

## BEST PRACTICE LESSONS LEARNT: HOW THE EXIT INTERVIEW AND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT AT THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SUDAN IS BUILDING A KNOWLEDGE DATABASE

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### Abstract

The United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) operated in a vast, remote and difficult environment in the Republic of the Sudan from 2005 to 2011. The mandate of the mission was to ensure the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2005 was adhered to and that both sides to the Sudan conflict achieved the best outcomes. The issues affecting the western Darfur region are a separate matter and the African Union/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) mission deals with them. As far as information and knowledge management is concerned there were many initiatives to ensure that we could address potential risks that operating in the Sudan context presented. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the United Nations (UN) in general have embraced the concepts of Web 2.0 technology. Social networking and file sharing sites have become de facto systems for many UN bodies. The Public Information Office of UNMIS routinely used YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook to spread its information to the wider world. UNMIS had a high turnover of staff and for long periods there is no Best Practice officer based in UNMIS. To counter that trend it was decided to implement an oral history project consisting of videotaped exit interviews of departing staff. This project provided a wide range of best practice and lessons learnt material that will add value to the ongoing operations of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). It was necessary to develop audiovisual metadata, a keyword thesaurus, and video recording standards and guidelines as none previously existed for peacekeeping operations that could be applied in the field.

The United Nations (UN) has been 'fighting the peace' around the world since its beginnings in the 1940s. The first ever UN peacekeeping intervention was in the British mandated Palestine in May 1948 and has been there ever since. Generally United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) missions are acting upon the collective will of the member states of the UN to try to restore peace and stability in conflict areas. Set up in May 1948, the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) has military observers in the Middle East to monitor ceasefires, supervise armistice agreements, prevent isolated incidents from escalating, and assist other UN peacekeeping operations in the region to fulfill their respective mandates (UNDOF and UNIFIL). Since May 1948 there have been sixty-six peacekeeping operations around the world.<sup>83</sup> As of August 2011, DPKO supports fifteen peacekeeping operations globally plus the special political mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) which is fully directed and supported by DPKO. In Sudan and South Sudan in August 2011, the UN has three fully functioning missions and they are the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), and the African Union/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).<sup>84</sup>

In this paper we wish to share the work that was undertaken by staff at UNMIS and soon also to be continued in UNMISS as we transition to the new mission in Juba, South Sudan. Information management, with archiving being a major part of that, has been a great success in many ways at UNMIS during the period 2006–2011. It is our intention to highlight

83 See <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/peacekeeping.shtml> accessed 10 August 2011.

84 See <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/> for more updated and detailed background information on DPKO operations around the world.

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the project of exit interviewing which included creating an oral history of the mission and how that fits into the concepts of 'best practice' as defined by the UN and how it also requires specialist audiovisual expertise and how that subsequently relates to the UN's use of social media tools.<sup>85</sup>

## **I. Background information on UNAMIS, UNMIS, and UNAMID**

The Sudan, before South Sudan declared self independence on 9 July 2011, was Africa's largest country. Sudan is and was divided along lines of religion (70 percent Muslim, 25 percent animist, and 5 percent Christian), ethnicity (African and Arab origin), tribe, and economic activity (nomadic and sedentary). Since its independence in 1956, the country has seen constant civil wars; the deadliest conflicts being those between North and South 1956–1972 and 1983–2005, and, more recently, the conflict in Darfur. Over the years, there were many attempts by neighboring States, donors, and the parties themselves to bring peace. One such effort, begun in 1993, was a regional peace initiative under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).<sup>86</sup> The UN closely followed and supported the IGAD initiative over the years.

### **I.1. United Nations Advance Mission in Sudan (UNAMIS)**

To intensify the peace efforts and build on the momentum of the progress made by the Machakos Protocol signing on 20 July 2002 by the parties—including the signing of the Agreement on Wealth Sharing on 7 January 2004 and the Protocol on Power Sharing on 26 May 2004 at the IGAD-led talks—the UN Security Council established a special political mission, UNAMIS. The mission was mandated to facilitate contacts with the parties concerned and to prepare for the introduction of an envisaged UN peace support operation. The UN Secretary-General appointed Jan Pronk<sup>87</sup> as his Special Representative for the Sudan and head of UNAMIS. Pronk led UN peacemaking support to the IGAD-mediated talks on the North-South conflict, as well as to the African Union-mediated talks on the conflict in Darfur, a region in the western part of the Sudan.

### **I.2. Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)<sup>88</sup>**

On 9 January 2005, in an event that marked a turning point in the history of the Sudan, the Government of the Sudan and SPLM/A signed in Naivasha, Kenya, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA included agreements on outstanding issues remaining after the Machakos Protocol and had provisions on security arrangements, power-sharing in the capital of Khartoum, some autonomy for the south, and more equitable distribution of economic resources, including oil. While the parties established the unity of the Sudan as a priority under the agreement, they decided to set up a six and one-half year period during which interim institutions would govern the country and international monitoring mechanisms would be established.

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85 For a broad overview, analysis and personal reflections of peacekeeping and the influence of information management see T. Adami 'Future Perfect? Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding and Archives – the UN in Sudan' in *Journal of the Society of Archivists* Vol. 30, No.1 April 2009, pp3-26.

86 See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IGAD> accessed 19 August 2011.

87 See Jan Pronk's weblog page at <http://www.janpronk.nl/> and also for an interview with Jan Pronk see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJDNghp80JQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJDNghp80JQ) Pronk was asked to leave Sudan and UNMIS in controversial circumstances due to his use of a weblog where he made remarks about the Sudan Armed Forces seen by the Sudan government as 'unhelpful'.

88 For a brief overview see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comprehensive\\_Peace\\_Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comprehensive_Peace_Agreement) and also <http://unmis.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=515> both accessed 15 August 2011.

### 1.3. Darfur<sup>89</sup>

Even as the civil war in the south concluded with the signing of the CPA, conflict continued in the Darfur region. According to the UN Secretary-General, “a stable Sudan requires a peaceful Darfur.”<sup>90</sup> In this regard, it was essential that the work of the United Nations and the African Union in the Sudan be complementary. AMIS had enhanced its numbers in October 2004, bringing it to a total of 3,320 personnel, including 2,341 military personnel and 815 civilian police, as well as complementary civilian personnel. The mandate of the enhanced mission was to monitor and observe compliance with the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement signed in N’Djamena on 8 April 2004, and to contribute to a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

### 1.4. United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)<sup>91</sup>

On 24 March 2005, the UN Security Council established UNMIS. The Council decided that the tasks of UNMIS, among others, would be: to support implementation of the CPA; to facilitate and coordinate, within its capabilities and in its areas of deployment, the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons and humanitarian assistance; to assist the parties in the mine action sector; and to contribute towards international efforts to protect and promote human rights in the Sudan. The deployment of UNMIS military elements commenced, enabling the force headquarters in Khartoum and the Joint Monitoring Coordination Office in Juba to achieve an initial operating capability, but a number of factors resulted in delays in the deployment rate of some military and police elements. In the following months, UNMIS continued its deployment at a steady pace, albeit behind schedule, and assisted the parties in implementing the CPA and resolving ongoing conflicts. At the same time, the deployment of UN human rights monitors to Darfur accelerated. In a parallel development, on 28 April 2005, the AMIS force in Darfur was increased by the AU Peace and Security Council to a total authorized strength of 6,171 military personnel and 1,560 civilian police. By September 2006, UNMIS military and police components were close to full strength at 8,727 troops, 695 military observers, 186 staff officers, and 666 police officers.

