



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY

**UNU-CPR**

United Nations University Centre for Policy Research

**What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field**

June 2018



---

## Tunisia 2011-17

---

Josie Lianna Kaye\*

*This case study is part of a broader research project, carried out by the UNU Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) with the support of the UK Mission to the United Nations, on the role of UN Resident Coordinators in Conflict Prevention. The project aimed to extract lessons from case studies of Resident Coordinator-supported preventive action in nine countries (Bolivia 2000-09; Colombia 2012-16; Guinea 2009-15; Guyana 2003-15; Kenya 2008-17; Kyrgyzstan 2010-17; Malawi, 2011-17; Nepal 2007-15; and Tunisia 2011-17). All case studies, and the resulting policy paper synthesizing lessons and findings can be accessed at [cpr.unu.edu](http://cpr.unu.edu).*

## Introduction

When broad-based protests triggered the so-called Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia in 2010, the dramatic political upheaval that followed ended 23 years of autocratic rule in Tunisia<sup>1</sup> under Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011), and set in motion the dynamics of the 'Arab Spring' across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Protests began in response to the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year old street vendor, whose fresh produce cart was confiscated by a police-woman who physically and verbally insulted him when he challenged her; Bouazizi subsequently set himself on fire in front of the local municipality building in his town of Sidi Bouzid. An expression of deep socioeconomic grievances and acute levels of frustration, Bouazizi's death sparked political protests and civil disorder in Sidi Bouzid, which quickly spread across Tunisia. The combination of social media activity and the efforts of the *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT) – whose members formed a "committee of the marginalized"<sup>2</sup> and helped coordinate widespread demonstrations – quickly outpaced the ability of the regime to repress the burgeoning revolution. While many protestors were met with police violence, armed security forces and snipers using an often lethal combination of rubber bullets, live bullets, tear gas and water cannons,<sup>3</sup> the protests eventually led to the ousting of President Ben Ali on 14 January 2011.

Tunisia proceeded to embark on an intense period of transition and transformation. In total, three interim governments followed Ben Ali's departure prior to the first democratic elections in October 2011 for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), Tunisia's interim parliament, leading to the formation of a coalition government comprising the dominant Tunisian Islamic party, Ennahda, and two centre-left groups, Ettakatol and the Congrès Pour La République (referred to informally as the 'Troika'). The NCA led the elaboration of the new constitution, passed in 2014, which protects important human rights, such as the freedom of speech and assembly. The same year in October, Tunisia also had its first democratic parliamentary elections, where the Nidaa Tounes party won 38% of the vote. The following month, in November the country also held its first democratic Presidential elections, with Beji Caid Essebsi winning with 55.68% of the vote.<sup>4</sup> Illustrative of the vital role played by civil society in building a pluralistic democracy, in 2015 the *Quartet du Dialogue National*<sup>5</sup> was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. While Tunisia's democratic transition and social transformation is far from complete, the steps taken so far have undoubtedly created a solid basis from which to entrench and further the aspirations of the revolution.

While it is now almost unfathomable to imagine that Tunisia could have taken any other path, from a regional perspective the odds were seemingly stacked against it. Six years after the 'Arab Spring' Tunisia is the only country out of 16 in the MENA region to have become significantly more democratic;<sup>6</sup> three of the 16 – Libya, Yemen and Syria

– experienced violent and intractable conflicts.<sup>7</sup> The Arab Spring movement itself has cost the region US\$ 614 billion in lost growth since 2011, which is equivalent to 6% of the region's total GDP between 2011 and 2015, according to the UN.<sup>8</sup> Considering that the Arab Spring was motivated in part by economic marginalisation and hardship, it is conceivable that such losses would further destabilise a small country like Tunisia. The civil war in Libya also had a negative impact, not only as a result of the humanitarian crisis and large number of refugees crossing the border, but also due to: the high socio-economic interlinkages between the two economies; and, the extensive macro-economic and fiscal impacts of the Libyan crisis on the Tunisian economy.<sup>9</sup>

