South Sudan. In **Iraq**, the country programme has actively engaged with partners – including fellow grant recipients PAX and the Berghof Foundation – to advance ongoing programming in the context of wider stabilisation efforts, including dignified and safe returns and reintegration, community reconciliation, and digital protection. NP teams in Iraq – across Sinjar, Ba'aj, and Tel Afar, as well as in new locations in South Mosul, Mosul, Erbil and Bagdad – have begun mobilising key allies for influencing policy and advancing local leadership in advocacy efforts. Partnerships advanced during 2024 primarily include HRDs: women's rights and gender activists; environmentalists; Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working on the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms as well as Yazidi minority rights.

Considering the ongoing sectarian disputes and exclusion of ethnic-religious groups from decision-making, engagement with the Iraqi civil society has allowed the NP team to explore the role of gender and other sources of marginalisation and create inclusive, safe spaces for the under-represented voices to be heard. A holistic analysis and strategy regarding protection of civic space in Iraq remains a major programmatic priority in 2025 (see the Annual Plan).

Growing national and regional movements around UCP has been a primary focus for the **South Sudan** country programme. The National Stakeholders Consultative Peacebuilding Forum, also mentioned above, convened by NP in Juba in September 2024, gather over 150 key peace actors and created a space for community-level structures (community peace committees, youth peace teams, HRDs, youth and women networks) to interface with key duty bearers, including the legislature, judiciary, Under-Secretary for the Ministry of Peacebuilding, and the Minister of Gender. The forum provided a space for Women and Youth Protection Teams (WPTs/YPTs) to demonstrate their confidence as advocates as they spoke of their needs and experiences in the presence of national government representatives. This advocacy was further enriched by the presence of HRDs who openly challenged government agents, donors, and UN representatives for action on key policy areas such as fostering inclusive social cohesion strategies and supporting grassroots structures which

contribute to promoting peaceful and safe communities across the countries. It also showed a diverse convergence of people (members of the armed forces, South Sudan's only female judge, traditional Chiefs, among many others) and ideas, for example, leveraging experiential learning and building relations across scales. Those present were able to discuss key policy processes, such the National Security Amendment Bill, which may lead to an increase of human rights violations and further endanger HRDs and journalists who promote good governance and civilian protection. This forum, held in the first months of this grant, positions NP to further accelerate locally led advocacy at the national level over the next eight years.

NP has also contributed to enhancing regional human rights mechanisms. SSHRDN, with the support of NP, has strengthened its partnership with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) to jointly promote and protect human rights in South Sudan and the wider region. Throughout December and coinciding with the 37th ACHPR Extraordinary Session, SSHRDN and NP organised and participated in a series of learning events – such as the 81st Session of the ACHPR in Gambia – the enhance the effectiveness of collective policy efforts. Such partnerships for advocacy and protection of civilians are to be expanded in 2025.

Outcome 3: Enhance Collective Learning and Critical Evidence, and Articulate Exemplary, Culturally Appropriate Models of Unarmed Approaches to Security

In the period covered in this report, NP has begun laying the groundwork for the learning component of this grant. In addition to recruitment processes for positions such as the Impact Analyst (still in process), we have convened several bilateral meetings with Search for Common Ground to learn and collaborate on the potential adaptation of the Peace Impact Framework (PIF) model for NP programming. This initiative has the potential to translate the PIF, currently used in peacebuilding programming impact analysis, to protection and humanitarian activities more akin to NP's work. As we adapt the framework and integrate it with existing evaluation methodologies, we will not only enhance our own learning in this space, but also be able to share this learning with other partners across the HDP nexus. We are also finalising partnership agreements with two learning partners, Humanitarian Practice Group and NORCAP, who will assist NP in capturing programmatic impact evidence, as well as in the humanitarian sector.

Throughout the past few months, NP has also begun facilitating collaborations with local researchers and research institutions to develop and implement focused research on unarmed approaches to security. The **Iraq** country programme has partnered with the Berghof Global Learning Hub for Transitional Justice to gather gender-specific data on enforced disappearances. The project is meant to facilitate opportunities for learning between local protection collectives and NP, while improving the practice of UCP across key stakeholder groups.

The **South Sudan** country programme has prepared for the start of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as part of this Project in collaboration with the WPTs and local leaders in Pibor. The study is focused on increasing understanding and evidence of how UCP works (and where it struggles), while enhancing collective learning at the community level (see section 2). Building on existing projects like the South Sudan Multi-Donor Trust-funded project on the Reconciliation, Stabilisation, and Resilience Fund (RSRTF), which is being implemented in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area and Greater Akobo, NP has also engaged with various national partners – such as the Lomore Development Organisation (LDO) and the Organisation for Nonviolence and Development (ONAD) – to ensure appreciation and standardisation of UCP in their operations and programming.

