

Newsletter

Creating Safer Space

April 2026



Dear All,

Here it finally is: the first CSS Newsletter of 2026!

Dive into several new *Creating Safer Space* **publications**, including books on UCP in Palestine and on art-activists' strategies against police brutality in Kenya, an article about water defence in eastern Antioquia, Colombia, and a brief on unarmed community self-protection's contribution to the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping interventions.

Watch a three-part **documentary series** about the survival, protection, and resistance of the Nasa Indigenous People amid violent conflict in Colombia, or listen to a **podcast** episode about the work of *Creating Safer Space*.

Find out about the ongoing **CSS Impact Study** and a new **UCP Dataset project**; and read about how *Creating Safer Space* **projects** have continued disseminating their work, establishing new partnerships, and making an impact.

We hope you will enjoy this update!

Exploring *Creating Safer Space* Impact

It has been a year since the funded research period of the *Creating Safer Space* network concluded. **We now want to understand what impact CSS has had**, how it has contributed to changes in policy, practice, scholarship, and community protection, and what legacy CSS leaves.

To explore these issues, *Creating Safer Space* is working with [Dr Gillian McKay](#) at Leeds Beckett University, UK. Gillian is in the process of gathering evidence and insights through surveys, interviews, document reviews, and a validation workshop. She uses contribution analysis as a methodology to understand impact in complex contexts where many factors influence outcomes. Gillian's work will result in a report that we will share with you later this year.

Thanks to all who have already contributed to this process. If *Creating Safer Space* research has impacted your life or work and you would like to share your experience, please contact Gillian or the CSS network – we would love to hear from you!



Community-Led Unarmed Civilian Protection: Expanding beyond UN-Led Protection

Rachel Julian and Berit Bliesemann de Guevara FEBRUARY 2026

Executive Summary

Unarmed civilian protection (UCP) by local communities remains an under-recognized component of the protection of civilians (POC) in contemporary peace operations. While UN peacekeeping operations have increasingly emphasized people-centered approaches and community engagement, these strategies are insufficiently connected to the diverse grassroots protection infrastructures that communities already employ, particularly in contexts where international missions are overextended or withdrawing. This brief examines how community-led UCP practices contribute to civilian protection in conflict-affected settings and how these efforts can complement and inform institutional POC approaches.

Drawing on evidence from a five-year international research collaboration and over two dozen field projects across eleven countries, this study illustrates how communities use surveillance, unarmed accompaniment and presence, mediation, and proactive engagement – to reduce violence and prevent displacement. Case studies from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Colombia demonstrate the scale, adaptability, and effectiveness of these grassroots protection strategies, including in contexts where UN missions operate in parallel or are transitioning out.

Despite their proven efficacy, community-led UCP mechanisms have at times been undervalued or undermined by peacekeeping operations that prioritize externally driven conventional force structures over existing local structures. A better understanding of how communities assess risk, adapt protection strategies, and build local networks is therefore essential for more integrated and sustainable POC outcomes.

As the UN reconfigures peacekeeping toward lighter footprints, regional partnerships, and transition planning, community-based civilian protection must not be treated as an afterthought. Peace operations should engage community UCP actors as partners in protection, not just beneficiaries. This requires building more equitable partnerships, creating clear coordination mechanisms, and embedding community-led UCP into early planning, implementation, and drawdown. Doing so can help missions leave behind more resilient, locally grounded protection environments.

In a new [International Peace Institute \(IPI\) issue brief titled “Community-Led Unarmed Civilian Protection: Expanding beyond UN-Led Protection”](#), Rachel Julian and Berit Bliesemann de Guevara draw on *Creating Safer Space* network findings and the wider literature to examine the role of local civilians in protection of civilians (POC) efforts, focusing on unarmed civilian protection practices that operate alongside—or independently from—UN peacekeeping missions and specialised NGOs. The brief explores how civilians engage in early warning, mediation, negotiation, and protective accompaniment.

As peace operations face transitions, drawdowns, and lighter footprints, the brief raises critical questions about how international actors understand, support, or overlook local civilian protection strategies.

New Research Project: The UCP in South Sudan Dataset

Aberystwyth University and Nonviolence Peaceforce (NP) have successfully applied for a secondary data analysis grant from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Building on recent innovations in nonviolent resistance and peacekeeping literatures, the project will make a much-needed quantitative contribution to the study and practice of UCP.

The project will use existing primary data collected by NP South Sudan to create a new dataset on UCP activities and types of violence in South Sudan and conduct first in-depth analyses of UCP effectiveness and trends based on this new dataset. The project aims to:

- Provide a transformative boost for UCP research through quantitative analysis to complement the existing rich body of qualitative research;
- Feed into design, monitoring, evaluation and learning (DMEL) in UCP through quantitative methods and evidence.