### 1.5. African Union/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)<sup>92</sup>

African Union efforts to seek a solution to the crisis in Darfur culminated in the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) on 5 May 2006. The Secretary-General said that the DPA, signed after more than three years of conflict, had given hope that the parties might be prepared to lay down their weapons. At the same time, he noted that the Agreement still faced formidable challenges. Following the signing of the Agreement, there was an escalation of clashes between those who supported it and those who did not. On 31 August 2006, the Security Council decided to expand the UNMIS mandate to include its deployment to Darfur, without prejudice to the mission’s existing mandate and operations. The Council invited the consent of the Sudanese Government of National Unity, called on Member States to ensure expeditious deployment and requested the Secretary-General to ensure additional capabilities to enable UNMIS to deploy in Darfur.

89 For further context and background on the Darfur conflict see the Int’l Crisis Group (ICG) page at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/key-issues/preventing-implosion-in-sudan.aspx> or see the history.com page at <http://www.history.com/topics/darfur-conflict> or the brief overview on the Wikipedia.com page at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darfur\\_conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darfur_conflict) all accessed 16 August 2011.

90 See <http://www.stimson.org/spotlight/finally-a-un-mission-in-darfur-the-first-step-in-a-long-difficult-journey/> also <http://web.peaceops.com/archives/1042> and the Security Council Report of the 6589<sup>th</sup> SC meeting 22 July 2011 <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Sudan%20SPV%206589.pdf>.

91 See <http://unmis.unmissions.org/> accessed 14 August 2011.

92 See <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unamid/index.shtml> accessed 14 August 2011.

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In the following months, however, UNMIS was not able to deploy to Darfur due to the Government of the Sudan's steadfast opposition to a peacekeeping operation undertaken solely by the United Nations. The UN then embarked on an alternative, innovative approach of trying to stabilize the region through the phased strengthening of AMIS, before transfer of authority to a joint AU/UN peacekeeping operation. Following prolonged and intensive negotiations with the Government of the Sudan and significant international pressure, the Government accepted peacekeeping operation in Darfur. On 31 July 2007, the Security Council authorized the establishment of the UNAMID.<sup>93</sup>

### **1.6. Completion of mandate – UNMIS, July 2011**

The Mission had focused on the parties' outstanding commitments, including the redeployment of forces, a resolution of the dispute over the oil-rich Abyei region, and preparations for national elections in 2010 and the referendums in 2011, which would decide the fate of Southern Sudan. The referendum to determine the status of Southern Sudan was held on schedule in January 2011, with the overwhelming majority, 98.83% of participants, voting for independence. The Secretary-General welcomed the announcement of the final results, stating that they were reflective of the will of the people of southern Sudan.

On 9 July 2011, the mandate of UNMIS ended following the completion of the six-and-a-half-year interim period set up by the Government of Sudan and SPLM during the signing of the CPA on 9 Jan 2005. On 31 May 2011, the Secretary-General transmitted a letter from the Government of Sudan (GoS) to the Security Council announcing the Government of Sudan's decision to terminate the presence of UNMIS as of 9 July 2011.

### **1.7. UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)**

The Security Council established as of 10 July 2011 UNMISS for an initial period of one year. UNMISS was mandated to consolidate peace and security, and to help establish the conditions for development with a view to strengthening the capacity of the Government of the Republic of South Sudan to govern effectively and democratically and establish good relations with its neighbors. As of early 2012 UNMISS was to establish offices in all ten state capitals and also set-up a presence at designated county level locations referred to as County Support Bases (CSB).

### **1.8. UN Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA)**

A separate referendum to determine whether the future of the area of Abyei lies in northern or southern Sudan was not held in January 2011 as originally planned, as a result of a failure to establish a referendum commission and lack of agreement on who could vote. Renewed fighting broke out in the area at the beginning of March 2011, driving an estimated 20,000 people from their homes, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The Security Council, by its *resolution 1990* of 27 June 2011, responded to the situation in Sudan's Abyei region by establishing UNISFA. The Security Council was deeply concerned by the violence, escalating tensions, and population displacement. The operation will monitor the flashpoint border between north and south, and is authorized to use force in protecting civilians and humanitarian workers in Abyei.

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93 For more detailed background on the Darfur situation see Ademola Abass, Professor of Law, Brunel University, London, "The United Nations, the African Union and the Darfur Crisis: of Apology and Utopia." *Netherlands International Law Review*, LIV: 415-440, 2007, 417.

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## 2. The UN and social media networks

On 12 January 2010, Haiti suffered a disaster of unparalleled magnitude.<sup>94</sup> The earthquake that day killed over two hundred thousand people; more than three hundred thousand were injured and a staggering 2.3 million—nearly one quarter of the population—were displaced. The Government lost thousands of civil servants and much of its key infrastructure was destroyed. One hundred and two United Nations staff members perished and many more suffered terrible personal losses. All communication means were broken. It was impossible to fully realize who was missing under the ruins and who was even out of the country. Gathering and disseminating information to staff in Haiti or in their homes on the other side of the globe would have been an impossible task if it was not for social networks that offered the only means of disseminating information to thousands of staff members around the globe without having to target them individually.

The United Nations realized the new role that social networks can play in peacekeeping and since then started taking social networks more seriously. Now almost all United Nations agencies have created official sites on Facebook, Flickr and Twitter with purposes that vary from funding activities and event planning to disseminating information and keeping communication channels open with its staff around the globe. The United Nations is also continuing with an ambitious programme to create its own social network “Peacekeeping Unite,” a network that will offer powerful social and professional means of communication between the peacekeeping workers. On 13 September 2011 there was what the UN called a “live global conversation event.” The Secretary-General was to publicly take questions from around the world. “Questions from the public will be collected through Twitter (using the hashtag #asktheSG). Questions are accepted in all six official UN languages plus Portuguese and Kiswahili. Questions in Chinese may also be posted on Weibo. There are no restrictions on subject matter.”<sup>95</sup> There have also been several Internet social media discussions between senior DPKO/DFS officials and field staff that allowed staff to put questions to senior management on any topic.