The **Sudan** country programme, in turn, has continued actively monitoring the conflict situation and contributing to the body of evidence of what UCP can look like in high-risk settings (see change story). In addition, maintaining presence during the siege of El Fasher has been an important pathway for learning, exploring the extent to which UCP can be practiced in the absence of on-site

guidance by experienced staff and as needs shift to the provision of essential humanitarian services. While direct protection was difficult to maintain or systematically apply, the team continued to weave security management and self-protection into their engagements with communities and leaders. Moreover, as entry points for leveraging influence at local levels, a shift towards contributing high-level advocacy clearly emerged as the most impactful way for NP to contribute to the security of people in Darfur.

In **DRC**, where NP has been present for a shorter period than other sites, there is a critical need to have 'proof of concept' around unarmed protection strategies. While many actors are interested in the approach (and acknowledge the limitations of the armed approaches that have characterised protection responses in DRC for many decades), stakeholders desire strong evidence for impact and efficacy of UCP. There is an eagerness to continue learning more about UCP approaches, and how they differ from existing and widespread community protection initiatives in DRC. As NP further develops programming in DRC, a focus is using our experience as evidence to show utility in this context.

Outcome 4: Implement Preventive and Response Actions That Enhance the Security of People and Communities Through Nonviolent Means

To advance direct application of UCP, in **DRC**, where the withdrawal of The United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is ongoing, NP has focused on identifying protection gaps that emerge in such transitional settings. In DRC, NP has secured national level permissions and registrations have been completed, with only a few outstanding in provincial areas. Operational requirements have been secured, and the senior management levels of the team are in place, with Protection Officers starting at the beginning of February. Security assessments for Bukavu have been completed while assessments for Kalehe will be iterative and ongoing over the next few months.

A heavy focus on stakeholder engagement has been prioritised as an essential pre-requisite to the commencement of any safe UCP programming. It is this careful and strategic relationship building that lays essential groundwork for sustained and impactful programming achievements into the future. Relationships have been initiated and developed with local authorities, traditional community authorities (Chefferie de Bukavu, King of Kalehe), civil society, national and international NGOs, MONUSCO, provincial government entities and some security entities. A broader contextual understanding is being developed through relationships with research institutes, journalists and lawyer networks.

Throughout the reporting period, NP has also strengthened protection of civilians' action via supporting proximate civilian leaders. Since the start of the NEST Project and largely because of it, the **Sudan** country programme has been able to continue UCP work in El Fasher, North Darfur, despite the ongoing siege and highly complex implementation environment. Amid active hostilities and the prospect of imminent, identity-based mass atrocities, NP's community protection networks have been actively supporting the newly displaced arriving into IDP camps as well as addressing issues of violence at the household level. They have been able to prompt and support local duty bearers to respond to particularly vulnerable groups (such as refugees from South Sudan) as well as provide fuel, cleaning materials and volunteer support to the only remaining health clinics in the city (all others have been attacked).

During the last quarter of 2024, the development of Early Warning Early Response (EWER) teams has also continued in the most impacted neighbourhood of El Fasher, Abu Shok. As daily shelling persists, volunteer groups have been keen to engage in UCP methodologies, conducting Psychological First Aid

(PFA) and organising for rapid treatment of injured civilians in the absence of state or NGO capacity to do so. In a context of acute insecurity, the role of local partnerships for protection is foundational to effective UCP. NP is committed to strengthening protection of civilians' action at the local level and deepen connections with mutual aid networks – in Sudan specifically and through advocacy efforts more broadly.

In **Iraq**, NP teams continue to work with community protection teams and other community stakeholders to continue UCP efforts in Ninewa. At the same time, it should be noted that direct implementation has become increasingly more complex since the de-activation of the cluster coordination mechanisms in 2022, the impacts of which continue to be felt. The lack of a united front via the cluster system has exacerbated issues around access for many NGOs, including NP. Though there is a strategy in place to resolve current issues, a key learning from these challenges is the need to strengthen collaboration with other NGOs to present a more united front to authorities, so as to facilitate ease of implementation.

