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Transitions in United Nations peace operations

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, prepared pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution [2594 \(2021\)](#), provides updates on the status of ongoing and recent transitions across relevant United Nations peace operations, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Guinea-Bissau and the Sudan. Trends and common issues that have emerged across multiple transitions are also identified in the report.

United Nations transitions often take place in contexts characterized by complex political dynamics and protracted humanitarian, development, and peace and security challenges, which are likely to persist beyond the departure of a mission. While sustained political engagement during and after mission withdrawal is needed to support key peacebuilding priorities, transitions are often characterized by a decline in the capacity of the United Nations. Consequently, the development of inclusive political strategies that engage a wide group of stakeholders around a shared vision of the peacebuilding priorities for the post-mission phase is critical for the success of transition processes. Proactive and integrated transition planning is therefore vital to ensuring timely and forward-looking transitions. United Nations transitions should not be understood as linear processes focused on the handover of responsibilities by a departing peace operation but should be seen as a strategic repositioning of a United Nations presence in support of the host country and local partners. National leadership and ownership are critical; transition planning should therefore be closely aligned with national development plans and strategies and should focus on early engagement with national stakeholders, with particular emphasis on strengthening capacity in areas that will be taken on by host government institutions.

The funding cliff following the departure of a peace operation represents a major risk for the host country's pathway to sustainable development. In a climate of scarce resources, it is essential to provide additional support to national authorities in the development and execution of longer-term financing strategies.



The experience of recent and ongoing transitions provides ample evidence of the need for improved planning for and adequate resourcing of transitions, as well as the need to consider implications for the post-mandate period, to ensure that the hard-won gains of peace operations mandates are safeguarded and that the countries hosting peace operations are placed on a sustainable footing towards durable peace and prosperity.

I. Introduction

1. United Nations peace operations, which encompass both peacekeeping and special political missions, are often deployed for time-bound periods in order to accomplish a defined set of tasks. As described in Security Council resolution [2594 \(2021\)](#), transitions of peace operations are understood as a strategic process which builds towards a reconfiguration of the strategy, footprint and capacity of the United Nations in a way that supports peacebuilding objectives and the development of sustainable peace and reinforces national ownership. That process is informed by the operational context, national priorities and needs of the host State and its population and includes engagement with local communities and civil society, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and the inclusion of youth. The ability of the United Nations to promote peace and security, human rights and sustainable development after a transition is affected considerably by the way in which the reconfigured United Nations presence is prepared to address remaining peacebuilding challenges and by how, where applicable, mission closure is planned and managed. If well managed, United Nations transitions can effectively reorient the United Nations strategy and footprint to support countries emerging from violent conflict; if ill planned, United Nations transitions carry the risk of jeopardizing hard-won gains and may make it more difficult to prevent renewed violence. In the present report, ongoing and recent transitions involving the active planning or execution of a significant drawdown, reconfiguration or withdrawal of a United Nations peace operation are examined.

2. Several United Nations peace operations withdrew in the past decade, and follow-on missions were established as part of the transition. At the time of writing of the present report, all remaining multidimensional peacekeeping operations had been asked by the Security Council to initiate or intensify their transition planning. Transition processes increasingly take place in contexts characterized by complex political dynamics and protracted human rights, humanitarian, development, and peace and security challenges, which are likely to persist beyond the departure of a mission.

3. The ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to affect societies around the world, having taken a toll on public health and socioeconomic well-being in many countries, with significant gender disparities in its impact. This is especially true in conflict-affected States, where pandemic responses are often adversely affected by fragmented authority, political and intercommunal violence, low State capacity and high levels of displacement. Many countries hosting peace operations will be severely affected by the socioeconomic repercussions for years to come, making a more proactive, integrated, forward-looking and gender-responsive approach to United Nations transitions even more critical to building inclusive and durable peace.

Evolution of the United Nations approach to transitions

4. Transitions are complex, inherently political processes that present heightened risk, but also opportunities. They require coordinated system-wide responses to mitigate potential negative consequences and help host authorities to further their peacebuilding objectives. Rather than being linear processes involving a handover of mandated tasks from a peace operation, United Nations transitions are more appropriately understood as a strategic repositioning of a United Nations presence to better support national stakeholders.

5. Over the past decade, the United Nations has adopted a more systematic approach to its transition processes as the growth in the number of peacekeeping

operations deployed slowed and missions closed. In 2013, the United Nations adopted policies on transition and on integrated assessment and planning. The policies enumerated guiding principles, established a division of responsibilities among stakeholders at Headquarters and at the country level and identified the required elements of planning processes. Meanwhile, the Security Council began to systematically request the Secretariat to prepare exit strategies for multidimensional peacekeeping missions and certain special political missions well before the drawdown phase, in addition to the existing practice of requesting the Secretariat to develop benchmarks to show progress in implementing mission mandates. The High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, in its 2015 report (see [A/70/95-S/2015/446](#)), noted that more could be done to facilitate smoother transitions between different phases of missions in terms of both the sequencing of mission mandates and the shifting between different types of configurations across the full spectrum of peace operations, including both peacekeeping and special political missions.