In Short the United Nations has boarded the social networking train and is now seeking to maximize the benefits. This approach can be seen when you search social networking sites for United Nations material. You will find many unofficial sites but you can also find official United Nations news sites like “United Nations News Center” and “United Nations Information Center” on Facebook. You can also find pages with stunning photographs and videos about the myriad UN global operations in Facebook on “United Nations Photo” or on the “United Nations Channel” on YouTube, which includes videos on a wide range of global topics including current news, peace and security, social and economic development, human rights, climate change, and more. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shares its photographs on Flickr at “UNDP Photostream.” The UN Secretary-General’s Spokesperson has a Twitter account to keep his followers and one presumes the media informed. At UNMIS the Public Information Office used YouTube to upload and share its videos on Sudan and the photographs taken by PIO staff were included in the previously mentioned UN photo page on Facebook.

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94 See <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/recenteqsww/Quakes/us2010rja6.php> for detail about the Haiti earthquake of January 2010. Accessed 18 August 2011.

95 See the UN iSeek and Facebook sites at <https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=260677160618578> and [http://iseek.un.org/webpgdept2001\\_57.asp](http://iseek.un.org/webpgdept2001_57.asp) both accessed 29 August 2011.

Figure 1: Selection of UN social media sites.<sup>96</sup>

UN OFFICE	SOCIAL MEDIA SITES
<p>DPKO – UN Dept of Peacekeeping Operations  <a href="http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/">www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/</a></p>	<p>Facebook : DPKO support for UN staff in Haiti – <a href="http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=158405560901077#!/minustahsupport">http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=158405560901077#!/minustahsupport</a>            Youtube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/unitednations#p/c/49CE20981558F582">http://www.youtube.com/unitednations#p/c/49CE20981558F582</a>            Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/UNPeacekeeping">http://twitter.com/#!/UNPeacekeeping</a>            Picasa: <a href="http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/idredir%3Funame%3Djunjimorales%26target%3DPHOTO%">http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/idredir%3Funame%3Djunjimorales%26target%3DPHOTO%</a></p>
<p>United Nations &amp; Secretary-General  <a href="http://www.un.org">www.un.org</a></p>	<p>Hi5: <a href="http://www.hi5.com/friend/group/228387--United%2BNations--front-html">http://www.hi5.com/friend/group/228387--United%2BNations--front-html</a>            Flickr: <a href="http://www.flickr.com/groups/unheadquarters/">http://www.flickr.com/groups/unheadquarters/</a> Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/UN_asktheSG">http://twitter.com/#!/UN_asktheSG</a>            Myspace: <a href="http://www.myspace.com/un_unitednations">http://www.myspace.com/un_unitednations</a> Tumblr: <a href="http://united_nations.tumblr.com">http://united_nations.tumblr.com</a>            LinkedIn: <a href="http://www.linkedin.com/company/1860?trk=NUS_CMPY_FOL-nhre">http://www.linkedin.com/company/1860?trk=NUS_CMPY_FOL-nhre</a>            Blogs: <a href="http://www.undispatch.com">http://www.undispatch.com</a> <a href="http://www.unfoundation.org/blog-multimedia/">http://www.unfoundation.org/blog-multimedia/</a> <a href="http://www.unwire.org/">http://www.unwire.org/</a>            UN Multimedia News Centre: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/un-photo#!/UN.News.Centre">http://www.facebook.com/un-photo#!/UN.News.Centre</a>            Youtube UN News: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/unphoto#!/UN.News.Centre?sk=app_57675755167">http://www.facebook.com/unphoto#!/UN.News.Centre?sk=app_57675755167</a>            Facebook UN Photo: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/unphoto">http://www.facebook.com/unphoto</a> &amp; / unwebcasts            Secretary-General's webcasts: <a href="http://www.un.org/webcast/sg.html">http://www.un.org/webcast/sg.html</a> livestream: <a href="http://www.livestream.com/unitednations">http://www.livestream.com/unitednations</a>            S-G's Spokesperson: <a href="https://twitter.com/#!/UN_Spokesperson">https://twitter.com/#!/UN_Spokesperson</a>            Weibo: <a href="http://www.weibo.com/UN">http://www.weibo.com/UN</a> [Chinese]</p>
<p>UNMIS – Misión is Sudan UNAMID – African Union / UN Hybrid Misión in Darfur  <a href="http://unmis.unmissions.org/">unmis.unmissions.org/</a>  <a href="http://unamid.unmissions.org/">unamid.unmissions.org/</a></p>	<p>UNMIS at LinkedIn: <a href="http://www.linkedin.com/groupsDirectory?itemaction=mclk&amp;anetid=149904&amp;impid=&amp;pgkey=anet_search_results&amp;actpref=anetsrch_name&amp;trk=anetsrch_name&amp;goback=gdr_1313474981686_1">http://www.linkedin.com/groupsDirectory?itemaction=mclk&amp;anetid=149904&amp;impid=&amp;pgkey=anet_search_results&amp;actpref=anetsrch_name&amp;trk=anetsrch_name&amp;goback=gdr_1313474981686_1</a>            UNMIS on Youtube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/unmistv">http://www.youtube.com/unmistv</a>            UNAMID at Flickr: <a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/unamid-photo/">http://www.flickr.com/photos/unamid-photo/</a> UNAMID at Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/UN_AUinDarfur">http://twitter.com/#!/UN_AUinDarfur</a>            UNAMID at Facebook: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/UNAMID">http://www.facebook.com/UNAMID</a></p>

96 This table is a very small selection of the myriad UN and UN related social media sites available on the Internet. All sites accessed 16 August 2011.