Section 2 – Adaptations and lessons learned

Summary of adaptations made to the annual plan, describing what the changes were, why they were initiated, how this was done and what the results were, divided over the following categories:

1. **Planned intervention strategies for country-level adaptive locally led programming to achieve thematic objectives (peacebuilding and mediation, or security for persons and communities)**
2. **Planned initiatives for evidence-based policy influencing to achieve thematic objectives (peacebuilding and mediation, or security for persons and communities.**
3. **Planned activities to continuously develop your working methods (with attention for inclusivity, conflict sensitivity, and alignment and coordination).**
4. **Risk materialised, new risks emerged and mitigation/adaptation strategy.**
5. **Key lessons learned.**

While the risk of conflict was clearly articulated in the proposal, in the months since the submission of the original design, security situation in **North Darfur, Sudan,** has continued to deteriorate. The end of August and September witnessed particularly dangerous dynamics with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) surrounding the town of El Fasher and Zamzam IDP camp. Deep seated inter-communal grievances as well as a history of ethnic based abuses committed by the RSF and its associated militias still has civilians inside the besieged area terrified for their lives. An international advocacy effort aimed at atrocity prevention was launched (please see attached case study), yet still, at the end of the year, a status quo of daily artillery and mortar bombardments, airstrikes and attacks against civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and markets persist. The number of people displaced is unknown, famine has been declared, and there is no humanitarian response currently implemented by international actors (bar a few small activities by local team members still present in the area). Supplies and supply chains are exhausted, to the point that medical agencies have ceased operations.

NP and community protection teams supported by NP have demonstrated unimaginable resilience in the face of such risk. Adapting to more psychosocial support activities, efforts to rally fellow IDPs into mutual aid efforts such as collecting items for/supporting particularly vulnerable households and identifying new opportunities to support localised civilian protection efforts wherever possible. NP has also reviewed its UCP model in terms of remote support and is currently piloting a remote, technical development programme for the North Darfur team.

A key emerging risk in **South Sudan** relates to the extension of the elections from December 2024 to December 2026, and the associated extension of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity. The rescheduling of this election – though expected by many – raised further concerns among South Sudanese communities related to accountability, inflation, food security, the use of public funds, and capacity to achieve other peace agreement commitments. The political instability raises risks of violence, including intercommunal violence and proxy wars as national-level conflicts may play out at the local level fuelled by political and armed actors.

As a response, NP is deepening relations with key actors, including community-level leadership (traditional and faith-based), armed actors, HRDs, women, and people with disabilities. By building trust with local and state leaders, NP aims to foster dialogue, promote peaceful coexistence, mitigate tensions that could arise from election-related conflicts, and be in an effective position to prevent and respond to violence should it arise. We are also strengthening linkages between impacted groups by working with CPTs, WPTs and YPTs to promote solidarity, allowing local groups to raise challenges to higher-level platforms and ensuring that local concerns are heard and addressed on national, regional, and international stages. These actions aim to prevent violence and build resilience against potential election-related violence.

Another key programmatic and implementation risk that has arisen in South Sudan relates to the current funding landscape and its impacts on NP programming overall. The NEST project outcomes are contingent on the continuation of NP's protection programming writ large. Though similar concerns flagged in relation to other country programmes have been allayed, the funding projections for South Sudan reveal a concerning gap in other baseline funding that has forced NP to contract operations in all field sites. Sustaining operations through this gap until renewal of funding from core donors can be confirmed is a core focus, and at the same time, the contraction will impact our ability to implement NEST programming as we would wish in the short term.

At the same time, planned initatives will proceed. Following the Snapshot Report on intergenerational violence in the Greater Pibor Autonomous Area (GPAA), the team has identified the Pibor operational area as a priority for initial implementation of this Project This will start with piloting PAR to generate evidence-based data and gain a deeper understanding of locally led approaches to resolving conflicts amidst challenges such as age-set fighting, cattle raids, forced marriages, and revenge killings that trigger intra-communal conflict. The PAR will also assess inter-communal conflicts between the Murle and neighbouring communities of Lou Nuer, Dinka, and Toposa, triggered by cattle raids, and women and child abductions. Findings from the Pibor pilot research will inform NP's adaptive programming under this Project, focusing on locally led UCP approaches that can be easily scaled up to other locations facing similar challenges. The PAR results will also be used to inform advocacy on issues specific and unique to the local contexts of the research. These findings will not only inform the direction and implementation of this Project but will also provide relevant evidence for adoption by other agencies contributing to peaceful and safe societies in South Sudan. NP plans to learn from the experience in Pibor best practices around PAR and then scale up the PAR in other operational areas.

One of the key issues that has been raised in engagement with HRDs in South Sudan has been concern about the human rights impacts of the National Security Amendment Bill, and as such this will be a focus in upcoming efforts. This will include engaging with relevant stakeholders within South Sudan's National Security, Ministry of Defence Human Rights Desk, Ministry of Justice, and the South Sudan Human Rights Commission to create safe spaces and protect grassroots as well as national-level HRDs and journalists who are likely to be affected by the law. NP will also conduct continuous engagement and advocacy aimed at influencing national-level discourses on the protection of human rights, addressing any gaps or flaws that manifest with the application of the Safety and Security Act and South Sudan's media policy and guiding frameworks.

