

## **Summary of IASC paper UN integration and humanitarian space: building a framework for flexibility**

### **Background and purpose<sup>1</sup>**

In December 2011, an independent study commissioned by the UN's Integration Steering Group (ISG) found that integration had had both positive and negative impacts on humanitarian operations. The study additionally found, however, that measures are needed to ensure that humanitarian operations are not undermined in the implementation of the UN's integration policy.<sup>2</sup>

The study was discussed at the 80th IASC Working Group meeting on 17 November 2011, at which it was agreed that there was a need for further clarification / definition of situations where structural or other very visible forms of integration could be considered 'undesirable and risky'.

The attached IASC Paper on Integration and Humanitarian Space<sup>3</sup> responds to this request. Below is a summary of the issues raised by the ISG-commissioned independent study and the IASC paper, and suggested actions for consideration by the IASC Principals.

### **Summary of ISG Study**

The ISG-commissioned independent study stressed the importance of consistency in implementation of UN policy on integration in accordance with the Secretary-General's Decision No.2008/24. In this regard, the study includes several important reminders, including that UN policy clearly states that the purpose of integration is to "maximize the individual and collective impact of the UN's response, concentrating on those activities required to consolidate peace". Integration is a principle, not a structure, for strategic partnership between the UN Country Team (UNCT) and the UN mission. As such, the creation of a triple-hatted Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC) is one possible structural arrangement that may be put in place to support strategic integration, but not the default option. Further, it is recognised that while integration arrangements may yield significant benefits for humanitarian operations, they must be accompanied by concrete measures to safeguard principled humanitarian action.

Crucially, the ISG-commissioned independent study found that in 'high-risk environments' much greater caution is called for in establishing integrated arrangements which structurally subsume and/or very visibly link humanitarian actors to a political or peacekeeping mission. In all contexts where there is both a UNCT and a UN political or peacekeeping mission, the study found that integration should always be operationalized at the strategic level, providing a framework for shared analysis and the development of a common vision of strategic priorities as they relate to peace consolidation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> While this IASC paper does not address the full process related to integration assessment and planning, it is consistent with, and should be read in conjunction with, the IAP Policy adopted by the ISG on 13 March 2013 and approved by the Secretary General on 9 April 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Metcalfe, Giffen and Elhawary, *UN Integration and Humanitarian Space*, Overseas Development Institute and Stimson Centre 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Endorsed by the IASC Working Group in August 2012.

<sup>4</sup> "The main requirement of UN integration policy and guidance is strategic integration based on a shared vision, closely aligned goals and a strategic partnership between the UN mission and the UNCT. However, debates on integration arrangements have been dominated by the question of whether to integrate the RC/HC and/or OCHA functions into the mission structure, at the expense of efforts to support strategic integration; in practice achieving strategic integration, including the necessary buy-in from different stakeholders in the UN integrated presence, has been inconsistent." UN Integration and Humanitarian Space: An Independent Study

The study therefore underscored the need for context-specific UN integration arrangements to be informed by comprehensive and inclusive assessments of risk factors affecting humanitarian operations.

The attached IASC paper acknowledges that the principle of integration should be operationalized at the strategic level in contexts where UN Country Teams and missions co-exist. The aim of the paper is to provide guidance on situations where very visible forms of integration, including structural integration, could be considered 'risky' and sets out key elements of a collective humanitarian process to inform decision-making in this regard. The elements set out in the paper are consistent with, and should be read in conjunction with, the Integration Assessment and Planning (IAP) Policy adopted by the ISG on 13 March 2013 and approved by the Secretary General on 9 April 2013.

### **Risk factors**

The primary risk factors affecting humanitarian operations are contextual and relate to the status and nature of the conflict, the nature of the armed actors, the behaviour of the host government, the roles played by other States, and the way that humanitarian actors themselves act and are perceived to be acting. In addition, in light of possible tensions between political and peacekeeping mandates, and the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, the nature of the political or peacekeeping mission mandate itself is a critical factor in assessing risk to humanitarian operations.

Eight main risk factors are presented herein to help assess these contextual considerations. Their presence will normally indicate a situation in which structural and other very visible forms of integration need to be approached with caution.

