

Excerpts from Nonviolent Peaceforce report

SRI LANKA

AS THE WAR ESCALATED IN THE NORTH, ITS EFFECTS IN COLOMBO continued to be felt in the form of increasing military presence on the streets, suicide bombings and other killings and disappearances. The high-profile killing of Lasantha Wickremetunga, editor of a popular English weekly newspaper known for its opposition to the current government, brought the situation in the capital to the world's attention in January 2009, but throughout 2008 NP was working to protect people under threat in Colombo. King Ayetey and other members of NP's Colombo Response Team (CRT) provided protective accompaniments to these threatened individuals.

Providing international protective accompaniment to vulnerable journalists, human rights defenders and other threatened individuals and families to safely access recourse mechanisms constitutes the biggest portion of CRT's work. Working with partners in Colombo, CRT often coordinates with the teams in the field to provide protection for people traveling to and from Colombo, where many national level services and institutions are located. For example, CRT has coordinated with the Jaffna team to meet and accompany human rights defenders who have worked with NP in Jaffna for a long time, to be able to accompany them as they continue their work in Colombo.

The kinds of services that people need to access with NP's help are many and varied, as are the threats that they face. People use CRT's accompaniments to visit threatened family members, to access medical care, to meet with people in the diplomatic community and in civil society, and to access Sri Lankan legal and governmental mechanisms, including institutions such as the Human Rights Council.

CRT focuses its interventions on Sri Lankan civilians who themselves are acting as civilian peacekeepers in a variety of capacities. As in any democracy, it is crucial that people such as journalists and human rights defenders are able to access those mechanisms that are legally entitled to them under Sri Lankan law. Nonviolent Peaceforce is proud that it has been able to offer civilians enough safety to do so.

The Colombo Response Team, one of five NP teams in Sri Lanka, is made up of highly experienced NP peacekeepers who remain on call 24 hours a day. They provide 20-30 accompaniments each month. NP is the only organization providing such service in Sri Lanka.

PROFESSIONAL CIVILIAN PEACEKEEPERS CONTINUALLY REFINE THEIR SKILLS and knowledge through formal training and daily field experience. And they don't work alone—in each field site, their Sri Lankan colleagues are an integral part of the team, bringing their own knowledge, expertise and experience to NP's work.

NP field officers Cassim Mahusoor and Earl Barthelot, both from the Batticaloa district, are integral to the work of the team in Valaichchenai. One major accomplishment of the teams has been facilitating a new network called the Organizations Council for Peace and Co-existence from a number of separate Muslim and Tamil community groups. The network creates an early warning system to prevent and decrease violence in the area. In some cases this was the first time in many years that Muslims have been in Tamil areas or Tamils in Muslim areas.

GUATEMALA

OVER 3,000 GUATEMALAN WOMEN HAVE BEEN MURDERED IN the past decade, their bodies often showing signs of torture and mutilation. Fewer than 2 percent of these crimes result in conviction. Much of the work of uncovering the truth is left to people like Guatemalan journalist and human rights defender Iduvina Hernandez. As director of the human rights watchdog organization Seguridad en Democracia, Iduvina works to challenge impunity and to combat violence, especially against women and children. As a result of her efforts to hold the Guatemalan authorities and security forces to account, she often receives threats and intimidation.

NP provided protective accompaniment for Guatemalan human rights defenders during the tense period before, during, and immediately after the national elections in Guatemala.

“Accompaniment for human rights defenders is very valuable because it is tangible proof that one is not alone,” said Iduvina. “This allows defenders to spend less time worrying about an attack. It’s not that the presence of accompaniment is an absolute guarantee that attacks won’t occur, but it allows for a fuller focus on the work itself and this represents a fundamental support.”

Her words were echoed by Claudia Samayoa, coordinator of Unit for the Defense of Human Rights Defenders of Guatemala (UDEFEGUA) and former IGC member. “For UDEFEGUA and me, NP’s presence meant a relief and a safe haven for our work. During the time they were here, we could depend on them to provide a vigilant eye and a protective presence so we could continue our own work protecting other human rights defenders. By the time NP left in February, our level of risk had diminished to ‘normal’ levels.”

[Full report available here.](#)