Considering the effects of violent conflict on frontline workers, WPTs, HRDs, and community members themselves, NP will implement mental health and psychosocial support interventions in a phased approach in South Sudan. The initial assessment phase in 2024/2025 aims to identify the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) needs among HRDs, community protection teams including WPTs, and NP frontline staff involved in supporting this Project. The assessment will help identify and document any MHPSS needs related to changes in thoughts, feelings, behaviours, social values and norms, cultural aspects, and personal human experiences.

In terms of **global policy and advocacy influencing**, NP continues to refine the plan presented in the original proposal documents. As specialist staff are onboarded, NP's capacity to do this will increase. This is particularly the case for MENA and AU regions, where representatives have been dedicated for the first time. It is also the case at national project levels, where dedicated policy and advocacy focal points will now be able to ensure essential analysis and collateral extends beyond the immediate circles of the country programmes. Media and communications additional capacity will be finalised in early 2025. In terms of risk, it should be noted that the MENA Policy and Advocacy Manager who joined NP at the end of October is based in Beirut, where the security situation has been unstable. With a ceasefire with Israel now in place and new government arrangements in Lebanon, NP teams continue to work together to monitor the situation and will make plans for possible travel in accordance with these assessments.

The next phase of the grant will also include finalising partnerships directed toward research and influencing the humanitarian sector more broadly. In the original formulation of the grant proposal, the Humanitarian Practice Group (Overseas Development Institute, UK) and NORCAP (as they administer the PROCAP expert roster) have been identified as potential key partners and are to be confirmed in Q1 2025.

A policy and advocacy element has been included into the baseline study TOR, which has been since finalised. The tracking of policy and advocacy impact as part of our MEAL planning remains a priority for NP, and the baseline results will be used to further identify entry points and priorities for institutional engagement moving forward.

Since the start of NEST, significant time has been dedicated to **refining the results framework** for the Project, including incorporating lessons and feedback from proposal assessors of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The updated framework – featuring more concrete indicators and revised learning questions – has been shared with the MFA for input. Additionally, focus has been placed on enhancing broader MEAL methodologies of NP to better assess long-term impact, identify draw comparisons within and across contexts, and capture lessons learned. The goal is to ensure NP's MEAL processes and methodologies are more participatory and reflective of NP's organisational commitment to decolonisation, community-leadership and rooted in context specificity.

To support this effort, NP teams have been meeting with potential partners, including ConnexUs (Search for Common Ground) and Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI), to learn from their experiences and insights in this area. More recently and following Search for Common Ground example, the NEST team intends to adapt and roll out a modified Peace Impact Framework (PIF) across the four NEST county programmes to establish a shared foundation for data collection and impact measuring. As the hiring of the Impact Analyst is ongoing, we plan on recruiting a dedicated consultant to support and refine our MEAL strategies.

Considering many new staff and the new Project, an in-person strategic planning meeting is scheduled in Q1 2025 to enable the dispersed team to meet and strategize together, and to ensure everyone has a collective understanding of the NEST grant and the tools they need to make it a success. This will include further identification of advocacy opportunities for 2025. All new staff are being scheduled to attend the UCP Foundational Training as soon as possible. This includes a specific

focus on trauma response tools staff can use to keep themselves and others grounded during this often-difficult work.

As part of our initial proposal, a new office in Addis Ababa was supposed to be established to support coordination efforts. However, after careful assessment, a decision has been made to pause the opening of this office for a few reasons. For the initial period of the grant, the coordination team, including the NEST Programme Manager, Finance Coordinator, and Impact Analyst, will be based in Geneva. This decision allows for closer collaboration amongst the core team, smoother onboarding, providing new staff with direct guidance and helping to integrate them into the organisation's systems and culture. Additionally, the legal hurdles for establishing an office in Addis Ababa are more complex than initially anticipated. Rather than delay the recruitment of essential staff or hinder other start-up processes, a decision has been made to establish the coordination team in Geneva for at least the next two years.

Section 3: Change Stories

Private and public advocacy for protection: The case of El Fasher and ZamZam, Sudan

1. INTRODUCTION

In August 2024, continuous context analysis completed by the NP team on the ground in El Fasher and ZamZam camp suggested an imminent and escalating risk of mass atrocities as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) moved closer to encircling the area. In the absence of timely and feasible direct protection responses, NP publicly and privately mobilised institutional advocacy networks to illuminate risks to civilians and ongoing harms, to prompt high-level political support, and to push for preventive diplomacy to avert atrocities.

NP was able to use the granular contextual knowledge of our team on the ground in Darfur to support a broader public and private advocacy campaign at a critical moment. As detailed below, the use of our institutional relationships and networks is resulting in high level political attention, and – we hope – will continue to contribute to the ongoing prevention of mass atrocities in and around El Fasher and ZamZam camp.