UN OFFICE	SOCIAL MEDIA SITES
<p>UNDP – UN Development Programme</p> <p><a href="http://www.undp.org">www.undp.org</a></p>	<p>Hi5: <a href="http://www.hi5.com/friend/group/3579364--US%2BCommittee%2Bfor%2Bthe%2BUNDP%2B%2528UND--front-html">http://www.hi5.com/friend/group/3579364--US%2BCommittee%2Bfor%2Bthe%2BUNDP%2B%2528UND--front-html</a></p> <p>Linkedin : <a href="http://www.linkedin.com/groupsDirectory?itemaction=mclk&amp;anetid=1011747&amp;impid=&amp;pgkey=anet_search_results&amp;actpref=anetsrch_name&amp;trk=anetsrch_name&amp;goback=.gdr_1313474981686_1.gdr_1313474981688_1">http://www.linkedin.com/groupsDirectory?itemaction=mclk&amp;anetid=1011747&amp;impid=&amp;pgkey=anet_search_results&amp;actpref=anetsrch_name&amp;trk=anetsrch_name&amp;goback=.gdr_1313474981686_1.gdr_1313474981688_1</a></p> <p>Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/UNDP">http://twitter.com/#!/UNDP</a></p> <p>Facebook: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/undp">http://www.facebook.com/undp</a></p> <p>Flickr: <a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/unitednationsdevelopmentprogramme/">http://www.flickr.com/photos/unitednationsdevelopmentprogramme/</a></p>
<p>OCHA – Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs <a href="http://www.unocha.org/">http://www.unocha.org/</a></p> <p>OHCHR – High Commissioner for Human Rights <a href="http://www.ohchr.org">http://www.ohchr.org</a></p> <p>UNHCR – High Commissioner for Refugees <a href="http://www.unhcr.org">http://www.unhcr.org</a></p>	<p>Facebook: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/UNOCHA">http://www.facebook.com/UNOCHA</a> and <a href="http://www.facebook.com/reliefweb">http://www.facebook.com/reliefweb</a></p> <p>Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/unocha">http://twitter.com/#!/unocha</a> Youtube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/users/ochafilms">http://www.youtube.com/users/ochafilms</a></p> <p>Facebook: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/unitednationshumanrights">http://www.facebook.com/unitednationshumanrights</a></p> <p>Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/unrightswire">http://twitter.com/#!/unrightswire</a> and <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/UN_NGO">http://twitter.com/#!/UN_NGO</a></p> <p>Flickr: <a href="http://www.flickr.com/people/unhcr/">http://www.flickr.com/people/unhcr/</a></p> <p>Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/UNRefugeeAgency">http://twitter.com/UNRefugeeAgency</a></p> <p>Facebook: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/UNREFUGEES">https://www.facebook.com/UNREFUGEES</a> LinkedIn UNHCR ‘BlueKey’ Campaign: <a href="http://www.linkedin.com/groupRegistration?gid=3794019&amp;csrfToken=ajax%25">http://www.linkedin.com/groupRegistration?gid=3794019&amp;csrfToken=ajax%</a></p>
<p>UNESCO – UN Education, Scientific &amp; Cultural Org</p> <p><a href="http://www.unesco.org">www.unesco.org</a></p>	<p>Flickr: many groups such as the world heritage day: <a href="http://www.flickr.com/groups/unesco/">http://www.flickr.com/groups/unesco/</a></p> <p>Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/unescoNOW">http://twitter.com/#!/unescoNOW</a></p> <p>Linkedin UNESCO’s profile: <a href="http://www.linkedin.com/company/166588?trk=NUS_CMPY_FOL-nhre">http://www.linkedin.com/company/166588?trk=NUS_CMPY_FOL-nhre</a></p> <p>Scribd: <a href="http://www.scribd.com/unicef">http://www.scribd.com/unicef</a></p> <p>Youtube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/unesco">http://www.youtube.com/unesco</a></p>
<p>UNICEF – UN International Children’s Fund</p> <p><a href="http://www.unicef.org">www.unicef.org</a></p>	<p>Hi5: <a href="http://www.hi5.com/friend/group/1011658--UNICEF%2Bfor%2Bthe%2BChildren--front-html">http://www.hi5.com/friend/group/1011658--UNICEF%2Bfor%2Bthe%2BChildren--front-html</a></p> <p>Flickr: UNICEF UK : <a href="http://www.flickr.com/groups/unicef_uk/">http://www.flickr.com/groups/unicef_uk/</a></p> <p>Linkedin: <a href="http://www.linkedin.com/groups/UNICEF-Supporters-21816?itemaction=mclk&amp;anetid=21816&amp;impid=&amp;pgkey=anet_search_results&amp;actpref=anetsrch_name&amp;trk=anetsrch_name&amp;goback=.gdr_1313474981692_1">http://www.linkedin.com/groups/UNICEF-Supporters-21816?itemaction=mclk&amp;anetid=21816&amp;impid=&amp;pgkey=anet_search_results&amp;actpref=anetsrch_name&amp;trk=anetsrch_name&amp;goback=.gdr_1313474981692_1</a></p> <p>Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/UNICEF">http://twitter.com/#!/UNICEF</a></p> <p>Youtube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/unicef">http://www.youtube.com/unicef</a></p> <p>Facebook: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/unicef">http://www.facebook.com/unicef</a></p> <p>Myspace: <a href="http://www.myspace.com/unicef">http://www.myspace.com/unicef</a></p> <p>UNICEF podcasts: <a href="http://www.odeo.com/channel/7933/view">http://www.odeo.com/channel/7933/view</a></p>

UN OFFICE	SOCIAL MEDIA SITES
<p>WFP – World Food Programme FAO – Food &amp; Agriculture Organization</p> <p><a href="http://www.wfp.org">www.wfp.org</a> <a href="http://www.fao.org">www.fao.org</a></p>	<p>Flickr FAO <a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/faonews/collections/">http://www.flickr.com/photos/faonews/collections/</a> Twitter <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/FAOnews">http://twitter.com/#!/FAOnews</a> Youtube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/user/FAOVideo">http://www.youtube.com/user/FAOVideo</a> Twitter WFP: <a href="http://twitter.com/#!/WFP">http://twitter.com/#!/WFP</a> Facebook FAO: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Food-and-Agriculture-Organization-of-the-United-Nations-FAO/46370758585?ref=mf">http://www.facebook.com/pages/Food-and-Agriculture-Organization-of-the-United-Nations-FAO/46370758585?ref=mf</a> Flickr:WFP USA <a href="http://www.linkedin.com/groups/World-Food-Program-USA-734147?itemaction=mclk&amp;anetid=734147&amp;impid=&amp;pgkey=anet_search_results&amp;actpref=anetsrch_name&amp;trk=anetsrch_name&amp;goback=gdr_1313474981692_1_gdr_1313474981694_1">http://www.linkedin.com/groups/World-Food-Program-USA-734147?itemaction=mclk&amp;anetid=734147&amp;impid=&amp;pgkey=anet_search_results&amp;actpref=anetsrch_name&amp;trk=anetsrch_name&amp;goback=gdr_1313474981692_1_gdr_1313474981694_1</a> Youtube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/user/Worldfoodprogram">http://www.youtube.com/user/Worldfoodprogram</a> Facebook WFP: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/worldfood-programme">http://www.facebook.com/pages/worldfood-programme</a></p>
<p>UN Careers &amp; Recruitment</p> <p><a href="https://careers.un.org/lbw/Home.aspx">https://careers.un.org/lbw/Home.aspx</a></p>	<p>Facebook: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/UN.careers">http://www.facebook.com/UN.careers</a> Twitter: <a href="http://twitter.com/un_careers">http://twitter.com/un_careers</a> Youtube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/user/unitednations?blend=3&amp;ob=4">http://www.youtube.com/user/unitednations?blend=3&amp;ob=4</a> Linkedin: <a href="http://www.linkedin.com/groups/United-Nations-Careers-3781413?mostPopular&amp;gid=3781413">http://www.linkedin.com/groups/United-Nations-Careers-3781413?mostPopular&amp;gid=3781413</a></p>
<p>UN &amp; related blogs</p>	<p>UN Dag Hammarskjold Library blog – <a href="http://unhq-appspub-01.un.org/lib/dhlrefweblog.nsf">http://unhq-appspub-01.un.org/lib/dhlrefweblog.nsf</a> UN Watch – NGO based in Geneva <a href="http://blog.unwatch.org/">http://blog.unwatch.org/</a> UN Dispatch – news and commentary <a href="http://www.undispatch.com/">http://www.undispatch.com/</a> UN Foundation – blogspot, videocasts &amp; podcasts <a href="http://www.unfoundation.org/blog-multimedia/">http://www.unfoundation.org/blog-multimedia/</a> UN Truth – journalist Marion Houk <a href="http://un-truth.com/">http://un-truth.com/</a> Enough Project – End Genocide <a href="http://www.enoughproject.org/blog_posts/United%2BNations">http://www.enoughproject.org/blog_posts/United%2BNations</a> Refugees International – <a href="http://www.refugeesinternational.org/blog">http://www.refugeesinternational.org/blog</a> UNESCO – <a href="http://unescomscience.blogspot.com/">http://unescomscience.blogspot.com/</a> Turtle Bay Foreign Policy – journalist Colum Lynch – <a href="http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/">http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/</a></p>