6. Under its current approach, which is informed by the Secretary-General's February 2019 planning directive for the development of consistent and coherent United Nations transition processes, the United Nations distinguishes between early transition planning and the active transition phase. Early transition planning, which is centred on the development of a transition road map, takes place well before a mission is preparing for drawdown and reconfiguration. In contrast, the active transition phase begins approximately 24 months before the probable withdrawal or reconfiguration of a peace operation. That phase involves the articulation of detailed transition plans that cover the steps necessary for the programmatic and operational disengagement of a peace operation, help to guide the completion of mandated tasks, and mobilize resources for peacebuilding activities throughout the transition period, which extends beyond the end of a mission mandate.

7. The United Nations has established several mechanisms that have proved valuable in supporting transitions. Since 2014, the United Nations Transitions Project, a partnership between the Development Coordination Office, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has provided direct support to transition processes to ensure that they are planned and managed in a proactive, integrated and forward-looking manner. Since 2017, the Department of Peace Operations, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and UNDP have worked to develop a gender-responsive conflict analysis methodology to support transition planning. In 2021, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs also incorporated gender into the design of studies on lessons learned and guidance materials. The new organizational structures and arrangements established through the reforms of the United Nations development system, the peace and security architecture and the management framework of the Secretariat have also improved the ability of the United Nations system to plan for and implement transitions. Of particular relevance are the strengthened resident coordinator system, the introduction of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, the establishment of a single regional structure shared between the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations and the creation of dedicated capacities for operational planning and for support to start-up, transition, downsizing and liquidation situations within the Department of Operational Support. The Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law, established in 2012, also supports planning and integration of strategies and programmes in rule of law activities across the United Nations system.

II. Status of transitions since September 2019

8. In the 24 months before the adoption of resolution 2594 (2021), three peace operations had concluded their mandates: the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). In Haiti and the Sudan, new special political missions, namely the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) and the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS), were established in parallel with the drawdown of peacekeeping operations as part of the reconfiguration of the United Nations presence.

Haiti

9. The Security Council, in its resolution 2466 (2019), decided that the mandate of MINUJUSTH, itself a follow-on presence to the earlier and significantly larger United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), would conclude on 15 October 2019. The Council requested the Secretary-General to initiate planning for an “appropriate integrated United Nations system presence in Haiti” to be established as of 16 October 2019. In its resolution 2476 (2019), the Council decided that the successor presence, BINUH, should take the form of a special political mission focusing on advisory services and good offices and working in an integrated manner with the United Nations country team, which would assume the programmatic and technical assistance role of MINUJUSTH.

10. Although MINUJUSTH operated under a two-year exit strategy, the transition from MINUJUSTH to BINUH faced some challenges, as it proceeded against the backdrop of successive waves of unrest that began in July 2018 owing to such factors as fuel shortages, corruption and high inflation, which were exacerbated by ongoing political instability and gang violence. The United Nations transition in Haiti was also the first following the management, peace and security and development reforms and therefore served as a test of the new structures and approaches. Despite those contextual challenges, operational continuity between missions was maintained and, in February 2020, an integrated strategic framework was endorsed, directing the capacities of the United Nations system to overcoming cross-dimensional structural obstacles to support Haiti in achieving long-term stability.

Guinea-Bissau

11. Following the completion of an independent strategic assessment of UNIOGBIS, the Security Council, in its resolution 2458 (2019), initiated a phased drawdown of the mission. The drawdown began with an electoral phase focused on support for the holding of legislative and presidential elections in 2019. It was followed by a post-electoral phase, including the closure of UNIOGBIS regional offices. The process concluded with a transition phase, with the mission’s tasks transferred to the United Nations country team, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and international partners. UNIOGBIS closed on 31 December 2020.

12. The transition phase and ultimate closure of UNIOGBIS occurred in an environment of heightened political tension over disputed results in the run-off of the presidential election in December 2019 and a deterioration in the security and human rights situation in the country. Although the impasse was resolved through the intervention of the Economic Community of West African States, the political and governance situation remained fragile. The sociopolitical and economic challenges within the country were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. By 28 February

2021, UNIOGBIS had concluded its mandate as scheduled and completed its in-country liquidation activities. The Government's endorsement of a common conflict analysis and eight peacebuilding priorities in November 2020 set the stage for the development of the 2022–2026 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Guinea-Bissau, which incorporates the country's peacebuilding priorities and guides its post-UNIOGBIS partnership with the United Nations. The total requirement for the implementation of the Framework over the five-year period is estimated at \$540 million, of which a gap of approximately \$321 million remains.