And, indeed, there have been multiple moments when Tunisia could have taken a dramatically different path: the troika was repeatedly accused of interference in the judiciary and of mishandling social unrest, especially following the violent suppression of protests in Siliana in November 2012;<sup>10</sup> anti-government protests erupted in 2013 following the assassination of Chokri Belaid, a key grassroots leader, and of Mohamed Brahimi, opposition MP and Arab Nationalist; the publication of the constitutional draft in June 2013 sparked a major controversy, with accusations that Ennahda was attempting to dominate the drafting process running rife;<sup>11</sup> disputes and divisions between Islamists and secularists have deeply marked and often polarised political debate; regional disparities, high levels of unemployment and poverty contribute to ongoing protests and social unrest; and, in 2015 the country was rattled by a series of devastating and deadly terrorist attacks.<sup>12</sup>

What role did the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) and UN Country Team (UNCT) play in supporting Tunisia during its (ongoing) transition, and what contributions did they make to preventing Tunisia from taking the path of its regional neighbours? This case study will demonstrate the manner in which the RC was able to position the UN as a credible, trusted and qualified 'partner of choice' in areas such as elections, constitutional support, and transitional justice, which were critical for the democratic transition and therefore from the perspective of conflict prevention. The case study will, furthermore, shed light on elements of the RC's approach that were vital when looking for entry-points, and for sustaining a strong relationship with national counterparts. What is evident from this case study is that the transition is far from over and that an RC strategy anchored in conflict prevention is just as important in 2017 as it was 2011-14.

## 1. Country Context

### Underlying conflict risk factors

During the post-colonial period, Bourguiba (1956-86) set about putting in place the instruments of a new state and, during his first five or so years his reforms were extremely popular and his charismatic style won him many 'fans'. He became increasingly autocratic, however, concentrating

power in his own hands and refusing to accept any form of critique.<sup>13</sup> In 1961 he opted for a form of “socialisme non-doctrinaire”, including central planning and nationalisation of land which belonged to foreigners.<sup>14</sup> In 1974, he was elected “President for life”, which led to an increased level of protests and political opposition – met invariably with repression and sometimes violence. In 1983, a dramatic increase in the price of flour and bread led to popular protests and student strikes, leading to a state of emergency and, ultimately, to the end of the regime following the death of more than 150 protestors as a result of army actions.<sup>15</sup>

When Ben Ali came to power in 1987, removing Bourguiba from power – ostensibly for ‘medical reasons’ – he announced the end of life-long electoral mandates, and expressed his commitment to democracy, reconciliation, free elections and economic reforms. His flirtation with democratic practices, however, was short-lived. In 1994, for example, he was “re-elected” with 99.8% of votes, and amended the constitution in order to stay in power first in 1999, then in 2004, and again in 2009.<sup>16</sup> Ben Ali’s regime became increasingly repressive – particularly of religious groups and religious expression.<sup>17</sup> A brutal eradication of the Islamist movement was accompanied by a hollowing of the institutions of the State, extensive corruption, torture and other human rights violations.<sup>18</sup> Political participation was almost non-existent, opportunities for expression, contestation and debate extremely limited, and the media was tightly controlled.

Political discontent aside, the embrace of neo-liberal economic policies and practices in the 1970s fundamentally changed the fabric of Tunisia’s economy, and the livelihoods of Tunisians: the dismantling of import tariffs destroyed a significant part of Tunisia’s textile industry;<sup>19</sup> privatisation of state communal lands widened the gap between rich and poor;<sup>20</sup> and, the decline in the role of public investment impacted the poor and impoverished the middle classes, which have increasingly found that education is no longer a route to a decent, secure job.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, Ben Ali constructed “a multi-billion dollar business empire for the elite class connected to the presidential palace”<sup>22</sup>, thus drastically contributing to inequalities.

And yet, by some economic indicators, Tunisia was on the ascent just prior to the Arab spring,<sup>23</sup> and a majority of Tunisians in both 2009 and 2010 believed that the national economy was improving overall. However, when pressed further, perceptions that local populations were benefiting from this economic situation were negative; Tunisians, for example, expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with basic infrastructure and services.<sup>24</sup> Dissatisfaction was also a direct function of geography: coastal regions benefitted economically to the detriment of regions in the south and interior; when the economic crisis of 2008 led to rising food prices and a decline in remittances, for example, the hardest hit were evidently the most economically marginalised and least able to withstand its effects.