The core project team includes Prof Berit Bliesemann de Guevara (Aberystwyth University), Dr Luke Abbs (Consultant/ CSS project researcher), and Rosemary Kabaki (NP South Sudan). The project will run over 24 months, starting in September 2026.

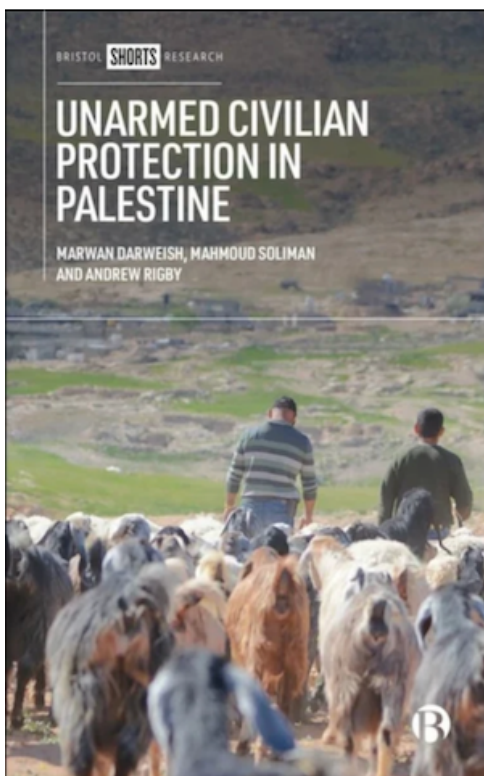
News from *Creating Safer Space* Projects



The project team of “[Ritualising Protection](#)” has released the documentary series “[The Nasa Indigenous People of Colombia in the Midst of Violence](#)” (Spanish with English subtitles).

In three chapters – *Pervivir* (Survive), *Proteger* (Protect), and *Resistir* (Resist) – the series explores the spiritual and social community self-protection practices of the Nasa Indigenous People in Northern Cauca, one of Colombia's most violent regions.

Access the videos [HERE](#).

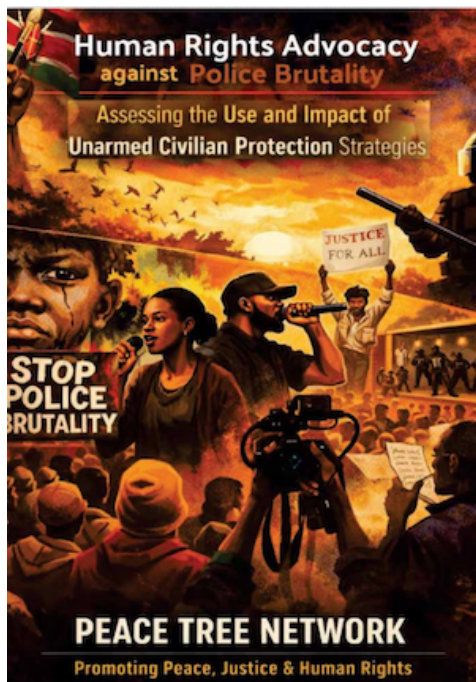


The book “[Unarmed Civilian Protection in Palestine](#)” by Marwan Darweish, Mahmoud Soliman and Andrew Rigby is **now published** with Bristol University Press.

The book offers a compelling look at how unarmed civilian protection (UCP) practitioners work to enhance the level of security experienced by local Palestinians, supporting community-based resistance to rocketing levels of dispossession and ethnic-cleansing in the occupied West Bank.

Drawing on first-hand field research, the authors reveal the daily realities of providing a protective presence against violence and displacement. Crucially, the book highlights the vital role of international UCP solidarity networks in supporting local efforts and examines what difference they can make in the face of increasing levels of settler violence. It is essential reading for those seeking practical pathways for nonviolent action and global solidarity.

The book is **available open access** [HERE](#).



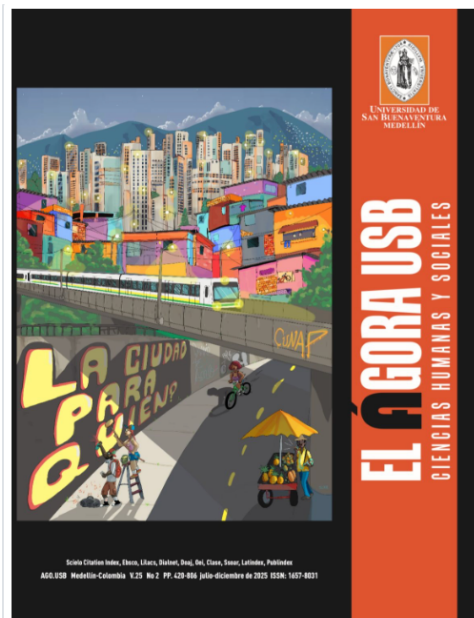
Martha Okumu and Elias Opongo have published a new online book titled “[Human Rights Advocacy against Police Brutality: Assessing the Use and Impact of Unarmed Civilian Protection](#)”.