Sudan

13. In June 2018, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations presented a transition concept and plan for the withdrawal of UNAMID over a two-year time frame (see [S/2018/530](#)). That concept included the establishment of state liaison functions, a whole-of-system mechanism that allowed the mission to work closely with the United Nations country team on joint priorities to reduce the risk of re-emergence of conflict. In the Sudan, the decision to transition from peacekeeping was the result of fundamentally changed circumstances on the ground: Darfur was no longer experiencing widespread military conflict between government forces and non-State armed actors and, despite capacity issues, the transitional Government had demonstrated a commitment to take full responsibility for protecting civilians. It became clear that the efforts of the United Nations should be responsive to national ownership and to the post-revolution imperative of supporting the democratic transition. Accordingly, in its resolution [2524 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council established UNITAMS, an integrated special political mission with a countrywide mandate. The United Nations subsequently carried out a comprehensive capacity mapping of the United Nations country team in the Sudan to scale up and reconfigure its capacities and activities around shared peacebuilding priorities in the country. In its resolution [2559 \(2020\)](#), the Council terminated the mandate of UNAMID with effect from 31 December 2020 and requested the withdrawal of all uniformed and civilian personnel by 30 June 2021, other than those required for in-country liquidation tasks, including a guard unit retained to protect personnel, facilities and assets. UNAMID provided logistical support for the establishment of UNITAMS, while UNITAMS supported UNAMID in planning for the use of residual assets in support of the Government's national plan for protecting civilians. Despite measures adopted to discourage the looting that followed the handover of UNAMID team sites in Saraf Umrah, Khor Abeche, Menawashei, Sortony, Nertiti and Shangil Tobaya, violence and mass looting in the logistics base in El Fasher prompted the decision, in December 2021, to relocate all remaining civilian personnel and withdraw the guard unit.

14. Knowledge transfer was emphasized during the transition in the Sudan. Before the departure of UNAMID staff, knowledge exchanges were held between UNAMID, UNITAMS and the United Nations country team, leading to a workshop on consolidating peacebuilding gains in Darfur. Recommendations from the workshop informed the development of the Sudan peacemaking, peacebuilding and stabilization programme, which serves as the framework outlining the programme priorities of the United Nations in the Sudan in support of the national transition as requested by the Security Council in its resolutions [2524 \(2020\)](#) and [2579 \(2021\)](#). UNITAMS works in an integrated and complementary manner with the United Nations country team in all areas of its mandate. The transition in the Sudan has also been one of the most progressive examples of the integration of gender equality into transition processes. Systematic engagement and prioritization at both the leadership and technical levels across the United Nations system resulted in gender equality issues being reflected in the set-up of UNITAMS, building on the gains on the women and peace and security

agenda made by UNAMID. While the coup of 25 October 2021 and the ensuing political crisis have seriously challenged the national transition in the Sudan, the Mission continues to support a Sudanese-owned and led solution to restore the path towards a democratic civilian-led Government, in line with the aspirations of the Sudanese people. In addition, against the backdrop of increasing intercommunal violence in Darfur, the Mission is continuing efforts to support the implementation of the transitional security arrangements provided under the Juba Peace Agreement.

Ongoing transitions and early transition planning

15. The Security Council and the Secretariat have taken several steps regarding the transition of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), including the progressive closure of field offices since 2018, with the understanding that the progressive drawdown of MONUSCO must be linked to benchmarks aligned with the conditions on the ground and not to a predetermined timetable. In its resolution [2556 \(2020\)](#), the Council endorsed the joint strategy on the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO ([S/2020/1041](#), annex), under which the Mission would gradually consolidate its footprint in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces, where active conflict persists and, in some areas, has deepened, while pursuing good offices and supporting the strengthening of State institutions at the national level. The Government and the United Nations system in the country established a joint working group to engage in transition planning and discuss the practical modalities of the transition process. The joint working group, in consultation with civil society, developed a transition plan ([S/2021/807](#), annex) that includes 18 benchmarks with indicative timelines, minimum conditions and priority collaborative actions that would permit the Mission's exit. The plan was welcomed by the Council in its resolution [2612 \(2021\)](#). Subsequently, MONUSCO withdrew from Kasai and Kasai Central Provinces on 30 June 2021 and plans to gradually withdraw from Tanganyika Province as of 30 June 2022. The Mission also established a bridging presence in each of those provinces to provide residual support to the Government and the United Nations country team, which have scaled up their presence.

16. The Security Council has also increasingly included references to early planning for transitions in mandate renewals for multidimensional missions that are not actively drawing down, as in the case of missions deployed in the Central African Republic,¹ Mali² and South Sudan.³ In approving the reconfiguration of the African Union Mission in Somalia into the African Union Transitional Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), the Council also established a timetable for the withdrawal of ATMIS,⁴ which in turn has implications for the United Nations Support Office in Somalia.

III. Key policy issues related to transitions

17. Each permutation of United Nations transitions has its own characteristics and challenges, but the experience of transitions past and present yield several common observations across multiple contexts that may be valuable to the Security Council and to Member States more broadly. These observations largely fall into the three broad categories of planning, resourcing and considerations for the post-mandate period.

¹ Resolution [2301 \(2016\)](#), para. 57.

² Resolution [2364 \(2017\)](#), para. 48 (ii).

³ Resolution [2625 \(2022\)](#), para. 20 (r).

⁴ See resolution [2628 \(2022\)](#).