### Medium term political dynamics affecting conflict risk

Notwithstanding the political progress made, Tunisia has faced, and continues to face significant challenges in terms of its socio-economic dynamics, the regional security situation, and on the political front. The political landscape is marked by deep political cleavages; while the division between secularists and Islamists remains one of the most prominent political divisions in the country, Ennahda itself is also divided “between those who were exiled during the Ben Ali regime and those who remained in country under authoritarian rule, as well as between moderate and more conservative”<sup>25</sup> elements – creating additional tensions. The electoral, geographical ‘map’ is equally fractured, demonstrating “a country divided between a north that is largely pro-Essebsi and his party Nida Tounes, and a south that is in majority pro-Marzouki and favourable to the Islamist party An-Nahda.”<sup>26</sup>

The Tunisia economy has shown some signs of recovering, with a growth rate of 2.4% in early 2017 as a result of a resumption of some tourist-related activities, as well as record trends in the agricultural export sectors.<sup>27</sup> These positive trends, however, are yet to translate into jobs, and Tunisia’s level of unemployment remains at around 15.3%<sup>28</sup>, and rises to 35.4% for youth.<sup>29</sup> The Tunisian economy continues to be deeply affected by the ongoing conflict in Libya, because of the loss of job opportunities, remittances and trade. This fragile economic landscape is undermined by organised criminal networks smuggling arms, drugs and other contraband, and an expansive informal economy in otherwise legal goods, which both overlap with and feed into terrorist-related violence<sup>30</sup>. These dynamics have contributed to a growing perception – and accompanying levels of frustration – amongst the local population broadly, and amongst youth in particular that the aspirations of the revolution have not been met.

The decision to bring the Islamist Ennahda party into the democratic transition is widely considered to be one of the key elements of Tunisia’s success to date. In power since 2014, the party – initially accused by some of turning a blind eye to violent extremism – has taken an increasingly proactive role in tempering and addressing Tunisia’s growing problem of radicalisation, notably through the development of a national counter-terrorism strategy. Nonetheless, Tunisia has become “a fertile zone for Islamic State [IS] recruiters”<sup>31</sup>, while simultaneously facing the domestic threat of the radical Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia. According to one estimate, 4,000 Tunisians have joined IS in Libya, and another 3,000 joined in Syria and Iraq<sup>32</sup>; furthermore, half of the Ansar al Dine group – affiliated with al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – are believed to be from Tunisia.<sup>33</sup> The rise of radical Islamism in Tunisia has been fuelled by: “the release of Islamists imprisoned during Ben Ali’s rule; the presence of ultraconservative preachers influenced by Saudi Wahhabism; and dissatisfaction with the ruling coalition”<sup>34</sup>, factors that are compounded by counterproductive state responses that violate human rights and exacerbate resentment.

## 2. RC-Supported Prevention Initiatives

### Historical role and perception of UNCT

Prior to 2011, the role of the RC and UNCT in Tunisia, and the type of issues they could work on, was significantly constrained by the authoritarian environment in which they operated and the latter's relatively modest size. The 2006 Common Country Assessment (CCA), for example, avoided directly criticising the Government while encouraging it to make the necessary reforms, framing these calls as an issue of congruence between economic and political rights:

*"[W]orld experience shows that in the long term, the non-correspondence between realizations at the economic, social and cultural levels, and at the level of political rights and fundamental liberties cannot be longstanding. Therefore, Tunisia must get rid of a paradoxical evolution, where its political rights and civil liberties performances are not at the same level as its economic and social developments."<sup>35</sup>*

Despite this relatively cautious language, the Tunisian government prevented the UN from making public the 2006 CCA along with a Poverty Reduction Strategy released in 2004, which drew attention to the stark inequalities underpinning Tunisia's socio-economic landscape.<sup>36</sup> The corresponding UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2007-11 focused on issues which could be considered a *partial* selection of the drivers of conflict, such as inequalities and quality of life and unemployment, for example. Issues related to political exclusion and human rights violations – and references to political rights and civil liberties – were evidently absent, reflecting the difficult 'balancing act' the UN must play of encouraging Member States to adhere to UN principles and standards, while remaining aware at all times of its position as 'guest' of the host country.

