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How to Overcome the Challenges Facing UN Integration

Let me first express my sincere appreciation for the invitation to speak before you at this prestigious event. The theme of this year's discussion is most pertinent to the current debates and dilemmas facing the UN system and its key partners. As the former USG for Peacekeeping Mr Alain Le Roy so eloquently outlined at last year's event, contemporary peacekeeping scenarios are ever-more complex and challenging. Over 121,000¹ uniformed and civilian peacekeeping staff are currently deployed in conflict and post-conflict contexts around the world, mandated to deliver a wide range of tasks aimed, ultimately, at aiding the transition out of war and helping to build and sustain peace.

This is a formidable challenge – one that necessitates a range of actions and capabilities including military, police and civilian. As the nature of peacekeeping has evolved, the UN system has expended significant efforts to rise to this challenge. Perhaps foremost among these has been the drive for greater coherence - 'to maximize the individual and collective impact of the UN's response, concentrating on those activities aimed at consolidating peace'.² This is the main purpose of the UN integration policy which, as articulated in the Secretary General's Decision in 2008, now applies to all settings where there is a UN peacekeeping or political mission and a UN Country Team (the UN agencies, funds and programmes).

The search for more coherent international interventions in crisis states began in the mid-1990s. Reflection on the international response to the genocide in Rwanda and the conflicts in the Balkans at this time highlighted the failure of the international community to reach consensus on political solutions to conflicts and challenged the post Cold War assumption that humanitarian action could be used as a substitute for political action. At the same time, there was a growing awareness that, without a more comprehensive understanding of the political context and the risks of aid diversion, humanitarian assistance could fuel the conflicts which generated humanitarian need in the first place.

Thus, a search for greater coherence between international political, human rights and humanitarian relief efforts began. The UN's integration policy has its origins in this discussion but it differs from the whole-of-government or comprehensive approaches of other multi-lateral organisations and member states in a number of key aspects. Firstly, these latter strategies have often sought to combine humanitarian with military, security and political objectives, and, secondly, in many instances, the military contingents of those interventions have played a direct role in provision of humanitarian assistance, as in Iraq and Afghanistan. In contrast, rather than encompassing all UN activities, coherence in the UN system is focused on efforts towards peace consolidation. It focuses on UN mission and development activities which are seen as critical to consolidating peace such as institution-building and early recovery efforts – thereby, in theory, largely excluding humanitarian relief efforts. In addition, UN humanitarian assistance is almost exclusively provided by UN

¹ As of 30 April 2012 – see <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/factsheet.shtml>.

² UN Secretary General's Policy Decision No. 2008/24 – Integration, 28 June 2008.

humanitarian agencies and their partners – not by peacekeepers. Despite this, the concept, policy and practice of UN integration has not been without controversy.

In fact, almost two decades after the UN's own search for coherence began, the implications of the UN integration policy for humanitarian action continue to generate intense debate. Some UN and non-UN humanitarian actors are deeply concerned that in conflict situations in particular, implementation of this policy blurs the distinction between humanitarian and political or peacekeeping action, subordinates humanitarian priorities to political or peacekeeping prerogatives and therefore places humanitarian action - the staff that deliver assistance, and the beneficiaries who receive it - at significant risk. For their part, many in the UN political and peacekeeping community emphasise the progress made in policy development and practice in recent years and argue that there is little evidence for some of the humanitarian concerns. These positions have become polarised and a climate of mistrust between the humanitarian community and UN political and peacekeeping actors has thus prevailed. This is undermining the spirit in which UN integration is meant to be pursued, its implementation in practice and the objectives it seeks to achieve.

Certainly, there have been negative experiences resulting from inconsistent implementation of the policy and this has created or exacerbated tensions between the various actors within the UN system and between the UN and the wider humanitarian community. However, in the last decade in particular, the policy on UN integration has evolved significantly – in part to address the concerns expressed by humanitarian actors. Thus, the Secretary General's Decision of 2008 emphasises the establishment of 'an effective strategic partnership' between the UN mission and the UN Country Team. This partnership is necessary in order to ensure that 'all components [of the UN system] are operating in a coherent and mutually supportive manner'. The Decision expressly states that the structures put in place to support this partnership should be context specific and therefore should vary from mission to mission. It explains that, whatever the context, this partnership should be based on shared objectives, closely aligned or integrated planning, agreed results and agreed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. It also states that the country-level arrangements should take full account of humanitarian principles and facilitate humanitarian coordination. The Decision also asserted that greater coherence between the UN's constituent parts can bring 'significant benefits for humanitarian operations'.