A. Planning

18. Proactive, integrated and gender-responsive transition planning is vital to ensuring timely and forward-looking transitions. The integrated assessment and planning policy provides the starting point for planning in integrated settings, that is, where a multidimensional peacekeeping operation or special political mission is present alongside a United Nations country team. Transition planning in such settings should be an aspect of integrated assessment and planning rather than treated as a separate process.

Member State guidance

19. The implementation of mission mandates and the conduct of transitions by the Secretariat are undertaken within the parameters and under the guidance provided by the mandating authority, which in most contexts is the Security Council. Once the Council has initiated a transition, ensuring the alignment and support of the governing bodies of the agencies, funds and programmes is also important if the transition is to succeed.

20. To further enhance proactive transition planning and implementation of both substantive and administrative activities, the Secretariat would benefit from clarity in mandates and timelines early on. In the case of UNAMID, the uncertainty regarding the timeline of mission closure meant that many of the typical processes of planning and preparing for mission closure and liquidation were only initiated once they had been mandated.

Integration

21. Past experience demonstrates that improved strategic and operational coherence between missions and country teams is correlated with better-planned and managed United Nations transitions. Where they exist, mission planning units are often the largest dedicated source of United Nations planning capacity at the country level. However, they are primarily an internal integration function working to ensure alignment between the various components within a mission; their perspective is therefore mission-centric. On the other hand, deputy special representatives of the Secretary-General who simultaneously serve as resident coordinator, and in some cases as humanitarian coordinator, in integrated contexts are the key drivers of system-wide cohesion at the country level. A practice that has emerged in several missions is the establishment of integrated offices reporting to the double- or triple-hatted deputy special representative, consisting of staff from both the mission and the resident coordinator office. During transition phases, additional planning, monitoring and evaluation capacities, including to ensure human rights and gender mainstreaming, are useful to ensuring an integrated approach between missions, resident coordinator offices and country teams, each of which has distinct but complementary roles to play. The corresponding departments and offices at Headquarters would also benefit from having sufficient and dedicated planning capacity to support their counterparts in the field and facilitate improved coordination at the Headquarters level.

22. Effective planning, however, is not necessary only within the United Nations system. For transitions to be successful, coherence in policy decisions and budget allocations related to missions and the agencies, funds and programmes is required to ensure that informed decisions are made regarding transition timetables, that Security Council mandates are crafted on the basis of a realistic understanding of country team capacities and capabilities and that sufficient resources are projected and committed to support peacebuilding activities to avoid funding cliffs after the departure of a

mission. This would benefit, for example, from counterparts in Member States coordinating their peace, development, humanitarian and financial expertise.

National ownership

23. Transitions, if undertaken prudently on the basis of marked improvements in key indicators of stability and political progress, are an opportunity for the United Nations and key partners to reposition themselves to support national authorities more effectively in promoting peace, justice and strong institutions. To that end, the United Nations supports the active involvement of host Governments in transition planning and their responsibility for elements of transition plans to ensure the sustainability of gains. Such efforts can reinforce the realization of a national development plan, supported by a United Nations Cooperation Framework.

24. One element of national ownership that must be built into planning processes relates to protection, particularly in contexts involving the withdrawal of a mission mandated under Chapter VII of the Charter. Host Governments have the primary responsibility for protecting civilians, and recent transitions highlight the importance of United Nations engagement with host Governments to assist in the development, implementation and monitoring of national strategies and plans for transition, including on the protection of civilians, child protection, the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence, human rights, the rule of law, access to justice, including transitional justice, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and security sector reform. This requires engaging national and local stakeholders as early as possible to jointly determine priority areas that need to be supported during and after mission withdrawal. Consideration must therefore also be given during the mission life cycle to strengthening national capacities for transition planning, as well as the areas necessary for sustaining peace during and after the transition.

Programmatic coherence

25. Early transition planning should be informed by national peacebuilding priorities, exchanges between missions and country teams on areas of focus for peacebuilding, a system-wide capacity mapping and agreement on how best to approach joint areas of focus, whether through joint programmes, a division of responsibilities, co-location or other modalities. However, entities within the United Nations system may not be the best positioned, or best resourced, to lead on specific activities. Thus, it is essential to bring in other major actors, including international financial institutions, regional and subregional organizations and bilateral development agencies, to increase the coherence of international assistance during transitions.

26. In the process of preparing a transition road map or a detailed transition plan, the associated efforts should be anchored in and linked to broader United Nations integrated planning frameworks, such as the integrated strategic framework or the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, to minimize the potential for duplication. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the alignment of the MONUSCO transition plan for 2021–2024 with the Cooperation Framework and the current strategy for the Peacebuilding Fund, both of which cover the period 2020–2024, has proved helpful in transition planning. Such alignment reduces the difficulty of translating requirements and tasks across planning frameworks with different time horizons and can help to ensure that peace sustainment activities are adequately prioritized and resourced after the departure of missions.