While no programmes explicitly centred on human rights were conducted – and OHCHR had no in-country presence – at this time, efforts were continuously made to ensure that a 'Human Rights-Based Approach' (HRBA) to programming was adopted, which in practice meant small environmentally-focused projects in rural areas with an emphasis on socioeconomic, rather than political, rights. While ultimately limited in impact, these initiatives provided some small building blocks for the post-revolutionary context when more explicit human rights work could be conducted, often drawing upon those individuals who had been trained in the HRBA approach. The RC at the time up until 2008, Ms. Heba El Khoully, is widely commended for her commitment to HRBA in such a complex setting, and for her willingness to take risks in the search for entry-points – a willingness which complicated her relationship with the Government and, it seems, led to her early departure from Tunisia.

Indeed, prior to the fall of Ben Ali, the UNCT's space to constructively engage the government around issues of

human rights and democratic governance remained non-existent, and the position of the RC prior to the fall of Ben Ali was repeatedly described as being "uncomfortable"<sup>37</sup> and "extremely limited in possibilities."<sup>38</sup> RC Mohamed Belhocine (described in detail in the next section) who took up his position in 2008, managed to carve out a small role for the UN as "protector" of international principles and standards by occasionally reminding the government (for instance in the 2010 CCA) of the multiple national, regional and international frameworks that Tunisia has subscribed to. But otherwise, the RC was obliged to take a 'pragmatic' posture of trying to do what was possible given the limitations, while attempting to look for viable entry-points to create change.

Such entry-points, however were limited: all programmes were conducted through line ministries, and opportunities to reach out to local actors and engage in meaningful actions were minimal. On sensitive political and human rights issues, the UNCT served mainly as a 'post-box': political figures and victims of human rights violations voiced their concerns to the UNCT, which passed them onto the UN in New York – which had significantly more freedom to take a critical posture towards the regime. Staff recount, however, being repeatedly 'summoned' by the regime to explain particular decisions or initiatives, and of not wanting to jeopardise development work by being too 'outspoken' politically. In a report Belhocine wrote on his experiences in Tunisia, he quotes a cable sent in July 2009 by the US Ambassador in Tunis as being exemplary of his experience as a UN official during this period. In that report the ambassador complained that the government had "increasingly tightened controls [making] it exceptionally difficult ... to conduct business [...]. All meeting requests and demarches must be conveyed by a diplomatic note. Most go unanswered."<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, and by default, the UN's positioned itself as a partner to the government in addressing MDG related issues of maternal health and youth employment, two key priorities for Tunisia.<sup>40</sup>

### RC-led situation analysis, strategy and coordination

The Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia took the RC and the UNCT – like everyone else – utterly by surprise. On 10 January 2011, the UNCT had gathered in a hotel to continue discussions of the UNDAF 2012-16, which were rather ironically focused on government objection to the inclusion of references to 'inequality' in the analysis, and capacity support to NGOs on issues of youth in the strategy. As the UNCT made its case to the Minister in question, the streets around the hotel were filling with protesting youth, and everyone was swiftly ordered to evacuate the building. During these first few days of turmoil, however, few imagined that these protests, a relatively common occurrence in Tunisia, could lead to the downfall of President Ben Ali.

The RC and UNCT have been criticised by some for their 'silence' during the revolution-related violence. Following the deaths of 21 protestors a week earlier, the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the time, Navanethem Pillay, released a

statement urging the government to cease using excessive force, and expressed concern for the use of arrests, torture and ill-treatment of detainees; and, a joint press release by a group of Special Rapporteurs was released two days later, entitled, "Words must become reality, excessive use of force must end."<sup>41</sup> It should be noted, however, that in line with practices established prior to the revolution of using the UNCT as a 'post-box', all such statements were actively and helpfully coordinated via HQ by RC Belhocine.