2. THE PROBLEM

In August 2024, the NP team in Sudan raised major concerns about the risk of escalating conflict in the region. Based on continuous context analysis and scenario building, it was determined that the likelihood of RSF capturing El Fasher and then moving on to attack ZamZam camp, was high/very likely. NP data analysis triangulated with that of other actors, including Yale Conflict Observatory satellite imagery, suggested that within a possible timeline of 2-3 weeks (aligned with the dissipation of rains), there was risk that a minimum of 600,000 civilians would be impacted by severe clashes between RSF and Juba Peace Agreement groups and Sudan Armed Forces (SAF).[1] The estimated civilian casualties for such a scenario were a minimum of 150,000 individuals, in an area with close to no health care services.

Despite the magnitude of risk, few stakeholders had been sufficiently engaged or vocal regarding the situation in North Darfur. Public and political attention at this time was fragmented, with the conflict in Sudan under-reported as compared to the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine. Few high-level statements had been issued by influential leaders and bodies, such as the United States (US) President or the EU. In the policy conversations that were happening on Sudan at that time (for example, roundtables on protection convened by Crisis Action that aimed to inform the Secretary-General's report on Sudan), advocacy energy was being largely directed toward a peace operation for Sudan writ large. Based on our assessment of the context, such a response was not politically feasible nor a timely response in the context of El Fasher and ZamZam.[2] In this context, we were gravely concerned that mass civilian harm would unfold in North Darfur.

3. THE CHANGE(S)

Amid high risks to North Darfur, and with options for direct protection on the ground limited, NP mobilised a private and public advocacy campaign (detailed in section 4). Our key objective was to use our on-the-ground staff presence and access to information and analysis to mobilise high level public and private political engagement on El Fasher and ZamZam. We targeted this toward specific actors, namely, member states in the UN Security Council; the EU; and the US Government. These stakeholders are not exhaustive, but rather reflect where NP has existing relationships with stakeholders that have the potential to significantly influence responses to the North Darfur crisis.

With this engagement we sought to increase the visibility of the crisis, and in so doing, prompt protective interventions from key stakeholders (see key asks below) as well as attempt to dissuade armed actors from committing atrocities through illuminating potential harm.[3]

Through the public and private advocacy campaign that NP mobilised and was part of, key changes that were observed included:

- An **increased level of attention and strengthening of language from key state and intergovernmental stakeholders** regarding the urgency of the issue of El Fasher and ZamZam, including: the US Government (including direct engagement from President Biden, the House and Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairs and staff) and the EU. These actors all released statements on the situation in El Fasher in September 2024 following briefings from NP and partners (see below). The increased visibility of the issue was welcome, and in some cases unprecedented (for example, this was the first time Biden had made a public statement on Sudan despite civil society calls for some time). Less welcome was the lack of accompanying concrete actions. Unwelcome and unexpected was the legitimisation of key conflict stakeholders during this time – for example, instead of pushing for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to suspend arms transfers to the RSF, the US formalised a defence partnership with the state in late August. At the same time, recent speeches from Hemedti (9 October 2024) and an easing of pressure on El Fasher suggest that weapons transfers to the RSF from the UAE have reduced, raising questions about what has prompted this shift.

- An increased level of attention on Sudan, and in particular El Fasher and ZamZam, at the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** and during the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) High Level Week** (September 2024), ahead of the release of the Secretary General's report on Sudan in mid-October. There were multiple events featuring Sudanese civil society actors during UNGA. It is difficult to draw clear causalities between our campaign and this visibility, but certainly the collective efforts of NP along other civil society organisations were essential to the focus on Sudan. The UNSC also held a meeting on Sudan in October. Our two direct exchanges with Slovenia, the then President of the Security Council, may have motivated some of the strong content of the conversation.

- **Greater coordination and interlinkages between NGOs** working on North Darfur and Sudan. Though there has been co-ordination at both the national level of Sudan (e.g. the protection cluster) and in different capitals (e.g. London, Washington D.C., New York), these efforts were not particularly integrated nor did they have significant momentum on North Darfur. An indirect and positive change because of our engagements has been a deeper integration of efforts on North Darfur across institutional settings, enabling us to work with partners to ensure that we are collectively covering all key stakeholders and that we have consistent advocacy messaging.

4. YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHANGE

The below engagement timeline table gives insight into key actions taken by NP in our efforts to draw attention and prompt action to the crisis in North Darfur. This timeline is not exhaustive - a

significant volume of engagements not mentioned here were undertaken with key stakeholders during this period. However, it seeks to give an indication of the scope and results of our efforts.