27. Within the United Nations system, the experience with the state liaison functions in Darfur provided a new model for integrating elements of closing missions with the country team, which helped to ensure programmatic coherence and provided a means

of more seamlessly transferring institutional memory to the next phase of United Nations engagement in the country. As noted in the summary report on lessons learned from the UNAMID experience (S/2021/1099, annex), mission staff in state liaison functions working in the area of protection of civilians guided the protection of vulnerable groups, monitored protection hotspots and supported country team partners in the planning and coordination of community reconciliation efforts. However, the implementation of state liaison functions in Darfur was not without challenges, including administrative hurdles, COVID-19-related restrictions and differences in organizational culture between mission and country team staff. In future, planning and implementation of similar functions will be contemplated earlier in the mission life cycle to allow for trust and working methods to develop organically. Ideally, those functions will have been fully operational by the time the implementation of a transition plan is under way and will continue to be integrated into the broader political and security activities of the departing mission rather than being managed as a programmatic vehicle operating in parallel.

Liquidation considerations

28. Missions and country teams increasingly approach the transfer of mission assets as an element of longer-term integrated planning processes. The process of asset disposal can provide an opportunity to explore how to ensure that United Nations assets are handed over to and used by appropriate government agencies for the benefit of the population and in line with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces and the “do no harm” approach, as applicable. The Financial Regulations of the United Nations include provisions for asset disposal that are specific to the liquidation of peacekeeping missions, while special political missions are governed by the standard provisions that apply to all other United Nations activities. Recent transitions have drawn attention to certain challenges with this arrangement. First, the lack of common provisions applicable to all peace operations can cause confusion for both the closing mission and potential recipients of assets. Second, the prioritization of peacekeeping missions as potential recipients of assets over special political missions and agencies complicates transitions, as follow-on missions and country teams may not necessarily receive the equipment required to take on some of the departing mission’s programmatic responsibilities. Third, the fact that Governments and government agencies are afforded the lowest priority for receiving mission assets can run counter to mission efforts to strengthen local institutions and build capacity in the final years of a mission mandate. While the General Assembly is aware of the challenges and can address some of them, the Secretariat is also working to make property disposal part of the normal supply chain management process and not as something to be left until mission liquidation.

B. Transition resourcing

29. Effective transitions require sufficient resourcing, including both funding and staffing, both before and after the end of a mission mandate.

Financing

Avoiding the funding cliff

30. The Secretary-General has repeatedly alerted Member States to the need to mitigate the funding cliff, that is, the marked decline in funding for peacebuilding activities, following the departure of a peacekeeping operation. In Haiti, the Haitian National Police received only 2.4 per cent of its estimated \$1.2 billion budget under its 2017–2021 strategic development plan during the two-year transitional mandate

of MINUJUSTH. Increased funding towards the development of human rights and gender-responsive rule of law and security sector institutions, as well as civil society organizations, which take on a greater role in ensuring stability after mission departure, is a critical component of transitions.

31. The misalignment of planning horizons between mission transitions on the one hand and the country strategies of development actors on the other is a major driver of the funding cliff. Transition plans should be tailored to meet realistic expectations for the funding landscape while ensuring that they clearly and accurately present the peacebuilding needs of the country to build a shared vision of how to address remaining activities. Ideally, the host Government should take increasing responsibility for donor coordination over the course of the transition period to help to ensure ownership. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations has partnered with the World Bank to develop a public expenditure review of the security sector in the country. The review, modeled on a similar exercise conducted in support of the earlier United Nations transition in Liberia, will identify the necessary actions to be taken by the Government and partners to ensure the long-term financial sustainability and affordability of security institutions, particularly after the closure of MONUSCO.

32. Several mechanisms exist within the United Nations system that can serve as vehicles to help to mitigate the funding cliff. At the country level, pooled funds can help to address requirements for residual activities included in transition plans that tend to be underfunded once a mission departs. At the global level, the Peacebuilding Fund serves as an important tool through which the Organization can help to respond to peacebuilding requirements and prevent violent conflict. Transitions are an area of particular focus for the Fund under its current 2020–2024 strategy, which includes a target of 35 per cent of total disbursements for its dedicated window for facilitating transitions.

33. Beyond the United Nations, several international financial institutions have increased their focus on fragile and conflict-affected contexts in recent years, providing entry points for collaboration, including in mission transition contexts. They also have a growing range of instruments and mechanisms that can provide financing for nationally led programmes for conflict prevention and crisis preparedness, response and reconstruction, and can offer credit agreements to strengthen social protection, improve governance and tackle corruption in transition settings. For example, the World Bank Country Partnership Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2022–2026), which dedicates substantial additional resources to addressing drivers of fragility and conflict, was developed and will be implemented in consultation with the United Nations.