### **Process**

The ISG-commissioned independent study demonstrated the need for much more robust decision-making processes regarding UN integration arrangements. Common analysis of the operational requirements for humanitarian action, and of the potential risks and benefits of specific integration arrangements, need to be built into UN assessment, design and review. Critically, there is a need for regular review of the impact of integration arrangements on humanitarian operations as well as a framework for engaging non-UN actors, including NGOs, in these processes.<sup>5</sup>

Seven key elements are presented in the attached paper to ensure that UN and non-UN humanitarian actors undertake a collective 'up-front' analysis and use this to inform the relevant decision-making processes within the UN system. It emphasizes the role of Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) in this regard, both with respect to Strategic and Technical assessment missions as well as for country level mechanisms to regularly review risk factors and, where needed, undertake corrective measures to better preserve the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action.

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Commissioned by the UN Integration Steering Group Victoria Metcalfe, Alison Giffen and Samir Elhawary, HPG/Stimson Center, Overseas Development Institute, December 2011, page 46

<sup>5</sup> The IAP indicates that the UN country team will engage with the humanitarian country team in the context of integrated assessment and planning.

## Action points for IASC Principals

1. Endorse the framework set out above and in the attached paper as the IASC approach to structural and other very visible forms of integration and guide to its members on how to assess risks, better inform UN integration arrangements and preserve the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian operations.<sup>6</sup>
2. Request Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and HCTs, where structural and other very visible forms of integration already exist, to review the attached paper, together with the IAP and other key policy documents on integration.<sup>7</sup> Continuous monitoring and adjustment is necessary to assess and accommodate humanitarian concerns as contexts evolve. An assessment of the risk factors and their implications for humanitarian operations in light of the current integration arrangements should be carried out and followed, if necessary, by the development of plans for corrective or mitigating action where necessary.<sup>8</sup> This may include engagement at the Headquarter level through the Integrated Task Force/Integrated Mission Taskforce. Progress on implementation of this action point will be reviewed by the IASC Task Force on Humanitarian Space and Civil Military Coordination within six months.
3. The evaluation of risk factors and identification and development of corrective or mitigating measures to safeguard principled humanitarian action can be complex. Given this, the IASC Task Force on Humanitarian Space and Civil Military Coordination should consult with HCs and HCTs to understand the challenges faced and approaches taken at country level so that lessons learned and best practice may be shared and potential areas for support identified.
4. The role of HCs and HCTs in implementing the UN Integrated Assessment and Planning Policy, including the actions described in Action Point 2, should be included in the RC/HC Handbook and induction as a matter of priority. The IASC Task Force on Humanitarian Space and Civil Military Relations should review compliance with this action point in six months.

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<sup>6</sup> This paper does not depart from and should be read in conjunction with the Decision of the Secretary-General on Human Rights in Integrated Missions (2005/24); and the OHCHR-DPKO-DPA-DFS Policy on Human Rights in United Nations Peace Operations and Political Missions, which provide for structural integration as the systematic default arrangement for human rights in multidimensional and peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Furthermore, this paper does not depart from agreed IASC arrangements, whereby OHCHR, including when structurally integrated in in multidimensional peacekeeping operations and special political missions, is a potential protection cluster lead alongside UNHCR and UNICEF.

<sup>7</sup> UN Policy Committee Decision No. 2008/24 on Integration, Integrated Assessment and Planning Policy and the Guidelines for Strategic Assessments

<sup>8</sup> e.g. to improve public messaging about the impartial character of humanitarian assistance, to revisit co-location or armed escort arrangements, clarify modalities for humanitarian dialogue with non-state armed groups, clarify decision-making processes or sign-off procedures, etc.

