

Newsletter

Creating Safer Space

January 2024



Dear All,

In today's newsletter, we are very happy to share news from the first of our three major international *Creating Safer Space* events. The Final Regional Event for Africa and the Middle East was hosted by Strathmore University in Nairobi, Kenya, from 24-26 January. The event brought together researchers, UCP practitioners, artists, journalists, and policymakers from around the world and especially the African continent, including representatives from all of our *Creating Safer Space* projects in Africa and the Middle East.

We are also very happy to share the *Creating Safer Space* brochure, with information about our network and initial findings from each of our 26 research projects in Africa, South-East Asia, and Latin America.

We are also sharing important news from our research projects around the world. It is not only Gaza that suffers at this time; our Palestinian projects report on the situation in the West Bank. On a more positive note, find out about an international film festival in Colombia, and the protection strategies adopted by different communities in different parts of Colombia.

Creating Safer Space is an international research network, which aims to understand and support unarmed civilian protection and self-protection amidst violent conflict.

***Creating Safer Space* Conference in Africa**

The *Creating Safer Space* network held a 3-day Final Regional Event for Africa and the Middle East in Nairobi, Kenya, from 24 – 26 January 2024. The event was hosted by Strathmore University.

The aim of the event was to bring researchers, practitioners, artists, journalists, and policymakers together to share research findings, unique research methodologies, and implications of the research findings for violence prevention, protection, and peacebuilding initiatives.

The event brought together over 60 participants from 8 countries. Each of the 10 *Creating Safer Space* projects in Africa and the Middle East sent at least two representatives to the event, and the first couple of days involved presentations and discussions on research findings and synergies between projects. The final day summarised the main research findings, and linked research, policy, and practice.

Participants were also able to visit the *Creating Safer Space* exhibition. The exhibition brings together objects, images, and voices to show how civilians around the world harness the power of nonviolence to create safer spaces for a dignified life.

More information about the event, including recordings, will be available on the [Creating Safer Space website](#) in due course.

This is the first of our three final events. The final event for Asia will take place in Thailand in February, and the final event for Latin America will take place in Colombia in June.



***Creating Safer Space* brochure**

We are happy to share the *Creating Safer Space* brochure, with information about our network, our activities and our research.

This version of the brochure shares initial research findings from each of our 26 research projects in Africa, South-East Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. A new version of the brochure will be published in autumn 2024, with the final research results.

The brochure is available for download [here](#).



Aberystwyth University Festival of Research

In November 2023, Aberystwyth University hosted a Festival of Research. The topic of this year's festival was the Pursuit of Peace.

Prof. Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, the Principal Investigator of the *Creating Safer Space* network, participated in a Roundtable on Paths to Peace in the 21st Century, which asked a range of questions, such as: "Is peace simply an absence of war, or should it include sustainable development and social justice? Can it be built from the top down by governments through international agreements, or does it depend on grassroots activism? Can it rely on what Senator Mitchell described during the Northern Ireland peace process as 'the decommissioning of mindsets', or does it require direct action such as we saw in Greenham Common in the 1980s and Extinction Rebellion today?"

Based on insights from the CSS projects and other research on UCP, Berit highlighted the crucial role that bottom-up and community-based approaches play in peace processes. She particularly focused on the contributions of nonviolent strategies to civilian protection which create the safer space needed for any further peace processes to flourish and that can accompany implementation processes of high-level agreements at the local level.

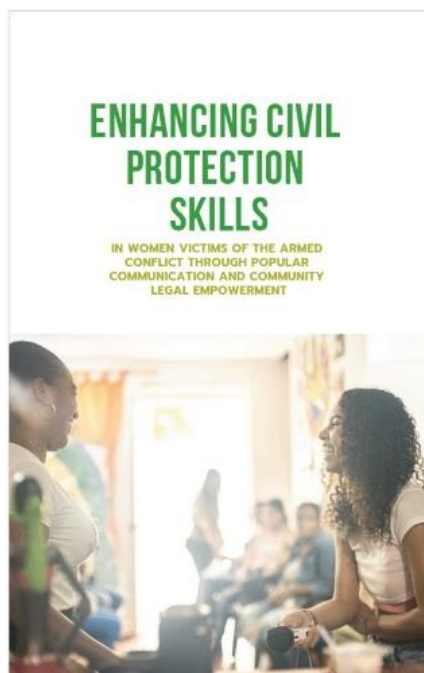
Creating Safer Space Projects in Palestine

The *Creating Safer Space* network has two research projects in Palestine. The research teams leading both projects highlight that while the world's attention is understandably focused on Gaza, there is also a tragic situation unfolding in the West Bank.