Harmonizing budgetary arrangements across peace operations

34. The High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations highlighted the difficulty posed by administrative hurdles in the transition between different types of peace operations. Administratively, peacekeeping operations and special political missions differ primarily in their financing arrangements; with the exception of two legacy missions funded through the programme budget, peacekeeping budgets are assessed under the scale of assessment for peacekeeping operations and financed through individual special accounts. Special political missions, on the other hand, are financed as part of the programme budget. Differences in the manner in which functions at Headquarters dedicated to supporting missions are funded between peacekeeping and special political missions have implications for the continuity of support when a peacekeeping operation is followed by a special political mission. Other differences include the inability of special political missions to draw on a ready pool of resources to finance mission start-up or expansion, issues highlighted in the

2011 report of the Secretary-General on the review of arrangements for funding and backstopping special political missions (A/66/340). Peacekeeping operations, on the other hand, have access to a reserve fund which has not been used since 2014. This complicates the start-up of special political missions and exacerbates the already difficult liquidity challenges of the Secretariat when new missions are authorized.

35. Peacekeeping missions also have access to funding for low-cost projects that can be rapidly implemented to improve local perceptions of and confidence in the mission, its mandate and the peace process supported by the United Nations. As highly visible United Nations transitions can potentially generate considerable uncertainty and anxiety in the local population, it is important to ensure that field missions have sufficient funding for confidence-building projects to build support and improve perceptions of the transition and of the new United Nations configuration in the country.

36. Peacekeeping budgets also routinely include funding for programmatic activities. Although such funds are not a common feature of special political mission budgets, UNITAMS was able to obtain \$1 million from the General Assembly for programmatic activities in its initial budget to support the transition. Funding for programmatic activities is not a panacea, but given that such funding has proved valuable for mandate implementation in peacekeeping operations, Member States should also consider its inclusion in special political missions, where appropriate. In contrast to the expectation that mission budgets should decrease during drawdown, the programmatic requirements of missions may be higher towards the end of the mission life cycle as missions focus more on the peacebuilding elements of their mandate. The state liaison functions in Darfur, which were managed by the United Nations country team but funded through the UNAMID budget, provide an example of programmatic funding being used to drive programmatic coherence between missions and country teams during transitions. By using funding for programmatic activities from the UNAMID budget and allowing the agencies, funds and programmes to capitalize on the knowledge of co-located mission personnel, the state liaison functions facilitated cooperation on critical interventions to avoid conflict relapse while enabling the agencies, funds and programmes to increase their presence and capacity in Darfur.

Staffing

37. Transitions are also associated with a myriad of staffing challenges for missions and the United Nations country teams, including the management of downsizing exercises, the need to maintain capacity for mandate implementation in the face of planned and unplanned staff departures, the emergence of requirements specific to closure and liquidation activities and the need to ensure sufficient capacity in the reconfigured United Nations presence.

Staffing and capacity gaps

38. The number of international staff in downsizing missions far exceeds the available vacancies elsewhere in the Secretariat, making it difficult to retain talent from downsizing missions. Retention of staff is governed by staff rule 9.6 (e), which prioritizes the type of appointment of staff members, with those holding permanent and continuing appointments being given first and second priority, subject to the availability of suitable positions in which their services can be effectively utilized. Staffing gaps in key functions may persist, given the difficulty of attracting candidates to fill vacancies in downsizing or closing missions. Missions have adopted several approaches to addressing such gaps. For certain substantive functions, missions can draw on standing capacities or rosters of experts to fill gaps during transitions, but such capacities do not exist for all key functions, including technical expertise on

gender. The Transitions Project also funds various measures to provide surge transition planning expertise. For all other functions, missions often resort to asking Headquarters and other missions for the deployment of staff on travel status to fill gaps for short periods. The Secretariat has established surge capacity rosters for certain key functions to facilitate such deployments. However, the existing General Assembly practice on post management creates significant challenges for meeting staffing gaps during transitions even when means of filling gaps exist on paper. One fundamental limitation in the use of deployments on travel status is the three-month limit on such deployments under Assembly resolution 63/250; a three-month period is normally insufficient to ensure the requisite continuity and transfer of institutional memory. Moreover, the deployment of staff on travel status is complicated by the aversion of the Assembly to the redeployment of funds across groups of expenditure.

39. For mission start-ups, the General Assembly also expects to see fully formed staffing tables in initial budgets even when staffing requirements may not be clear and the conditions necessary for undertaking all mandated tasks may not be present. Tasks such as security sector reform typically gain in prominence and scope later in the mission cycle, but there is seldom political appetite to adequately resource such functions late in a mission life cycle, leading to missed opportunities. More broadly, providing missions with the ability to manage their unpredictable staffing requirements more flexibly during transitions within the limits of the overall appropriation approved by the Assembly would allow them to implement transition plans more efficiently without having to devote precious time and resources to finding alternative solutions.

Maintaining capacity during transition and after mission departure

40. An inevitable result of a mission transition, whether the departure of a peace operation or reconfiguration from a peacekeeping mission to a special political mission, is the separation from service of many nationally recruited personnel. Although it has become good practice for missions to organize job fairs during staffing drawdowns, the sheer size of peacekeeping mission staffing tables means that such activities are successful in securing onward employment for only a limited number of a mission's national staff. At the same time, one of the common objectives of many recent peace operations has been to build institutions and capacity. One successful approach in earlier transitions, for example in Timor-Leste, is to work with the host Government and key partners to use missions more systematically as a pipeline of qualified personnel for national, subnational or international institutions. Ideally, this can be done over the course of a mission life cycle, rather than developing such an arrangement at the end of the mandate.