More recently, there has been greater variation in the structure and form of UN integrated presences on the ground. The previous 'default' option of a fully integrated structure where humanitarian leadership and coordination functions were located within the mission structure (as in the early days in UNAMA in Afghanistan), has arguably given way to a more considered approach that has facilitated, in some cases, the physical separation of these humanitarian functions and only a minimum level of shared planning, analysis and information exchange, as is the case in Darfur and Somalia today.

However, even where these more appropriate structures have been put in place, the 'transaction costs' - the time and efforts required to negotiate these arrangements have, at times, been unacceptably high. There have also been continued concerns expressed by humanitarian actors about the fundamental concept, as well as the practice, of UN integration. Consequently, in late 2010, my organisation (HPG/ODI) and the Stimson Centre, a think-tank based in Washington D.C., were asked by the UN's Integration Steering Group to jointly undertake a study on the impact of UN integration on humanitarian space. The Integration Steering Group - the coordination body of the UN Secretariat, agencies, funds and programmes in UN HQ established to support implementation of the policy - defined humanitarian space as referring to five key issues: firstly, the security of humanitarian workers, secondly the access humanitarians have to populations in need of assistance and protection, thirdly, the ability of humanitarian actors to engage all parties to a conflict, including non-state actors, on humanitarian issues, fourthly how humanitarian actors are perceived by local

stakeholders and, lastly, the ability of humanitarian actors to advocate freely on humanitarian issues of concern. We were asked to document positive and negative impact in these five areas, to establish a shared understanding amongst all stakeholders of the risks and opportunities which the UN integration policy presents to humanitarian operations and to make recommendations towards the better management of these risks and opportunities. This, it was hoped, would help to forge a more constructive way forward.

We focused on six cases – Afghanistan, Central African Republic (CAR), Darfur, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia and Somalia – with field work conducted in three. Our research illustrated that there are in fact both negative and positive impacts of UN integration on humanitarian space. For example, in some instances, the structures put in place to support greater integration of the mission and the UN Country Team has meant that the humanitarian components of the UN presence in a country have been able to draw upon the authority and leverage that a UN peacekeeping mission often has *vis-à-vis* the national authorities to raise humanitarian concerns to greater effect; in 2006 in Darfur, Sudan, the Humanitarian Coordinator was able to use his political position as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to successfully negotiate an agreement with the government allowing access for UN and non-UN humanitarian actors to populations who needed assistance. Similarly, the integrated structures in place in the UN's mission in DRC (formerly MONUC, now MONUSCO) have meant that humanitarians have been able to influence the prioritisation of mission capabilities deployed to protect civilians from attack in eastern parts of the country – with a positive outcome for populations at risk.

With respect to the negative impact, there are some instances when senior managers of a UN peacekeeping or political mission sought to use the authority conferred on them by integrated leadership structures to limit humanitarian advocacy on key issues such as protection concerns relating to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), or to restrict humanitarian engagement with certain non-state armed groups as occurred at one point in DRC. With regards the security of humanitarian workers, we were not able to find examples of a direct link between integration arrangements in place and threats or attacks against humanitarian staff. However, security analysts interviewed in this study agreed that in the most high risk security environments the association of humanitarian actors with political or military actors, including the UN, should be considered as one of the risk factors affecting security of humanitarian workers.

One additional area of concern is the impact of the UN Integration policy on coordination of the international humanitarian response. The relationship between many INGOs and the UN system broadly has been undermined by NGO objections to the concept of integration on principle, but also by a lack of understanding of the content of the policy including its provisions relating to humanitarian space, and by inconsistent application of the policy in practice. As a result, some NGOs have withdrawn from UN-led humanitarian coordination mechanisms in Afghanistan – for fear of being associated with the UN mission in that context, through the UN humanitarian agencies and actors. Others have, at times, threatened to do the same in Somalia. This could have serious implications for UN agencies which rely upon NGO partners for delivery in many contexts.

Notwithstanding these issues of concern, we found that the primary risks to principled humanitarian action are often contextual factors, such as the status of the armed conflict and its dynamics, the behaviour of the host and donor governments or the nature of non-state armed groups. For example, in Afghanistan, threats to humanitarian actors can be seen as part of a strategy by the Taliban and other groups to undermine the state and its supporters (i.e. the international forces). In DRC and Darfur, attacks by armed groups against humanitarian organisations are believed to be largely motivated by economic gain. In addition, the humanitarian community itself has not been consistent in its adherence to humanitarian principles. For example, some organisations have accepted funding from conflict parties, have advocated for military intervention or have failed, in

some instances, to provide assistance in an impartial manner. In addition, the size and the diversity of the humanitarian community has meant that it has been difficult to establish a coherent position on key issues affecting humanitarian space, such as the use of MONUSCO military escorts in DRC.