## ANNEX A

### UN integration and humanitarian space: building a framework for flexibility

#### Final draft /IASC paper<sup>9</sup>

#### Background and purpose

This paper draws on the findings of the December 2011 study commissioned by the Integration Steering Group which examined the impact of UN integration arrangements on humanitarian space, and in particular, on aid worker security, humanitarian access, engagement with non-state armed actors, perceptions of humanitarian actors (both UN and non-UN) and humanitarian advocacy. The study underlined the need to significantly reinforce measures to ensure consistent implementation of policy provisions that seek to ensure that UN integration arrangements protect humanitarian space. A key conclusion was that more efforts were needed to ensure that context determines the design of UN integration arrangements, including through a more comprehensive and inclusive assessment of the various risk factors as they relate to humanitarian space as part of an up-front analysis.<sup>10</sup>

The study was discussed at the 80<sup>th</sup> IASC Working Group meeting on 17 November 2011, at which it was agreed that there was a need for further clarification / definition of situations where structural and other very visible forms of integration could be considered ‘undesirable and risky’.

This followed extensive discussions on the same topic at a meeting of the Integration Steering Group on 11 November, in which a number of participants reiterated that in certain contexts the form that integration would take should be carefully tailored to realities on the ground, and would not include structural or other very visible forms of integration.

Drawing on the ISG study, this paper therefore seeks to articulate:

- a) The ‘risk factors’ which could indicate that very visible forms of integration, including structural integration of the humanitarian coordination function, should not be applied.
- b) Key elements of the process through which such risk factors should be identified, their potential impact assessed, and corresponding recommendations elaborated on the form which integration should take in a particular country operation.

#### Key parameters

- (i) The policy foundations for this note are set out in the Secretary-General’s Decision No. 2008/24 on Integration, which defines the current policy framework on integration for the UN system and subsequently by the new IAP policy. This note does not seek to depart from that policy framework (although this should not be read as an endorsement of this policy by all IASC members) but rather to articulate how it can best be given effect in such a way as to ensure that the requirement to allow for the protection of humanitarian space set out in that policy can best be reflected in the design of integration arrangements.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, this note does not supersede and should be

<sup>9</sup> Drafted by the IASC Task Force on Humanitarian Space and Civil-Military Relations

<sup>10</sup> *UN Integration and Humanitarian Space: An Independent Study Commissioned by the UN Integration Steering Group* Victoria Metcalfe, Alison Giffen and Samir Elhawary, HPG/Stimson Center, Overseas Development Institute, December 2011

<sup>11</sup> Paragraph i.(d) of the Secretary-General’s decision of 26 June 2008 states: “An integrated approach and integration arrangements can yield significant benefits for humanitarian operations. Integration arrangements

read in conjunction with policies, directives and arrangements specifically relevant to the integration of human rights in multidimensional peacekeeping operations and special political missions (i.e. The Secretary-General Policy Decision 2005/24 and the OHCHR-DPKO-DPA-DFS Policy on Human Rights in United Nations Peace Operations and Political Missions.)

- (ii) Integration is a principle, not a structure. It is conceived as a ‘strategic partnership’ between the UN mission and the UN Country Team, the main purpose of which is ‘to maximize the individual and collective impact of the UN’s response, concentrating on those activities required to consolidate peace.’<sup>12</sup>
- (iii) Structural integration (through the establishment of a ‘triple-hatted’ DSRSG/RC/HC) is one option for giving effect to this principle, but is not – and should not be – the default option. The 2008 decision is clear that country-level arrangements may take different structural forms, but at a minimum should include a shared analytical and planning capacity and an integrated strategic framework.<sup>13</sup> The latter is not designed to encompass all the activities of the UN system, but should focus on ‘those tasks critical to consolidating peace.’<sup>14</sup> The IAP policy further emphasizes that form should follow function in the design of UN integration arrangements.

### **Key considerations**

Humanitarian actors do not argue that integration is per se responsible for the complex range of pressures on humanitarian space. The ISG-commissioned study found that integration has had both positive and negative impacts in this respect, and that a number of other contextual factors affect humanitarian operations. Crucially, the study found that in ‘high-risk environments’ greater caution is called for in establishing integrated arrangements which structurally subsume and/or very visibly link humanitarian actors to a political or peacekeeping mission. In all contexts in which the integrated approach is applied, integration is operationalized at the strategic level, providing a framework for shared analysis and for developing a common vision of strategic priorities linked to peace consolidation. However, in certain ‘high-risk’ environments, this may be as far as integration should go; structural integration of the humanitarian coordination function and other visible forms of integration such as joint external communications, a prominent role for the mission in the cluster approach, and co-location may not be appropriate in such contexts.<sup>15</sup>