Date	NP Action/Engagement	Purpose	Output/Outcome
20 August 2024	Briefing with Nathaniel Raymond of Yale Conflict Observatory.	Triangulation of NP conflict data with Conflict Observatory satellite imagery.	Triangulated and strengthened NP context analysis; prompted urgent outreach to Alliance for Peacebuilding (US Government) and Protection Approaches (UK).
21 August 2024	Coordinated meeting with Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) and Protection Approaches (PA) on North Darfur.	Triangulated data and escalating indicators prompted us to outreach to two key actors, AfP and PA. AfP is a US focused organisation with strong ties to the US Congress and Government; PA is a UK focused organisation with strong ties to UK Parliament and Government. Both states are key actors on Sudan and P5 members of the UNSC.	Agreed on coordinated language, recommendations, and an outreach plan for US and UK authorities. Planned coordinated actions for PeaceCon (private roundtable), UNGA High Level Week.
22 August 2024	NP staff (Global Head of Policy and Advocacy, US Policy and Advocacy Manager), coordinated by AfP, give private briefing to key members of Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff.	Push for high level statements and engagement from US Government that extends beyond the Special Envoy. Update staff on current situation, based on information forthcoming in the 28 August brief.	Staff we met with organise and coordinate a statement on El Fasher and Zamzam from Senator Cardin, Committee Chair, released 28 August. Staff also connect directly and privately with NP staff on Signal to allow for more frequent updates and collaboration, enabling NP to give guidance on outputs (for example, this output from Special Envoy Periello). Again, the statement is not as strong as what we recommended.
27 August 2024	NP U.S. Policy and Advocacy Manager briefs Senate Foreign Relations Committee member staffers on protection concerns in Sudan as a part of larger InterAction working group briefing on the 500 day anniversary of the conflict.	Continued elevation of the issue, highlighting with a broader group of congressional staff.	Request for further information from several offices, public statement and private brief shared with these staffers. Senators later announce intention to introduce “Sudan Accountability Act”.
28 August 2024	NP U.S. Policy and Advocacy Manager briefs House Foreign Affairs Committee member staffers on protection concerns in Sudan as a part of	Continued elevation of the issue, highlighting with a broader group of congressional staff.	Request for further information from several offices, public statement and private brief shared with these staffers.

	larger InterAction working group briefing on the 500 day anniversary of the conflict.		
28 August 2024	Private 'Protection and Atrocity Prevention Alert: El Fasher and Zamzam, North Darfur' released to key stakeholders. Urgent Alert: Imminent Threats to Civilians in North Darfur is also released to press, NP supporters.	Inform stakeholders of current context and risk with evidence; note indicators to watch; note limitations of a peace operation for this context; and issue key asks for action (see document). We also sought further verbal engagement off the back of this circular. The purpose of the urgent alert was to be able to engage a broader public audience on social media and CSOs, without using sensitive information that could put our colleagues on the ground at risk.	Prompted multiple further engagements with stakeholders (see below). Informed 13 September Avaaz dispatch to journalists: RSF Launches Dreaded Assault on El Fasher, the Last Domino Yet to Fall in Darfur. Informed pitch and 14 September stories collected by NP for The Continent.
3 September 2024	NP Sudan Head of Mission and NP Global Head of Policy brief US Special Envoy Periello as part of private roundtable (invited by USIP).	Highlighted urgency of situation in El Fasher, raised concerns about the fixation on longer term change by the US Government to the detriment of immediate actions.	
11 September 2024	Private Strategy Session on Sudan convened by NP, Alliance for Peacebuilding and Protection Approaches.	Taking advantage of the fact that PeaceCon was this week, we convened this private side event. The convening sought to gather key experts (CSOs and Government) to game out a political strategy and risks surrounding civilian protection and atrocity prevention and outline urgent recommendations for the US, UK, and other influential governments and multilateral institutions to address concerns of imminent mass atrocities in El Fasher and Zamzam and advance efforts to end the conflict.	This was a useful roundtable to understand where different stakeholders stood and to interact very frankly with trusted US government interlocutors. We had intended this to be a convening space for collaborative action, but it was more useful as an information gathering and relationship building exercise (see reflection on lessons learned below).
12 Sept 2024	NP Sudan Head of Mission and UN Representative held first meeting with Mission of Slovenia's expert on Sudan.	NP Sudan Head of Mission had a first engagement presenting the details of NP's brief and answered questions.	Opened up communication and developed trust for a second meeting with Protection Approaches and Yale Humanitarian Observatory.
17 September 2024	Multiple US Government engagements.	Cumulative, see above and content of briefs.	The above actions and calls for high level political engagement, specifically from the US President, finally result in a statement released by President