In summary, there are a range of challenges to the effective implementation of the UN integration policy – particularly as it relates to the protection of humanitarian space. These include:

- The limited understanding and awareness of the policy and guidance, including as it relates to humanitarian action;
- A lack of ownership of the policy by some UN agency and OCHA staff;
- Insufficient understanding of and appreciation for the operational relevance of humanitarian principles amongst some DPKO and DPA staff;
- A lack of clear minimum standards on incorporating humanitarian principles in the design, planning, implementation and review of missions;
- A lack of accountability and transparency in decision-making and;
- Insufficient commitment and investment in the concept and its implementation across the UN system.

The key question now is how to address these challenges. Clearly, moving beyond the dysfunctional and distorted debates of the past, a more concerted dialogue between the humanitarian community and the UN system is now essential to ensure that the risks inherent in this approach are identified and mitigated and the opportunities it offers humanitarian action are more effectively exploited.

In our report, we suggest five key areas of action aimed at addressing these challenges.

Firstly, as per the Secretary General's Decision of 2008, the context must be the starting point for the design, planning, implementation and review of UN missions and the way in which the integration policy is implemented in each case. A more comprehensive analysis of the context and the various risk factors inherent in it, including in relation to humanitarian action, must be undertaken at the beginning and throughout the life of the mission. This analysis should include an assessment of the risks and potential benefits for humanitarian action of certain integrated structural arrangements. In particular, in high risk contexts where the UN political or peacekeeping mandate and activities are contested, where violent conflict is highly likely or ongoing, and where non-state actors are able and willing to distinguish between humanitarian and other components of the UN presence, greater caution should be exerted when determining the structures of a peacekeeping or political mission and how it relates to UN and non-UN humanitarian actors. This consideration for the impact on the UN's humanitarian objectives must be constant throughout the life of a mission. As we have seen most recently in South Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire, and DRC, the situations in which peacekeeping missions are deployed are extremely dynamic. As Mr Le Roy asserted last year, UN missions must have the systems and capacities in place to adapt to the evolving political and security situation. But by extension, the way a mission operates *vis-à-vis* the humanitarian community must also remain flexible to changes in the context or the mission mandate.

Secondly, in contexts where there is significant humanitarian need, the mandate, scope and nature of the peacekeeping mission should be informed by humanitarian considerations. The UN Security Council should develop clear and realistic mandates that support rather than undermine the distinction between the UN's peacekeeping and humanitarian objectives and which minimise duplication between the functions of the mission and UN humanitarian actors. For example, the

current mandate for the UN mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to reference the responsibility of UNAMA for coordination of the humanitarian response³ – this is despite the re-establishment of an UN OCHA office in 2009 expressly tasked to undertake this coordination role.

Thirdly, effective leadership at all levels of the UN system is crucial to the success of a more integrated UN response – and to mitigating the risks and realising the benefits to humanitarian operations. Decisions and risks must be informed, shared and supported by all leaders within the system, from the Secretary General down to the heads of missions and UN agencies on the ground. Also key to more effective leadership is more robust accountability – including with respect to non-compliance with the UN integration policy.

Fourth, current efforts to revise the internal guidance on implementation of this policy is a welcome step and offers an opportunity to provide greater clarity to all staff on how exactly UN integration arrangements in each context should take account of humanitarian concerns. The guidance should also stress the importance of engagement of UN humanitarian staff, and their NGO partners, in the design, implementation, monitoring and review of integration arrangements in order to ensure more informed decision-making by the lead department (DPKO or DPA).

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, there has been a lack of trust and confidence both within the UN system and between the UN system and the wider humanitarian community on this issue. If UN integration is to be successful, UN leadership must take action to restore confidence, including through ensuring more transparent decision-making. Building confidence is, however, a shared responsibility and more consistent and constructive engagement from all stakeholders, including humanitarian actors, is critical in this regard.

Notwithstanding the concerns regarding the concept and the implementation of UN integration, it is clear that a more coherent response from the UN system is necessary to more effectively deliver its mandate to protect civilians, restore security and support the peacebuilding process. The UN integration policy cannot eliminate all the tensions between UN peacekeeping, political and humanitarian objectives – such tensions are inevitable given the nature of the UN system and the unique breadth of tasks that it is asked to undertake in crisis contexts. However, the UN integration policy does offer a credible framework which, when implemented appropriately, can support more effective management of these tensions – including to support better humanitarian outcomes for crisis-affected populations.

Thank you.

³ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2041 (2012), 22 March.