The principle of integration – as a UN system framework for dialogue, shared analysis of the drivers of conflict and facilitating the engagement of all UN actors, including humanitarian actors, in developing peace consolidation strategies – remains important even in contexts where structural integration or other visible forms of integration are not appropriate. Even in ‘high-risk’ environments, integration can provide a framework for reconciling tensions between

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*should take full account of recognized humanitarian principles, allow for the protection of humanitarian space and facilitate effective coordination with all humanitarian actors.”*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, paragraph i. (a) and (b)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, paragraph ii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, paragraph i. (c)

<sup>15</sup> As per agreed arrangements following the 2005 Humanitarian Reform (see ‘Guidance note on using the cluster approach to strengthen humanitarian response’, 24 November 2006) and as reiterated in the Transformative Agenda (see ‘Protocol: Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country level’, November 2012), OHCHR, including when structurally integrated in multidimensional peacekeeping operations and special political missions, is a potential protection cluster lead at the field level alongside UNHCR and UNICEF. This paper does not depart from and should be read in conjunction with the above arrangements as well as the Decision of the Secretary-General on Human Rights in Integrated Missions (2005/24); and the OHCHR-DPKO-DPA-DFS Policy on Human Rights in United Nations Peace Operations and Political Missions, which provide for structural integration as the systematic default arrangement for human rights in multidimensional and peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

political/security and humanitarian imperatives and for developing complementary and mutually-reinforcing approaches on certain common priorities such as the protection of civilians and the pursuit of durable solutions for displaced populations, in which a range of actors have different roles to play.

However, there is a need for a carefully calibrated approach to the way in which the principle of integration is operationalized in ‘high-risk’ environments. In such environments, delivering effectively on the facilitation of humanitarian action, and giving effect to paragraph i(d) of the Secretary-General’s Decision,<sup>16</sup> may require measures which deliberately foster a distinct identity for humanitarian actors, helping them to operate in a manner which is demonstrably independent, not aligned with political objectives and impartial in their response to human suffering. In situations where armed conflict is highly likely or ongoing, where a peace process is fragile or significant constituencies remain outside such a process, a range of measures are required to demonstrate the neutral, impartial and independent nature of humanitarian operations, maintain acceptance by communities and humanitarian access, and allow for timely humanitarian action. These measures must include, but go beyond, ensuring appropriate integration arrangements.

Moving rapidly to structural or other very visible forms of integration at the outset in such contexts may result in greater risks to humanitarian space, may exacerbate existing risks, or may limit available options to mitigate them. Experience has shown that once relationships between humanitarian actors, local populations and parties to conflict (often established through a long process of confidence-building) are damaged, confidence in the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian operations, once compromised, is extremely difficult to regain. This underscores the importance of undertaking a detailed contextual analysis and moving cautiously from the outset to get integration arrangements right.

Conceived as a strategic partnership between a UN mission and UNCT, the principle of integration is always operationalized at the strategic level.<sup>17</sup> Where the risk factors below are present, however, visible forms of integration including structural integration, a prominent role for the mission in the cluster approach or other humanitarian coordination mechanisms, co-location and joint external communications may not be appropriate.<sup>18</sup> There should be a regular assessment of the risks to humanitarian space present in the specific context, and how different forms of integration might impact upon these risks to either mitigate or heighten them. Regular reviews and not getting locked into specific structures before conducting a risk assessment will allow the UN greater flexibility to adapt its presence to suit the context.

A final key consideration is the impact of UN integration on the functioning and performance of the humanitarian system. At the operational level, visible forms of UN integration in certain high-risk environments have sometimes resulted in NGOs pulling back from UN-led coordination mechanisms. This has a detrimental effect on humanitarian partnerships and results in a weakening of the humanitarian system particularly as NGOs represent a large portion of the humanitarian community’s operational capacity and many UN agencies rely on NGO partners as implementing partners.

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<sup>16</sup> “An integrated approach and integration arrangements can yield significant benefits for humanitarian operations. Integration arrangements should take full account of recognized humanitarian principles, allow for the protection of humanitarian space, and facilitate effective humanitarian coordination with all humanitarian actors.” Paragraph i.(d) of the Secretary-General’s decision of 26 June 2008.