			Biden that specifically references the siege in El Fasher. US official confirmed to partners that the statement was a direct result of NP's warnings on El Fasher: *"FYI the email thread that eventually led to the statement was our communication about risk in El Fasher. You sending that warning on WhatsApp and me asking for that email from you led to this!!"*
19 September 2024	NP convened second briefing with Mission of Slovenia, President of the UNSC during September.	Included NP, Protection Approaches and Yale Observatory. Push for action at the UN level, including an emergency meeting of the UNSC on Sudan, institute a UN IMAC (Information Management and Analysis Cell). Slovenia asked us to inform more Council members which we did.	Pushed for Council to get regular briefings. Helped to get stronger language in the 25 Sept Council debate on Sudan. Also, catalysed a number of INGOs to approach the UK Mission (penholder), shook them out of their reticence and got them to be more active.
20 September 2024	Private 'Addendum: Protection and Atrocity Prevention Alert: El Fasher and Zamzam, North Darfur' released to key stakeholders.	Provide contextual updates and evidence and updated key asks to stakeholders building on the 28 August brief, particularly ahead of UN High Level Week. At the time this was released, we were unsure how long the Urgent Global Memo (see below) would take, and contextual updates needed to be released.	Solidified understanding of situation prior to UNGA HLW. However, this update was subsumed by the collective brief that went out the following day.
20 September 2024	NP Sudan Head of Mission briefs EU officials on the context in El Fasher.	Provided context update alongside Yale Conflict Observatory, understand how we can better find entry points within the institutions. Ask for EU to engage at high level, and to push for UNSC meeting engagement at HLW.	EU shared Sudan was a "footnote" to the recent visit of EU President to UAE and asked to emphasise at UNGA. On 22 September, the EU High Representative released a strong statement on El Fasher and ZamZam, referencing the word genocide. There was less willingness from the EU to lead on this issue in the context of UNGA.
20 September 2024	Sudan Head of Mission briefs U.S. Congressional staff (House Foreign Afairs Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff) on the context in El Fasher.	Provided context update, provided recap on predicted scenario, why we are now on the tipping point of this going beyond where it can't be stopped, reminder on situation of civilians and requests for escalation through whatever channels possible.	Congressional staff then forwarded to USAID. That day, members of congress sent a letter to President Biden.

21 September 2024	Private 'Urgent Global Memo: El Fasher is Falling' coordinated by NP, Protection Approaches, and Alliance for Peacebuilding released. A public version with endorsing organisations redacted is also released to key press and media stakeholders, via Avaaz.	Provide key updates at the same time as indicating that the issue has broad concern from key CSOs (8 signatories from a range of backgrounds, local to international membership organisations).	Statement by the High Representative on the situation in El Fasher released by EEAS on Sept 22 (cumulative, especially with Sept 20 and Sept 21 briefs).
September/October 2024: Additional outcomes of note October 8: USA issues new sanctions on Algoney et al (RSF); EU extends sanctions. October 9: against imposition of US sanctions indicates a reduction in weapons supply, as he urges RSF troops to be frugal in their weapons and ammunition use. October 11: State department official shares in private briefing between Protection and Prevention Working Group and USG officials that CSO pressure on El Fasher has been essential to this outcome: sanctions are "is a direct consequence of the El Fasher situation". The State Department Atrocity Prevention focal point also explicitly recognised NP's contribution in this meeting, stating that "NP's work calling out where they see the realm of the feasible in terms of PoC options has been incredibly valuable"			

The cumulative impact of the NP engagements on the North Darfur crisis in August and September is significant, contributing to multiple high-level statements remarking specifically on the situation in El Fasher and ZamZam, a notable focus on Sudan during UNGA High Level Week, and tangible action from states in the form of individual sanctions. The extent to which this attention has shaped actions from conflict parties on the ground is not currently within the scope of our analysis capacity, but it is important to note that we sought high level attention not only to prompt action from those to whom we directly advocated but also to raise the political and social stakes for RSF and SAF in their decision making on uses of violence in North Darfur. NP's role as one of the few partners still implementing on the ground offered important real-time contextual updates and enabled our senior staff advocates to speak with authority on the situation as it evolved. Our collaboration with key partners Alliance for Peacebuilding and Protection Approaches enabled us to demonstrate broad concern and agreement on the issues, mobilise additional partners, and more quickly access high level institutional decision makers, particularly within the US Government (generally difficult to reach high levels) and the UK (where NP does not have advocacy relationships or presence).

5. ANALYSIS

Key stakeholders on Sudan such as the EU, the US and UK Governments, and the UN Security Council are currently faced with a myriad of crises that vie for their attention. Without a clear articulation of facts and analysis of civilian harm, it would be easy for the situation in North Darfur to be sidelined from diplomatic and political efforts. Given the scale of potential harm, the urgency of the situation, and the lack of public and private attention it had received, it was important that NP provide decision makers with a rationale for political and diplomatic engagement and encourage necessary action.

