

## Roundtable

### **UN Peace Operations Radios: Lessons Learned and Best Practices for their Post-UN Transitions** 6-7 December 2018, Geneva

#### **Executive Summary**

On 6-7 December 2018, Fondation Hironnelle (FH) and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), in consultation with the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the UN Department for Public Information (DPI), hosted a roundtable discussion on the transition of UN peace operation radios in Geneva. The aim of the roundtable was to identify lessons learned and best practices from past transitions in order to, first, develop a better understanding of what works and what does not work. Second, it aimed to inform a next phase of developing guidelines for how such transitions can best be planned and managed, as and when they will occur in the future. The participants of the roundtable explored the questions of why, when, what and how a post-UN transition of Peace Operation Radios can be done and shared their experiences and assessments of a selection of past transitions, and including one potential coming transition. Workshop case studies included radio transitions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The participating UN officials, diplomats, media development practitioners, academics and other experts largely agreed on the following recommendations<sup>1</sup>:

- A key factor in supporting countries in transition from conflict to sustainable peace and preventing the relapse of violence is to strengthen the media capabilities that provide the local populations with access to reliable information and platforms for inclusive dialogue.
- The radio stations created by UN peacekeeping operations often play a critical role in their respective media environment. There is a pressing need to develop lessons learned, best practices and guidance on UN peacekeeping radio stations, including on their post-UN transition.
- Different options have been implemented when dealing with a UN radio station at the end of a peacekeeping mission mandate, including: the closing of the radio station (e.g. Cambodia, Rwanda, Croatia), transferring it to an international or regional organization (e.g. Liberia), to a public broadcaster (e.g. Timor Leste, Kosovo, Sierra Leone), to an NGO (e.g. CAR, Ivory Coast). Other options could include the transfer to the private sector or the creation of a trust fund and/or a governing body supervised by national and/or international actors. Evaluating the efficacy of these different models is key to establishing lessons learned and best practices for the future.
- The transition of a UN radio is not only about handing over its equipment, frequency or personnel. What is of essence is the function that the UN radio fulfils, its relationship with its audiences, its editorial line, its professionalism and independence, its management and oversight, its funding, its legal status, and its ownership, including its relationship with the host government.
- Key questions for UN radio transitions include: what functions did the UN radio fulfil? Is there a need for those functions to be fulfilled beyond the UN peace operation's mandate? And what are the options and structures to maintain these functions?

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<sup>1</sup> All the contributors attending the roundtable spoke under Chatham House Rule. Accordingly, this synthesis does not mention any names.

- Specific transition teams should be mandated with gathering the perspectives of the different UN entities, including the headquarters, the mission and the country team, and examining the situation on the ground. It is also important to involve the government, the local media sector, audiences, potential donors and the private sector with a view to assessing the various transition options for the preparation of a consolidated UN Radio transition plan proposal. Civil society institutions, media development practitioners and academics should also be included in the assessment process.

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## WHY?

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Decisions on the transition of UN radios tend to be dictated by significant time and budget constraints. A major concern for the UN is to safeguard its reputation that could be harmed by a radio's loss of quality after its handover. The general rule has therefore been the closure of the station when the mission ends.

UN radios, however, are public commodities that people rely on, and which often play a critical role in supporting and facilitating countries emerging from conflict to continue on a path towards sustainable peace. Decisions should therefore be based on a careful analysis of the needs and opportunities on the ground.

The relevant stakeholders, particularly the different UN entities, including the Headquarters, the mission and the Country Team, the government and civil society institutions, including academics and representatives of the local media sector and media development practitioners, audiences, potential donors and the private sector should be consulted and involved in the assessment process.

Key questions for the UN radio transition are: what functions did the UN radio fulfil? Is there a need for those functions to be fulfilled beyond the UN peace operation's mandate? And what are the options and structures to maintain these functions?

UN radios fulfil different functions: providing reliable information and space for inclusive debates, creating mutual understanding and addressing core grievances, explain what the purpose of the mission is and manage peoples' expectations, and ensuring that certain narratives on key issues such as human rights are properly covered and explained.

The need for a media that is the voice of a UN mission ends with the mission's mandate. However, the need for reliable, inclusive and impartial media and information remains. Studies indicate a positive perception of UN radios that give a voice to the local populations, a platform for inclusive and balanced debates and the possibility for them to have a dialogue with their own leaders. Those functions should be further promoted with political and financial support.

It should be noted that despite the emergence of digital media, in most regions where peace operations take place, radio is still the media from which most people get their information. One critical factor in supporting countries in transition from conflict to sustainable and equitable peace is to strengthen access to reliable and credible information. A key contribution of UN peace operations is the development of media capacities and the training of local journalists able to provide reliable information and impartial media spaces for inclusive debate. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure a smooth, effective and responsible transition of the UN media capacities at the end of a mission.