### 3. Best practices in the UN and DPKO

In general a best practice is a way of doing things that has proven its effectiveness in one situation and may have applicability in another situation. Lessons Identified are, literally, lessons that have been identified from past actions, projects, and operations. The lessons can be positive, for example the identification of a good practice or innovative approach that is worth repeating, or the lesson can be negative, for example an adverse practice or experience that should be avoided or changed. In a peacekeeping environment the Best Practices staff assists in the planning, conduct, management and support of peacekeeping operations by learning from experience, problem solving, and transferring best practices in United Nations peacekeeping. The overall goal is to develop and support a culture of best practices in United Nations peacekeeping by helping to establish and develop the mechanisms and working habits to share knowledge. To this end, the best practices staff undertakes a broad range of activities and work, including knowledge management, policy analysis and development, and lessons learned. Best

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practice staff support operational arms of the departments through the development of operational policy materials and, in particular, on thematic issues such as gender, HIV/AIDS, civil affairs, child protection, and planning.

Within the best practice methodological framework it is important to be clear with distinctions on the products they offer to staff serving in the field:

1. A 'Policy Directive' provides an authoritative statement of institutional and management expectations, parameters and broad methods for handling important issues or activities in UN peace operations. Policies have an expectation of compliance.
2. A 'Standard Operating Procedure' (SOP) is a standing instruction, often based on best practice, that provides DPKO/DFS staff with guidance on how to implement a specific task, process or activity, or to achieve a desired result. Compliance is expected.
3. A 'Manual' is a guidance publication, usually on a technical subject, that may contain an omnibus collection of policies, SOPs, and/or guidelines on subjects that can be logically grouped. Compliance is expected.
4. 'Guidelines' are suggested courses of action, recommendations, principles or considerations that provide guidance to staff on how to implement an activity or handle an issue. Compliance is strongly recommended.

Guidance materials are official DPKO/DFS policies, procedures, manuals, and guidelines. These documents reflect best practices that have been validated through the guidance development process, and represent the official DPKO/DFS approach to particular activities. They carry an expectation of compliance.

Best practices materials refer to After Action Reviews, End of Assignment Reports, Surveys of Practice, and Handover Notes. These documents contain analysis from the field on what works well or could be improved. Best practices materials reflect the personal views of, and are drafted by, field staff, often with the assistance of Best Practices Officers, to transmit their lessons and best practices to colleagues in their mission or other missions, as well as to provide field inputs to policy-makers at Headquarters. The practices they suggest reflect personal views on what works well and what does not. These suggestions have not yet been validated and converted into official guidance, and thus do not carry any expectation of compliance. For this reason, they do not require clearance by senior management in missions or at Headquarters. As a complement to existing guidance, staff members are nevertheless encouraged to consult the best practices library to benefit from their colleagues' experience.<sup>97</sup>

The best practice reporting tools that have been developed to assist in achieving the best practices objectives are:

1. After Action Reviews: AAR's are where the user will use a standard structure that resembles how we learn from experiences by specifying the objectives of the action and its expected outcomes, then explain what went well and what could have been done better.
2. Hand-over notes: The purpose of hand-over notes is to provide the staff member's successor with key knowledge and information regarding the position so that the transition period is as short and smooth as possible. They ensure a degree of business continuity.
3. End-Of-Assignment Report: EOA's are assessments by senior mission staff of the implementation of their mandates. EOA's are distinct from Hand-over Notes, which are strictly factual.

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97 Accessed on 17 August 2011 from the Best Practice UN Intranet page at <http://intranet.dpkco.un.org/dpkco/pages/WebPageDetail.aspx?pageid=29>

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#### 4. Exit interviews

The UN has had the concept of exit interviews as part of its staff departure process for some time. The Human Resource (HR) section of the organization normally conducts them. There is an on-line exit interview that departing staff should do but it is voluntary and the questions relate purely to the interactions staff had with the HR section and how they felt the conditions of service related to their time with the organization. This interview is very narrow in focus and cannot be used to delve into broader issues such as effectiveness of functional strategies in the field in a peacekeeping operation. The UN traditionally used other best practices tools to get that sort of data. The use of AAR reports and EOA forms provided quite a bit of useable data to incoming staff. UNMIS adopted the in-person exit interview approach to add to this exiting and growing body of knowledge. Its purpose was to supplement the existing tools in place.

In the broad sense, exit interviews are defined as:

“...an interview conducted by an employer of a departing employee. They are generally conducted by a relatively neutral party, such as a human resources staff member, so that the employee will be more inclined to be candid, as opposed to worrying about burning bridges. Exit interviews are conducted by paper and pencil forms, telephone interviews, in-person meetings or online through exit interview management systems. Some companies opt to employ a third party to conduct the interviews and provide feedback.”<sup>98</sup>

The UN has adopted a variety of these methodologies to conduct the interviews and the face-to-face version we adopted has been a new direction at UNMIS. These interviews are recorded on video and captured into the recordkeeping system. We have adapted the UN metadata for audiovisual material in the capture process and we use a thesaurus to index the interviews.

Criticisms of exit interviews range from comments that they only capture disgruntled employees, skewed or negative responses, that employees are reluctant to be open and honest so as not to burn bridges, that they offer no tangible benefit to the departing staff, that it is difficult to synthesise the responses into actionable projects or programmes, and that they are time consuming. Paper- or form-based interviews are said to be easy to administer but difficult to compile and the in-person approach is time consuming and it is at times difficult to get staff to openly critique aspects of their employment.