The situation in North Darfur remains critical, and this is an ongoing campaign. Though RSF has not yet taken El Fasher, consistent pressure is required and the actions that we have outlined above are the foundation for our ongoing engagement efforts. The outcomes that were achieved in the August-September period – e.g. recognition of the risk of genocide in El Fasher and ZamZam by the EU – can

and should be used to remind decision makers of the importance of ongoing engagement. We remain hopeful that the outcome we seek – the prevention of mass atrocities in North Darfur – can continue to be realised over the long term. As at 10 October, indicators also suggest that a reduction of arms transfers to the RSF is occurring, suggesting some changes on the strategy of the UAE. Again, no clear causal links can be drawn between NP advocacy and these changes – at the same time, such advocacy pressure is often critical to creating the enabling environment that enables this to occur.

As noted in the table above, and as is almost always the case for advocacy, NP's efforts are one essential component of a broader network of actors. From our civil society partners Protection Approaches and Alliance for Peacebuilding, to our allies at the Dutch Mission to the United Nations in New York, to individual State Department officials who provided advice and facilitated access, the institutional allies we have and the relationships we have fostered are fundamental to the success of our efforts. Snowball efforts from these actors – for example, the circulation of emergency briefs by the Dutch Mission to the UN to members of the International Atrocity Prevention Working Group – undoubtedly contributed to the overall impact of these efforts.

In terms of institutional support beyond the NEST grant, the role of our US Policy and Advocacy Manager is funded via a small (100k) grant from a US-based private family fund, the Holthues Foundation. Given the centrality of our US-based networks to this effort, this investment was a critical additional component of our North Darfur effort.

In terms of breadth of the institutional network engaged, the depth of data triangulation and number of private and public outputs, and the speed of engagement, it is likely the largest context-specific effort advocacy NP has mobilised to date. It is a significant proof of concept for the strength of our advocacy networks on Sudan, and within relevant policy institutions.

6. LOOKING AHEAD: LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the policy and advocacy campaign to uplift the harms and risks faced by civilians in El Fasher and ZamZam was a success. We effectively targeted key actors, were persistent in our briefings on the changing context, and as a result contributed to far greater attention in key debates such as the UNGA High Level Week. Though this public acknowledgement and engagement is essential and remains important, the key recommendations for action we have advocated are yet to materialise. In some cases, stakeholders acted in the opposite direction to what we had hoped despite promising rhetoric – for example, despite a clear statement on El Fasher from President Biden, the following week saw acknowledgement of the UAE as a major defence partner of the US (though we cannot know what concessions were made on the UAE side). A key lesson learned reaffirmed is the importance of the action recommendations, and the need to be as specific as possible in what we are requesting of different actors.

Part of the reason for the success of this campaign was the targeted way we worked with key actors. The deep collaboration between the Global Policy and Advocacy team and the Sudan Country Programme, alongside key three key partners (Yale Conflict Observatory, Alliance for Peacebuilding, and Protection Approaches) mutually strengthened our efforts and leant significant credibility when engaging with key stakeholders. As we each represent different areas of expertise, together we were able to advance a compelling case for the high-risk level and the need for action. In this case, a smaller (rather than all-encompassing) group of core actors meant we could act quickly as the situation shifted and be in direct contact with one another and iteratively adjust our approach where needed.

It is important to note that these were not the only actors we engaged. We attempted to coalesce a broader group of actors in different ways (both bilaterally, such as with other NGOs, and collectively, such as at the roundtable during PeaceCon noted in the table above). Though broadly speaking actors were aware and concerned about El Fasher in the same way, it became apparent that NP has a

more collaborative theory of change than some other actors. Understanding this was useful and enabled us to move forward effectively with our core group.

Another lesson affirmed during this advocacy campaign was the importance of a defensive strategy, in addition to the proactive explanation of context and asks. Given the overwhelming focus on a peace operation from many actors, it was important that we be able to clearly explain why this is not a feasible or timely option for El Fasher and ZamZam. The analyses that we completed – which demonstrate how difficult it would be for such a proposal to be successful - can now inform how we engage with the question of a potential peace operation moving forward. This is particularly relevant to the forthcoming Secretary General's report on Sudan.

Practical lessons were also learned in terms of advocacy campaign management, particularly for a quick-moving issue. Though NP is in the process of developing systems in Salesforce to manage our advocacy relationship network and to be able to distribute materials with greater ease, this is still in progress and meant that communications were harder to track. Given new colleagues will join our team in the coming months, at regional and national levels, this experience is an important prompt to ensure these systems are sharpened and in place as soon as possible.

In terms of NP's broader advocacy strategy, this case acts as an important pilot for future crisis advocacy efforts. Our experience further confirmed the need for regional advocacy representatives in the MENA and AU regions, which are currently being recruited under the NEST grant. Our institutional reach with key stakeholders – such as the UAE, Egypt, and the AU – will be far stronger once these positions are in place.