C. Preparing for the post-mandate period

41. Transition requirements and residual activities continue for years beyond the end of a mandate. In fact, the immediate post-mission phase of the transition process is often the most critical. Sufficient efforts must be made during the early transition and transition processes to safeguard the hard-fought achievements of the departing peace operation and to ensure that the follow-on presence can succeed. The closure of a mission before a country is on a sustainable path to peace can jeopardize past investments, undermine human rights and development gains among local communities, particularly in vulnerable and marginalized populations, and could be more costly to the international community in case of a relapse into conflict. The day-to-day activities of missions affect the local economy and environment in ways that will be felt long after their departure.

Maintaining progress in sustaining peace

42. Peace operations are often the only United Nations actors present in a country or region with the mandate and capacity to engage and facilitate political processes. That presence is important not only for protection of civilians considerations but also in terms of engagement with authorities, civil society, communities and stakeholders at the subnational level, and it is a critical element of the situational awareness, human rights monitoring and early warning capacities of peacekeeping operations, which enable efforts across the entire system. Moreover, the capacity of mission support components, including their aviation capabilities and medical facilities, to facilitate the work of a multitude of other actors, including the United Nations country team, the diplomatic community, international and regional organizations and non-governmental organizations, should not be discounted.

43. The composition and capacity of United Nations country teams vary considerably, and not every agency, fund or programme may be represented in each country context. The country team needs to be provided with the operational and financial capacity to provide additional support to the national and local authorities in a given thematic area. The departure of a peace operation may result in the United Nations system adopting a different role or asking bilateral or regional partners to take the lead in supporting the appropriate national and local authorities. In this regard, external partners will need to support the agencies, funds and programmes working on transition planning and be engaged accordingly as early as practicable.

44. Over the past decade, in transition settings, the Security Council has in several instances requested the Secretariat to develop benchmarks to monitor country progress and critical minimum requirements in key mission-mandated areas to inform the exit strategy of a mission. Where relevant, clearer and more consistent use of gender-sensitive benchmarks, including maintaining a distinction between core benchmarks related to the progress made by host States in key political and security areas and other more contextual benchmarks can be helpful and can provide a means of charting progress, or lack thereof, on peacebuilding over the course of a transition, even after the departure of a mission. With a view to ensuring their usefulness in determining a potential change to the United Nations configuration in a country, it is important for benchmarks to be fully informed by progress in national reform priorities and to be responsive to a potential deterioration in the political and security situation.

45. Progress in the development of inclusive, representative, responsive and accountable security sector governance at all levels is important for peacebuilding, not only for the rule of law but also for protection; the protection of civilians is first and foremost a responsibility of the national Government. Recent transitions provide cause for concern about the actual capacity of national security sector institutions to meet their responsibilities and to do so in a human rights- and gender-responsive manner. Many of the security sector capacity indicators considered, for example, focus on quantity rather than quality, and indicators related to the extension of State authority are often not representative of actual security governance arrangements on the ground or potential risks to civilians.⁵ As the United Nations cannot step in to provide physical protection after the withdrawal of its military and police contingents from missions mandated under Chapter VII of the Charter, it is essential that the timing of transitions be informed by objective assessments of presence, capability, internal management and civilian oversight capacities of security sector institutions.

⁵ Pursuant to resolution [2594 \(2021\)](#), the Secretariat is undertaking a review across relevant peacekeeping missions of the implementation of mandates to support the restoration and extension of legitimate State authority and security sector reform to identify lessons learned for transition planning.

Sustainable security sector reforms that facilitate the ability and willingness of security institutions to protect civilians should be under way before the departure of a mission's uniformed component. In this regard, it is equally critical to consult and provide support to local communities and civil society early on to reinforce their ability to address potential security risks, as well as ensure that the handover of responsibilities between United Nations presences and entities, particularly regarding the protection of civilians, is well planned and resourced.

46. A common finding from many previous mission transitions is the need to avoid basing mission transition time frames on electoral processes. A successful election is an important demonstration of functioning institutions and democratic systems that can mark a turning point for a country and provide a seemingly convenient moment for the United Nations to withdraw or reconfigure. At the same time, there is a risk of increased tensions around elections that must be taken into account during transition planning. Even if elections proceed smoothly, a change in government can lead to capacity gaps in key government institutions and potential changes in national peacebuilding priorities. Transition plans should therefore take into consideration, but not have their timelines set by, national electoral processes.

Ensuring a responsible departure

47. Activities undertaken by mission support components are generally understood to play a supporting role to components directly working on mandate implementation. However, there is growing recognition that many of the activities of mission support components over the life cycle of a mission have an outsized influence on the success of transitions, as they have a direct impact on the health of the local economy and workforce and on the local environment.