The findings of this study indicate that activist (= art activist) strategies play a significant role in raising public awareness, stimulating dialogue, and mobilising communities around issues of police brutality in Kenya.

Digital platforms, particularly social media, were found to be critical in amplifying marginalised voices and documenting human rights violations.

However, the sustainability and effectiveness of these interventions are constrained by limited financial and institutional resources, societal resistance, and heightened safety risks faced by artists and activists.

Access the book online [HERE](#).



The project “Water conflicts, violations and forms of self-protection” has published a new article on “[Hydrosocial Resistances and Environmental Subjectivity: Defense of Water in San Luis, Eastern Antioquia](#)” (in Spanish), co-authored by Denisse Roca-Servat, Juan D. Arias-Henao, Jessica Restrepo Gallego, Luis E. Giraldo García and Dubán Quinchía González.

The socio-environmental movement in the municipality of San Luis in eastern Antioquia, Colombia has faced a historical process of defending its waters and territories, which has been transformed as territorial conflicts have evolved. The article explores three periods of hydro-social resistance, highlighting the environmental subjectivity that emerged in each. It observes the emergence of a new environmental subjectivity as a response to territorial dispossession, expressed through art and pedagogy.



The podcast “Vienna Dialogues: Coffee and IR” has published [an episode about the research of the Creating Safer Space network](#). Podcast host Markus Pollak talks with Prof Xymena Kurowska of the Central European University (CEU) and CSS network lead Prof Berit Bliesemann de Guevara.

The conversation opens with a discussion of conducting international relations field research in conflict and war-affected settings. At the core of the episode is the “Creating Safer Space” project. It explores questions of (unarmed) civilian protection, as well as the project’s broader contributions to debates in peace and conflict research and beyond academia.



The project “[The Social Process of Guarantees of Antioquia, Colombia, an experience of unarmed civil protection with indigenous and peasant communities of Bajo Cauca](#)”, led by Corporación Jurídica Libertad (CJL), presented its core findings at the **Social Process of Guarantees Annual Assembly 2025**.

The Assembly was attended by social leaders from eight subregions of the department of Antioquia, representing 40 social, peasant, and indigenous organisations. The presentation and discussion of the project findings resulted in the incorporation of two specific protection strategies into the PSG’s work plan: advocacy directed at departmental authorities; and the strengthening of training and awareness-raising processes.

Read more [HERE](#).



In November 2025, MasterPeace Cali participated in the **Build Peace 2025 Conference** in Barcelona, organised by Build Up and the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP).

As part of the conference programme, the team facilitated the workshop “Civilian Nonviolent Self-Protection in Latin American Communities: Alternatives to Militarised Security”, in which they shared practices and lessons related to Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) learned from community initiatives in Colombia, attended by c.100 conference participants including researchers, practitioners, and representatives of peacebuilding organizations from different regions.

Read more about the outcomes [HERE](#).



Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) and Universitas Syiah Kuala have entered a new **Partnership for Peace Education and Research** in Indonesia.

USK launched a Master’s programme in Peace and Development, creating new pathways for academic inquiry and practitioner-oriented learning in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. In support of the programme’s establishment, NP facilitated ongoing learning exchanges between USK scholars and Creating Safer Space (CSS) researchers, including Prof Rachel Julian, Prof Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, and Prof Chantana Wungaeo. NP also provided substantive input into the programme’s curriculum development and academic planning.

Read more [HERE](#).

External News

University Diploma in Civil Peace Intervention (in French)

The Catholic University of Paris, in collaboration with the French Committee for Civil Peace Intervention and Nonviolent Peaceforce, offers a University Diploma (in French) that enables students to acquire the key skills required for unarmed civilian protection. Application deadline: 30 April 2026. For more information, see: <https://www.icp.fr/formations/diplomes-universitaires/diplome-universitaire-intervention-civile-de-paix>

createPeace Online Gallery

The *createPeace* initiative calls on artists and cultural practitioners to contribute their unique images of peace. Explore how artists from different countries have imaged peace in this [online gallery](#).

Journal of Resistance Studies

Have you considered publishing in the Journal of Resistance Studies? This peer-reviewed academic journal critically explores unarmed resistance and aims to advance an understanding of how resistance might undermine repression, injustices and domination of any kind, as well as how resistance might nurture autonomous subjectivity, as e.g. constructive work, alternative communities, oppositional ways of thinking. <https://resistance-journal.org>

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