The project [Safety and dignity: Enhancing unarmed civilian protection amongst Palestinian communities in the South Hebron Hills](#) is led by Marwan Darweish (Coventry University), together with Mahmoud Soliman (Coventry University & Al Shmoh Cultural Centre, Palestine) and Andrew Rigby (Coventry University). Drawing upon their research, they have published an article in *Rethinking Security* entitled [Settlers turn Soldiers: The imperative for international presence and protection in the West Bank](#). The team argues that there is an urgent need to deploy a civilian multinational presence to protect Palestinians in the West Bank from armed and empowered Israeli settlers. The team also reports on the arrest of their filmmaker, who was arrested while filming a shepherd. More information is available [here](#).

The project [Assessing the impact of unarmed civilian protection in the South Hebron Hills between 2018-2023](#) is led by Operazione Colomba. They report an escalation of violence by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, and have witnessed arrests, destruction of properties and land-grabbing, and human rights violations against Palestinian civilians. More information is available [here](#).

News from Creating Safer Space Projects



The *Creating Safer Space* project '[Development of civil protection capacities in women displaced by the armed conflict through popular communication and Community Legal Empowerment](#)' shares one of the key outputs from their research: a Transmedia Booklet co-created with the project's research participants. The research participants are women in Colombia who have been displaced by armed conflict, and who now reside in contexts characterized by social and urban segregation in the city of Cali. In these environments, the women remain exposed to multiple forms of violence linked to fear-based political dynamics. The booklet communicates the key research findings and shares innovative protection strategies. The aim is to encourage the adaptation and replication of these strategies in other regions and communities affected by fear-based policies. The booklet is available in English and Spanish [here](#).



The *Creating Safer Space* project '[Community strategies for Unarmed Civilian Protection in South-West Colombia: local experiences and lessons learned](#)' organised the 1st International Festival of Participatory Video and Community-based Cinema at the Universidad Autónoma de Occidente (UAO) in the city of Cali, Colombia, in November. The festival received 178 applications from 25 countries and its academic agenda included a series of in-person workshops on UCP strategies with community members from the three sites of the project: Buenaventura, Caldon and Lerma. More information is available [here](#).



The *Creating Safer Space* project '[Mapping and Responding to Vulnerability through Nonviolent Collective Actions in Buenaventura, Colombia](#)' has undertaken focus groups with different populations about navigating vulnerability to violence in Buenaventura, Colombia. They noted different strategies and fears based on age and ethnicity. For indigenous participants, protection was based in traditional practices, medicines, and harmonization. In urban Afrodescendent communities, they talked more about interpersonal strategies like telling a loved one about one's movements. Urban youth discussed protection strategies based on taking care of their parents, particularly mothers.

External News and Events

Humanitarian Policy Group and **Peace and Development Watch Centrafrique** have published a working paper on [Community engagement with armed actors in the Central African Republic: Preventing and reducing protection risks and violence](#).

The **Campaign on Social Defence (Wehrhaft ohne Waffen)** has issued a Call for Papers for a scientific symposium on [Advancing Social Defence – Current Issues and Practical Challenges](#) (submission deadline 31 March 2024).

Luise Bendfeldt and **Louise Ridden** have issued a Call for Abstracts for the "[Protection in IR and Beyond](#)" section of the [Pan-European Conference on International Relations](#) at Université Catholique de Lille (submission deadline 13 March 2024).

The **Central European University** is inviting applications for its summer university course on [Mobilizing the Feminist Imaginary: Arts-based Research Approaches and Creative Activism](#). Fully funded scholarships are available for students and professionals from the Global South.

Creating Safer Space
Department of International Politics
Aberystwyth University
Penglais Aberystwyth
SY23 3FE, Wales, UK

Please contact us on creating-safer-space@aber.ac.uk to unsubscribe from this mailing list.