Impact on local economy

48. Peacekeeping and larger special political missions can have a significant impact on local economies. Mission support activities can help to enable the development of a local private sector and expand economic opportunities, including for women. These include not only the development and rehabilitation of local physical infrastructure but also the local procurement of goods and services required for the mission. Separate from but related to the issue of from whom missions procure is what missions procure and how they do so. For example, in some recent mission liquidations, some of the equipment or assets procured for mission requirements, such as water purification systems and fuel depots, were not practical or economical to dismantle but were of little practical value to local communities, as they relied on spare parts and specialized expertise to maintain, neither of which was available locally.

Impact on the environment

49. Peacekeeping and larger special political missions have a significant impact on the environment; in particular, they are significant consumers of fuel, whether for air operations, ground transportation or electricity generation. Within the United Nations system, the Secretariat is responsible for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions, mostly from peace operations. Beyond carbon emissions, the heavy reliance on fuel in peace operations contributes to air pollution and land contamination, provides opportunities for theft and misappropriation and can also contribute to resource competition that can affect local conflict dynamics. In 2019, the Secretariat launched a 10-year climate action plan which established specific targets to be achieved by 2025 and 2030 in such areas as reducing both absolute and per capita carbon emissions, reducing overall electricity consumption and increasing the percentage of electricity consumed through renewable sources.

50. In peace operations, the increased use of renewable energy can have other benefits. It can contribute to improved safety and security by reducing the frequency and requirement of fuel convoys in locations where the United Nations is actively targeted. In locations where no renewable energy infrastructure exists, the United Nations can leverage its market power to partner with other organizations and commercial suppliers to develop renewable energy infrastructure. In addition to meeting the electricity requirements of the United Nations, the infrastructure would benefit local communities long after the departure of the mission. Such an approach is being pursued in Somalia, where a power purchase agreement was concluded in 2020 between the United Nations and a commercial renewable energy supplier. Because of the lead time required to develop such projects, planning for such projects should be initiated well in advance of the transition phases of missions.

IV. Conclusions

51. When host countries have achieved tangible progress in peacebuilding, there is an opportunity for the United Nations to adjust its configuration to enhance its supporting role in line with national priorities and national institutions, civil society organizations and communities to sustain peace and prevent the resurgence of conflict. Transitions are a test of the durability of the political processes and structures supported by the United Nations configuration: if national stakeholders are unprepared to assume greater responsibilities, investments in sustaining peace made by national authorities and their international partners over the years could be lost. The support from the international community for national and local efforts to prevent conflict, protect and promote human rights and build resilience should be redoubled at these crucial moments for the future of a country.

52. A transition does not start with an instruction to draw down or end with the conclusion of a mandate. Sufficient capacities of national institutions and confidence in them to assume their responsibilities across areas ranging from the rule of law, to protection, to the full and meaningful participation of women in political and security institutions are critical before the initiation of a transition, as it may not be possible to reverse course once a peace operation has begun its departure from a country. Transitions must therefore be initiated and undertaken on the basis of objective assessments of the political and security conditions in the country and the capacity of national and local institutions to effectively prevent and respond to risks of recurrence of conflict or violence in line with international human rights standards.

53. Member States can contribute to the success of transitions by adequately resourcing the capacities for the planning and implementation of transitions as well as the peacebuilding requirements in the post-mandate period. This includes not only funding for planning functions and standing capacities but also measures to help to avert or mitigate the impact of the funding cliff after a peace operation departs. The report of the Secretary-General on investing in prevention and peacebuilding (A/76/732) provides an option for strengthening the Peacebuilding Fund in this regard. Such funding will need to be complemented by reinforced efforts to strengthen national counterparts during transitions and deepening collaboration with the international financial institutions and other partners. In addition, Member States may also wish to review some of the rules regarding personnel, financial and property management that may have unintended adverse consequences in transition plans.

54. Finally, more can be done to ensure coherence among all stakeholders in a transition. The United Nations system will continue to improve its preparation and implementation of transitions and would benefit from improved alignment in Member State guidance across the Security Council, the General Assembly and the governing

bodies of the relevant agencies, funds and programmes. Member States can also help by proactively pursuing greater coherence with external stakeholders in support of transitions and national priorities. The Council, in its resolution [2594 \(2021\)](#), acknowledged the importance of strong coordination, coherence and cooperation between the Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. In fact, the Commission offers a platform for sustaining international attention and providing political accompaniment by convening national actors, United Nations bodies, regional and subregional organizations, civil society and international financial institutions to ensure an integrated, strategic and coordinated approach to the longer-term needs of peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

55. As shown in the present report, the experience of recent and ongoing transitions provides ample evidence of the need for improved planning for and adequate resourcing of transitions, as well as the need to consider implications for local populations in the post-mandate period. To ensure that the eventual transitions of United Nations configurations currently in the early planning phase are as successful as possible, the United Nations will continuously enhance its transition planning and implementation, building on lessons learned. I call upon Member States to join us in this endeavour by taking the steps necessary to ensure that the hard-won gains of peace operations are safeguarded and that the countries hosting peace operations are thus placed on a sustainable footing towards durable and inclusive peace and prosperity.