<sup>17</sup> The concept of ‘strategic’ integration implies a UNCT-mission partnership which incorporates ‘(i) a shared vision of the UN’s strategic objectives, (ii) closely aligned or integrated planning, (iii) a set of agreed results, timelines and responsibilities for the delivery of tasks critical to consolidating peace, (iv) agreed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.’ Paragraph i.(c) of the Secretary-General’s decision of 26 June 2008.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem* at 10.

## **Risk factors**

As noted above, and highlighted in the ISG report, the primary risks to humanitarian space are contextual, linked to the status and nature of the conflict, the nature of armed actors, including their structure, motivation and goals, the behavior of the host government, the roles played by other states, the way in which humanitarian actors are perceived, and the manner in which they are organized and conduct their activities. The potential impact of particular forms of integration is strongly linked to these contextual factors.

The nature of the mission's mandate and role is also a critical element in defining the level of risk to humanitarian operations. There can be tension between the mandates of political and peacekeeping missions, and the humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality. In particular, where peacekeeping missions are deployed in contexts where there is no peace to keep, or where a peace process subsequently falters, they may be seen, or come to be seen, as a party to the conflict.

The presence of the following risk factors will indicate that the HCT and the IAP partners must conduct an assessment of risks to humanitarian operations and may indicate that structural integration and other very visible forms of integration are not yet appropriate. Whatever the final decision on structural arrangements, HCTs, all IAP partners and mission leadership must take particular care to mitigate possible risks to humanitarian operations at all stages of mission planning and implementation. Whilst in most situations no single risk factor will be determinative, and consideration of these should form part of a broader context assessment, the higher the number and/or intensity of risk factors identified, and the greater the potential impact on humanitarian space, the greater the imperative to take precautionary measures at the mission set-up stage.

The presence of the risk factors set out below would also indicate that particular care is needed to preserve the actual (as well as the perceived) neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian operations in policies, strategic priorities, communications, and operational decision-making. In 'high-risk' contexts, maintaining the autonomy of the humanitarian leadership and coordination infrastructure takes on particular importance.

The following list (and any subsequent guidance which elaborates on these factors) should also be applied as part of a regular review process in existing integrated presences, to ensure that the form of the mission-UNCT partnership is sufficiently agile to respond to shifts in the operating environment which result in new or heightened challenges to humanitarian operations. The review process should also enable adverse consequences (or potential benefits) for humanitarian space which were not identified at the start-up stage, to be picked up and reflected in decision-making processes, including through pursuing mitigating measures and corrective action where necessary.

- Is the UN mission (currently or expected to be) linked, (either through a Security Council Resolution or otherwise) or perceived as linked to a non-UN military or peacekeeping operation which is engaged in active combat?
- In the event that a UN-supported peace process is under way, or recently concluded, are there significant constituencies remaining outside the process or who challenge its legitimacy?
- Is the UN mission perceived as closely associated with a government whose credibility is significantly challenged, or which holds power through an election process which is not generally perceived as legitimate?
- Are the UN's political and/or peacekeeping mandate and activities challenged by armed actors on the ground?

- Has the reputation of the UN mission on the ground been adversely affected (through, for example, significant civilian casualties, association with a flawed electoral process, or other events), resulting in a knock-on risk that the reputations of humanitarian agencies (and NGOs, by virtue of their participation in UN-led coordination mechanisms), may also be undermined? Alternatively, in the case of a new mission, is there a risk that this may occur?
- Are local and/or regional non-State armed actors linked to international ideologically-motivated armed groups who have taken an anti-UN stance?
- Is violent conflict highly likely or ongoing? In particular, do non-state armed actors exercise de facto control and/or have a significant extended presence and/or influence in part of the territory?
- Are there indications that local populations and armed actors can and do make a distinction between UN humanitarian agencies and political/security actors?