The advantages and disadvantages of the four approaches to administer the interviews are usually defined as being:

1. Paper form – easy to administer, low cost, low participation of 25 percent to 35 percent, difficult to compile/track;
2. Telephone – can probe, can track responses, time consuming, expensive;
3. In-person – personal touch, can probe, difficult to get employees to critique, need to compile/track, time consuming; and
4. Technology based – high participation 65 percent-plus, inflexible in terms of questions and probing, more honest feedback, compiling automatic, easy reporting, reasonably priced.

None seem to be universally accepted as the ideal approach but a combination might be the best solution.

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<sup>98</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exit\\_interview](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exit_interview) accessed 19 July 2011

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Once it has been decided to adopt the exit interview when staff members leave the organization, it should be kept in mind that several ongoing issues need to be regularly reviewed and, if necessary, addressed:

1. It goes without saying that employees who are leaving can be a great source of information. In the knowledge management context the exit interviews can add to the organization's knowledge and also gather ideas to improve productivity, act as an early-warning risk-management tool for sexual harassment and violence issues, and measure the success of diversity initiatives. The gathered data needs to be acted upon otherwise the process itself becomes redundant. Therefore, senior management buy-in and full endorsement of the interview process and subsequent action is critical or no real value is added to the knowledge base of an organization.
2. In selecting a methodological approach it is important to clearly understand the advantages and drawbacks of each. Defining the acceptable drawbacks and what the minimum level of acceptable advantages should be is necessary.
3. Conduct exit interviews as near to the termination date as possible and during any checkout procedure. If the interview is mandatory and required as a trigger for final benefits to be released then this will provide highest participation rate and possibly the most honest feedback. Use a neutral and preferably non-personnel human resources staff to conduct the interviews.
4. If you cannot make the interview mandatory set an initial goal of 50-60% for the exit interview participation rate by selecting a defined target group of employees. Any participation rate of less than 50% is not ideal and cannot give valid or comprehensive data for analysis.
5. Use both quantitative (rated) and qualitative (open-ended) questions. The quantitative questions will allow you to analyze the data. The qualitative questions will give meaning to the data. Review the questions at regular intervals based on quality of responses and extracted data. Relevance of the questions may change overtime.
6. Do not ask too few or too many questions. Too few and the employee may feel that you do not care; too many and the employees may not complete it or give hasty responses.
7. Compile data from exit interviews into a spreadsheet, database or exit-interview management system to identify trends across the organization. Collected data should be presented in a report format with executive summary for managers to digest.
8. Reports should have parsed data by meaningful demographics to isolate the unique issues and opportunities for different departments, divisions, or job groups.
9. For large organizations, add additional demographics such as gender, race, age range, length of service, and performance rating to further identify organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
10. Analyze the data not only to create retention strategies based on the issues identified but also to improve service delivery or effectiveness of functional operations.
11. Capture the interviews into a recordkeeping system for future access to incoming employees. The answers, responses, and synthesised data should be freely available to new staff as a way of adapting to the organizational culture and becoming familiar with former staff opinions.
12. Use a standardized tagging system and structured language to log the interviews according to responses given by the staff.
13. Regularly review the entire methodology including the questions asked to ensure the process is still achieving its stated goal of improving how the organization does its core business.

Selection of questions to be asked is a contentious issue in the literature on exit interview strategy but most commentators agree that it is best to ask open-ended questions that do not allow for 'yes' or 'no' answers. The questions asked during the interview are the single most important aspect of the exit interview process. The quality and quantity of responses depends upon the questions and the way the questions are posed during the course of the interview. In

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the UNMIS interview process we ask the following questions. These questions have remained constant since the start of the project despite the regular reviews undertaken.

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself and can you please tell us your duty station and functions while at UNMIS?
2. Did you undertake any kind of national preparation before you came to the Mission?
3. On arrival at UNMIS were your duties and functions well defined and were you provided with any handover notes?
4. What was most rewarding and most challenging about your work at UNMIS?
5. With the benefit of hindsight, what would you say needs improvement or was done well at UNMIS?
6. Which PKO's have you worked at before and when? If you have prior experience with DPKO, how does UNMIS generally compare to the other missions in terms of conditions of service, quality of life and satisfaction of the role you fulfilled?
7. Did you feel that you had the opportunity and full support to positively contribute to the mandate of the mission? Where you able to participate in the training programme at UNMIS?
8. Did you make use of any of the staff counseling and welfare, organized staff activities or medical services and how would you rate those support services?
9. Overall was your time with UNMIS a positive experience and could you recommend such an experience to anyone else? (*Military and Police*) How will you give your impressions or experiences to other national colleagues if they come to serve in UNMIS?
10. Did you write any handover or end of assignment report? What made you leave UNMIS?
11. What were your general impressions of Sudan and is there anything else you wish to add?

Through the use of this set of questions we feel we can identify if there is an issue with pre-deployment to the mission, and whether the induction and initial phase at the mission are productive. We can identify what makes staff separate from the mission and whether they were part of the best practice process on checkout, as well as what they felt about their ability to perform duties and the support of supervisors and managers. There is also a consent form that all participants complete where we capture further metadata that links the recorded interview with data such as gender, nationality, office location, staff type and grade, length of service, various dates, and an acknowledgement that the interview may one day become a public record of the UN archives.

From our perspective we feel this exit interview fits very well into the best practice framework of the UN. As previously explained the best practice concept of the UN falls into the framework of the 'best practice toolkit'. The toolkit has several tools that allow for capture of staff knowledge through crowdsourcing data with products such as 'end of assignment reports' or 'hand-over notes' and by making available online SOP's and guidance material. The exit interview is an additional aspect to all of these products and does not make any other product obsolete.

It has always been the case that managers of information systems used a form of standardized metadata to categorise the information they maintained. The metadata aided access to the information. "[Records managers] have always captured metadata about their organizations' records in their records systems and related tools"<sup>99</sup> but we needed to review the current schema available as far as audiovisual records were concerned. We had to be able to run a report from the recordkeeping system that allowed for the quick provision of summary infor-

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99 W. Duff and S. McKemmish 'Metadata and ISO 9000 Compliance' in *The Information Management Journal*, January 2000, pp.4-16.

mation with regard to nationality, gender, location and staff type, functional area of employment, and major areas of concern in their responses. This metadata applied to the records was the most effective way to be able to extract data from the recorded interviews.

Figure 2: Synopsis of interviews conducted showing selected data such as nationality in order of top 20 numbers and staff types interviewed.