The principles upon which the radio station is built, handed over or closed down usually derive from experience in the field, but there is no solid doctrine. The operators on the ground are left to make their own decisions and lack guidance and best practices to guide them.

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## WHAT & WHEN?

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The transition of a UN radio is not only about handing over its equipment, frequency or personnel. What is of essence is the function that the UN radio fulfils, its editorial line, its relationship with its audiences, its professionalism and independence, its management and oversight, its legal status, its

ownership and its funding. The immaterial features of a radio station (e.g. its relationship with its audiences, its professionalism, impartiality and independence) cannot be transferred as easily as its equipment and frequencies.

Within the radio staff, the transition might raise serious concerns as they are likely to face salary cuts after the post-UN transition. A key issue is who pays the salaries after the UN radio handover and the risk of interference in the editorial line that this could create.

Considering UN radio transitions, it is also important to take into account the overall media environment in the country. Upstream to the handover of the UN radio, efforts need to be invested in fostering a safe environment for local journalists and the creation of conditions for professional journalism and robust media to flourish. This cannot be the task of UN peace operations alone; the UN as a whole and other international and local actors need to work to foster an enabling environment for media development.

Ideally, the transition of UN radios should be considered from day one, but peace operations lack long-term-planning due to a range of reasons, including their temporary nature. The closing of a peace operation is generally a critical stage where a lot of work has to be done in a short amount of time. The preparation of the UN radio transition should therefore start well before the mission leaves. It should start with an assessment phase to consider different transition options and then lead to a pilot phase to test and implement a long-term strategy.

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## HOW?

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Due to the different circumstances of each peace mission, it is not feasible to establish a one-size-fits-all approach for UN radio transitions.

There have been 17 UN radio stations established with five still in operation. Out of the twelve remaining radio stations, five had a transition plan, while seven did not. This shows that the transition of these radios is not mainstreamed in UN peace yet, and the general rule has been the closure of the station when the mission ends.

Different options have been implemented when dealing with the transfer of UN radio station at the conclusion of a peace operation mandate. These include: transferring the radio to an international or regional organization (e.g. Liberia), to a public broadcaster (e.g. Timor Leste, Kosovo, Sierra Leone), to an NGO (e.g. CAR, Ivory Coast). Other options could include e.g. the transfer to the private sector or the creation of a trust fund and/or governing body supervised by national and/or international actors. Evaluating the efficacy of these different models is key to establishing lessons learned and best practices.

As a condition for handover, the successor institution should enjoy enough credibility and support of the population, it should display the required management and oversight capacity and sources of funding that are stable enough to resist illegitimate pressures on the editorial line.

The transition ultimately requires a coordination mechanism that bring key stakeholders around the table to define the pre-conditions for the handover and to prepare for the moment when the mission is to leave.

Specific transition teams should be mandated with gathering the perspectives of the different UN entities, including the headquarters, the mission and the country team, and examining the situation on the ground. It should also involve the government, the local media sector, the audiences, potential donors and the private sector with a view to assessing the various transition options for the preparation of a consolidated UN Radio transition plan proposal. Civil society institutions, media development practitioners and academics should also be included in the assessment process.

Recommendations raised during the workshop included the need to focus on: 1) **anticipation**: develop a strategy and a memorandum of understanding providing for the key conditions of the handover to be reached well before the departure of the UN mission; 2) **political will**: there should be frequent

exchanges over the transition of the UN radio including between the head of the UN mission and the host government; 3) **consultation**, to assess various transition options should be as broad as possible and include civil society institutions, the local media sector, audiences, media development practitioners, academics, potential donors and the private sector; 4) **financing**: a transition fund and long term hybrid and diverse funding (public/private; donors/revenues production) are essential to ensure the smooth transition and to maintain the quality of the media; 5) **institutional anchorage**: the credibility, oversight and management capacity should drive the choice of the successor entity. The continuous involvement of other UN agencies (non- UN peace operation) and the creation of a hybrid institutional architecture for a transitional period should also be considered; 6) **human resources**: defining and building the necessary journalistic, technical and management skills well before the transition, and possibly reopen positions for competitive hiring; 7) **Monitoring & Evaluation**: the decision-making process should be data driven and transparent.

The Geneva Workshop was the first of its kind, allowing for an in-depth assessment with key stakeholders on what the practice of UN Radio transitions have been to date. The two-day workshop identified a range of best practices and recommendations for the improvement of future possible transitions. Key findings of the workshop as listed above, in addition to the more detailed account of the proceedings, are intended to contribute to the formulation of guidelines for UN Radio Transitions in the future.

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This executive summary is based on the minutes of the event drafted by three PhD students of the MEDAS 21 research program, Fabíola Ortiz, Roja Zaitoonie and Michel Leroy. Many thanks to them.

The full report and the participant list will be made available upon request to: Sacha Meuter, Head of Research and Policy, Fondation Hirondelle

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