## Process

The ISG study demonstrated that there is a need for much more robust mechanisms to operationalize the positive obligation placed on integration stakeholders by the 2008 Secretary General’s Decision to “take full account of recognized humanitarian principles, allow for the protection of humanitarian space and facilitate effective humanitarian coordination with all humanitarian actors”<sup>19</sup> in the implementation of UN integration policy. Measures are required to build into the mission assessment, design and review processes a framework for a common analysis of the broader political and security context, the humanitarian operating environment and an assessment of potential risks and benefits of specific integration arrangements, and these have been included in the newly issued IAP.

The provisions in the IAP for regular reviews of the impact of integration arrangements on humanitarian operations and to ensure that a framework is in place for engaging non-UN actors, including NGOs, in these processes must be fully implemented.

In particular, the following seven elements are required.

1. As indicated in the new IAP policy, there should be a collective ‘up-front’ analysis of existing and potential risk factors affecting humanitarian operations through a consultative process. This exercise should be built into the Strategic Assessment (SA) process and the conduct of Technical Assessment missions (TAMs), and key conclusions and recommendations should be reflected in Policy Committee submissions and reports of the Secretary General to the Security Council. The HCT should ensure it feeds into a joint process undertaken by the mission planners and the UNCT.<sup>20</sup>

To facilitate the inclusion in the process, Humanitarian Country Teams should initiate analysis prior to the Strategic Assessment, in order to ensure a comprehensive and well-reasoned assessment, which maximizes the potential benefits of integration for humanitarian operations, and manages / mitigates potential risks.

In no circumstances should structural integration be recommended until the risk assessment process is complete and, if structural integration is pursued, until risk mitigation measures are identified.

Some humanitarian organisations have additional development mandates and/or other contributions to the consolidation of peace. However, the humanitarian considerations

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<sup>19</sup> Secretary-General’s Decision No 2008/24

<sup>20</sup> The IAP indicates that the UN country team will engage with the humanitarian country team in the context of integrated assessment and planning.



presented herein require focused consideration by HCTs in order to ensure that explicitly humanitarian implications of approaches to integration are taken into account.

2. Proposals for safeguards, mitigation measures and monitoring mechanisms should also be developed at this stage.
3. HCTs should work with Integrated Mission Task Forces / Integrated Task Forces (IMTFs/ITFs) to ensure an examination of measures necessary to deliver on the obligations imposed by Paragraph i.(d), building on the analysis carried out at the SA stage are incorporated in the TORs for Technical Assessment Missions and reflected in recommendations.
4. The engagement of NGOs and other non-UN actors at all stages of the process is critical. The primary channel for such engagement is the Humanitarian Country Team and other co-ordination mechanisms led by the Humanitarian Coordinator. However, there is also a need to reach out to a broader range of humanitarian actors and other important stakeholders, including national NGOs and UNDP, who may not be represented on the HCT. Consideration should be given to engagement through in-country NGO consortia or representation fora. Integration arrangements and mission design, scope and activities may have a significant impact on non-UN humanitarian actors, whether or not they are formally part of the cluster approach or other UN-led (or co-led) coordination mechanisms, and whether or not they are UN implementing partners. Engagement of humanitarian actors at an early stage should also have the positive effect of increasing their ownership over and responsibility for the arrangements ultimately adopted.
5. An ad-hoc meeting of IASC Emergency Directors to analyse and endorse the proposals developed at country level may be a useful mechanism in cases where new missions are being deployed.
6. At country level, a mechanism should be in place for a regular review of risk factors in relation to humanitarian operations, and the linkage with integration arrangements and mission design and activities. This mechanism, in which the HC and HCT should play key roles, should include an examination of how decision-making processes within the mission and between the mission and the UNCT affect adherence to humanitarian principles and the implementation of humanitarian operations. It should identify and trigger any mitigating measures required to preserve the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action in the context of UN integration. Where possible, the review should also ideally be informed by perception studies which provide a more nuanced understanding of how both the mission and the range of humanitarian actors are perceived, although the availability of such studies should not be a determinative element.
7. As indicated in the IAP policy, the Integration Steering Group will act as a headquarters level dispute resolution mechanism to address instances when disputes arise over the interpretation or implementation of the policy. This may include when a common position is not reached on the nature, extent and potential impact of risks to humanitarian space, and consequently on the appropriate form of integration in a given context.