<b>NATIONALITY<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Staff Total and Types</b>	<b>Gender Ratio (M/F) and Main Issues Raised during the Interview<sup>2</sup></b>
SUDAN	78 - 3 national volunteers, 75 national staff or national professional officers	Male 54 / Female 24. Premature termination of contracts, transition period
NEPAL	30 - 1 Civilian Int'l, 5 UNV's, 3 Military, 21 Police	M29 / F1. Administration, security, infrastructure, R&R, language
BANGLADESH	28 - 1 Civilian Int'l, 4 UNV's, 16 Military, 7 Police	M27 / F1. Supply, communications, R&R, illiteracy, IDP's
INDIA	26 - 1 UNV, 11 Military, 13 Police, 1 Contractor	M25 / F1. Infrastructure, flight movements, human resources
PHILIPPINES	25 - 7 UNV's, 1 Military, 17 Police	M17 / F8. UNMO patrols and UNPOL call locations, training, mandate, medical
UGANDA	24 - 9 UNV's, 4 Military, 11 Police	M9 / F15. Discipline & conduct, audit, logistical & comms support, tribalism
CANADA	23 - 2 Civilian Int'l, 1 UNV, 20 Military	M21 / F2. Induction training waste of time, bureaucracy
JORDAN	23 - 8 Military, 15 Police	M23 / F0. Language, communication, transport & vehicles
PAKISTAN	20 - 1 Civilian Int'l, 7 UNV's, 10 Military, 2 Police	M20 / F0. Communications, religion, transport & aviation, fighting, information
SRI LANKA	20 - 1 Civilian Int'l, 7 Military, 12 Police	M20 / F0. Language, medical, welfare, culture
AUSTRALIA	19 - 1 Civilian Int'l, 15 Military, 3 Police	M13 / F6. Induction training waste of time, bureaucracy, accommodation, information
ZIMBABWEA	18 - 1 Civilian Int'l, 1 UNV's, 1 Military, 15 Police	M12 / F6. empowerment of women, communications, gender
SIERRA LEONE	17 - 1 Civilian Int'l, 14 UNV's, 2 Military	M17 / F0. Transportation and vehicles, rainy season

<b>NATIONALITY<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Staff Total and Types</b>	<b>Gender Ratio (M/F) and Main Issues Raised during the Interview<sup>2</sup></b>
NETHERLANDS	16 - 6 Military 10 Police	M14 / F2. Induction training waste of time, bureaucracy
RWANDA	16 - 1 UNV, 9 Military, 6 Police	M16 / F0. Induction training, religion, culture, climate
BRAZIL	15 - 1 UNV, 1 Police, 13 Military	M14 / F1. Bureaucracy, induction, culture, medical, climate
SWEDEN	15 - 2 Civilian int'l, 3 UNV's, 3 Military, 7 Police	M11 / F4. Information, GIS, transport
GAMBIA	14 - 14 Police	M13 / F1. Personnel, culture, security
KENYA	14 - 5 Civilian Int'l, 8 UNV's, 1 Police	M9 / F5. Personnel, training, infrastructure, accommodation, culture
GERMANY	13 - 1 Civilian Int'l, 12 Military, 0 Police	M13 / F0. Induction training waste of time, bureaucracy
	<b>Total interviews of the 'top 20' nationalities 450 out of total of 688</b>	<b>Overall ratio male to female – 82% to 18% (564 males to 124 females)</b>

**Note 1 on Locations:** HQ was in Khartoum. The Sector offices include those in Team Sites. UNMIS had 6 Sectors each with a HQ office. Sector I – Juba, II – Malakal, III – Wau, IV – Ed Damazin, V – Kadugli, VI – Abyei and LogBase was in El Obeid. Each Sector had a number of smaller Team Sites used by UNMO's and UNPOL staff as well as human and civil rights and other substantive staff. 34 UNMIS office locations were covered in the interviews.

**Note 2 on Locations:** The highest number of interviews from HQ, LogBase and Sector Offices (in reverse order): Khartoum 162, Juba 101, Wau 41, Malakal 37, Ed Damazin 30, Abyei 28, Kadugli 27, El Obeid 7.

The highest number of interviews from Team Sites (in reverse order): Rumbek 31, Bentiu 29, Aweil 28, Bor 20, Yambio & Torit 16, Nassir 14, Dilling, Maridi & Melut 12, Yei 10, Kauda 9, Raja 8, Kurmuk & Warrap 7.

**Most commonly raised issues at check-out:** 1. the checkout process; 2. Induction training; 3. Information flow; 4. the transition period; 5. transportation, flight schedule, and cancellation; 6. accommodation; 7. bureaucracy; and 8. premature termination of contracts.

#### Footnotes

1 Total of 84 nationalities interviewed over a period of 10 months.

2 See notes at bottom of table regarding issues of concern raised by participants.

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## 4.1 Enhancing knowledge management?

Much has been written about the concept of knowledge management. For the sake of brevity in this discussion, it is the concept of harnessing, as far as possible, the intangible aspects of an organization's knowledge base, i.e., the accumulated knowledge of staff gained through the active performance of their functions and duties overtime. Knowledge management is about systems and technologies. It is about people and learning organizations. It involves processes, methods, and technique. It is about managing knowledge assets. It is a holistic initiative across the entire organization and should be an integral part of every knowledge worker's daily responsibilities.<sup>100</sup>

Given the best practice requirements to develop documentary resources for future staff to access in the performance of their work, the exit interviews form a valuable asset in that respect. Apart from reading the hand-over notes or end-of-assignment reports of former staff, incoming staff members can now view the exit interview of their predecessor to give them a very real introduction to the mission and possible feedback related to the work they will be expected to perform. As the interviews are indexed in the recordkeeping system of UNMIS they reside with the other more traditional records expected to be found in any organization.

## 5. Oral history

A secondary benefit of the exit interview is that we are creating an oral history of the mission. It has been said that "Oral History" is a maddeningly imprecise term: it is used to refer to formal, rehearsed accounts of the past presented by culturally sanctioned tradition-bearers; to informal conversations about "the old days" among family members, neighbors, or coworkers; to printed compilations of stories told about past times and present experiences; and to recorded interviews with individuals deemed to have an important story to tell.<sup>101</sup> Sub Saharan Africa has a long tradition of its own form of oral history in the guise of West African griots that passed down history orally through generations. Countries such as Kenya, Eritrea, South Africa, Ghana, and many more all have had experience with traditional oral histories being fundamental to their identity and cultures.<sup>102</sup> In the twenty-first century oral history continues to be a thriving and seemingly useful tool if one surveys the many organizations both national and international that exist to foster the practice globally.<sup>103</sup>

Historians generally consider oral history as beginning with the work of Allan Nevins at Columbia University in the 1940s. Nevins was the first to initiate a systematic and disciplined effort to record on tape, preserve, and make available for future research recollections deemed of historical significance. While working on a biography of the United States of America President Grover Cleveland, he found that Cleveland's associates left few of the kinds of personal records—letters, diaries, and memoirs—that biographers generally rely upon. Moreover, the bureaucratization of public affairs was tending to standardize the paper trail, and the telephone was replacing personal correspondence. Nevins came up then with the idea of conducting interviews with participants in recent history to supplement the written record. He conducted his first interview in 1948 with New York civic leader George McAneny, and both the Columbia Oral History Research Office—the largest archival collection of oral

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100 See the 'Knowledge Management On-line' web page for a wide range of definitions and resources on KM <http://www.knowledge-management-online.com/Definition-of-Knowledge-Management.html> accessed 22 August 2011.

101 See the very informative discussions and resources at 'History Matters', *Making Sense of Oral History* <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/what.html> accessed 21 August 2011.

102 See the Columbia University Libraries 'African Studies' *History and Cultures of Africa* page at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/africa/cuiv/cult.html> for a huge reference listing of sources on many aspects of African history including the oral tradition. Also see the 'International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa' website at <http://africaisola.org/> Both accessed 18 August 2011.

103 See <http://iohanet.org/resources/websites.html> for a comprehensive global listing of associations and organizations devoted to oral history, accessed 21 August 2011.

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history interviews in the world—and the contemporary oral history movement were born.<sup>104</sup> This situation still rings true at UNMIS where most staff members rely on email and mobile phone communications including text messages. Given that few recordkeeping systems exist that allow for capture of text messages or phone conversations we have lost a large amount of communication between staff. It was only in early 2011 that UNMIS implemented a record-keeping system that allows for capture of emails as well as the traditional record formats of digitized hard-copy, born digital, and audiovisual records.

It was the intention of the staff of the UNMIS archives to collect the thoughts of departing staff to provide a tangible link to the past once the mission had closed its doors and ceased operations. The questions asked at the exit interview were framed with an eye on what a future researcher might want to hear from staff. The open-ended nature of the questions put to the staff members who participated in the programme led to broad responses from a wide range of staff. In particular UNMIS exit interview questions 9 and 11 noted above were meant to elicit a response that was more personal and that might be of more value to a social scientist twenty years in the future rather than senior management of the mission in 2011. The interviewer also has the ability to probe while asking the questions. If the interviewee raises an interesting point it is possible to ask supplementary questions to get more detailed information. The process is not set in stone but is flexible enough to be able to draw out more than standard responses from some interviewees who may be reluctant to say too much due to cultural background or expectations of military and police 'conditioning.' We have realized in the course of doing over 650 interviews that it is more than simply asking the questions and recording the session. To get a truly useful interview it is important to listen carefully and try to get as much as possible from the interviewee. Of course it goes without saying that some people will just not open up and no matter how much you probe they will limit their responses to the bare minimum. Hence we have interviews that are a total of six minutes while others run for an hour.

“Oral history might be understood as a self-conscious, disciplined conversation between two people about some aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical significance and intentionally recorded for the record. Although the conversation takes the form of an interview, in which one person—the interviewer—asks questions of another person—variously referred to as the interviewee or narrator—oral history is, at its heart, a dialogue.”<sup>105</sup>

It has been said that the best oral history interviews have a measured, thinking-out-loud quality, as perceptive questions work and rework a particular topic, encouraging the narrator to remember details, seeking to clarify that which is muddled, making connections among seemingly disconnected recollections, challenging contradictions, evoking assessments of what it all meant then and what it means now. As much as possible this is what we have tried to do at UNMIS while maintaining the primary need to gather information on the work-life experience of staff in the peacekeeping field to try to improve processes and functional effectiveness through a reporting structure to senior management of the mission. We feel we have been able to find a middle ground between satisfying the need to report on staff impressions and to provide future researchers with a useful resource on what it was like to work in the peacekeeping field with UNMIS in 2010–2011.

It is acknowledged that oral history is a very tangible and accessible way to pass on real life experience to others who view the recorded responses of those who participate. We are not, however, saying that it is necessarily a better history than one written by a historian. It is true to say that just because someone was there does not mean they fully understood what really happened or how their experience should be conveyed to others

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<sup>104</sup> 'History Matters', *Making Sense of Oral History* <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/what.html>.

<sup>105</sup> See <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/what.html>.

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in a meaningful or objective manner. The immediacy and emotional connection of the respondents can at times be a negative thing. What we hope to do with these oral histories is to present very personal reflections on what life was like at a peacekeeping mission in Africa in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Interpretation of the content of these interviews should be the concern of a trained professional.

## 6. Audiovisual developments

As part of the development phase of the exit interview and oral history project we needed to establish a technical framework on which we would build the overall project goals. This framework included setting a minimum metadata requirement for the upload of the interviews into the recordkeeping system. UNMIS used the HP TRIM<sup>106</sup> system, which has the capacity to capture records in most formats. Certain audiovisual records were easily captured into the TRIM database. We also had to determine the file formats to use to record the interviews of staff. We discussed this with other audiovisual colleagues primarily at the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

Initially for lack of appropriate recording equipment when the project was initiated, we used the only available Sony DCR-SR52 HDD Handycam whose output is MPEG2 (not a highly recommended or an archival file format). After seeking professional advice, we have decided that we should procure an AGHVX-200 camera which outputs to Quicktime. The footage is compressed and the compression is DVCPROHD. It shoots on P2 cards, which are like mini hard drives but solid state (i.e. no moving parts) so they are potentially more stable. We will use the camera with an external microphone.

The metadata we use in TRIM for the exit interviews was derived from PBcore as well as the Department of Public Information (DPI) at the UNHQ in New York. Some of the fields which are mandatory for our videos are: Title (name & functional title), Nationality, Staff Category (Civilian, Military Observer, UN Police), Gender, Interview Duration, Location (Duty Station), Duration of Service, Date of Interview and the Interviewer.

## 7. Conclusions

The joint Exit Interview Programme and the Oral History Project had been the culmination of many hours of efforts to establish a process whereby we had a worthwhile end product. In a relatively short time period we were able to interview almost 700 departing staff and capture their thoughts and impressions for future use. Of course some issues such as cultural sensitivities and military mind-sets impede the free discourse of some participants but we still believe that major issues can be synthesised from the collated data we gathered. It is also fair to state that the processes within the UN driving change and enhancing best practice and knowledge management also added to the impetus to ensure we were able to get management support at UNMIS to carry out the interviews as apart of the staff check out process. Social media developments after the Haiti earthquake in 2010 established and solidified the widespread use of these Internet based tools and they are now part of the fabric of the United Nations. It is within this context that we carried on with the oral history project to ensure social and personal voices of those who served in UNMIS will remain accessible long into the future. Many lessons have been learnt and we now have them recorded according to best practice standards.

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<sup>106</sup> See <http://h41112.www4.hp.com/promo/imhub/trim/erm/index.html>, accessed 10 August 2011.