Once the security of UN staff had been assured and some families (voluntarily) evacuated, the immediate task of the RC was to gain a deeper understanding of the unfolding socio-political context, and to position the UNCT within this emerging landscape. It was evident that both the political and social forces were evolving rapidly: the army had taken a surprising Republican stand; CSOs and political parties – both tightly controlled under the Ben Ali regime – were mushrooming; and, expectations for what the revolution would bring were rising to unrealistic heights.<sup>42</sup> The RC took the immediate and necessary decision of "putting the UNDAF 2012-16 in the bin"<sup>43</sup>, since it was evident that a four-year planning strategy would not be appropriate for such a rapidly changing context; a decision was taken to elaborate a 'transition strategy' in its place.

The ability of the RC to position the UN as a trusted and impartial actor early on in Tunisia's transition was facilitated by the interim government's adoption of a road map, and transparent communication<sup>44</sup> of its intention to conduct elections, elaborate a constitution and establish three commissions on: political reform, human rights violations committed during the uprising, and corruption and embezzlement. This road map presented the RC with clear entry-points in areas where the UN has extensive expertise to draw upon. The key question for the RC, therefore, was not where to offer support but *how* – a question which required a sensitivity to the political context in Tunisia, and an ability to navigate it. Tunisia was in the midst of a tumultuous transition, it was being inundated with international support it had little experience of absorbing,<sup>45</sup> and it remained highly protective of its sovereignty and suspicious of international interventions.

Against this background, the RC opted for a six-pronged approach which positioned the UN as an "honest broker"<sup>46</sup>: first, a low profile, giving credit, ownership and leadership at all times to national counterparts, while at the same time being open to a degree of risk-taking, not afraid to engage in 'political issues'. Second, mobilization of high-quality expertise with a focus on cultural-sensitivity; of Algerian nationality, the RC himself was widely seen as someone who understood regional – and cultural – dynamics intimately. Third, equidistance between all influential political forces, reinforcing the key principle of impartiality – especially important in light of the dynamic political landscape where key national interlocutors were changing frequently. Fourth, a "*modus operandi* based on dialogue and consensus as

instruments to achieve peace engagement"<sup>47</sup>, enabling the UN to serve as a 'bridge' between different political factions, as well as between the government and civil society, and other actors. Fifth, engagement with national counterparts premised on the UN as "protector" of international norms. And, sixth, the need for flexibility. These different elements of the strategy were infused into and across UN engagements as part of a "One voice" approach that RC Belhocine helped foster within the UNCT.

The UNCT's Transition Strategy of Tunisia (TST) 2011-13, therefore, both embodied and created the basis for this approach. Based on a combination of the CCA 2010, an assessment of the situation by the UNCT post-January 2011,<sup>48</sup> consultations with the diverse national stakeholders, the TST was used both as a 'GPS' for engagement with the interim authorities and as a tool to rally the UNCT around a common goal. The RC achieved a high degree of 'unity of purpose' by adopting, by all accounts, a highly collaborative and inclusive approach vis-à-vis the UNCT with regards to the transition strategy planning process. He built upon modalities he had established prior to the fall of the regime to catalyse cooperation towards new ends; he brought all the agencies together, "making sure that everyone had a role to play"<sup>49</sup>; and, he worked closely with the interim authorities, building relationships of trust that would serve the UNCT well. A doctor by training whose prior experience was predominantly with WHO, his "distance" from UNDP (in his prior career) might have made other UNCT members more inclined to follow his lead. He delegated many of his responsibilities as head of UNDP to his deputy,<sup>50</sup> thus enabling him to play a more proactive role as RC.

The strategy had four broad pillars: support to good governance for the success of the democratic transition; emergency preparedness and response, in light of the humanitarian crisis on the border with Libya; issues related to equity, employment and regional development, with a special focus on youth; and, lastly, environment and climate change. The approach of the RC came into play in all these pillars. In the area of elections for example, 18 experts were working with the Independent Commission on Elections, with the Prime Minister as the key entry-point. This was an extremely sensitive issue to work on at the time, and the RC took the position that all UN staff should insist upon Tunisians taking the lead. By playing a low profile, 'behind the scenes' role, the UN was able to provide pertinent and effective support: "when you keep a low profile", insisted Belhocine, "you can achieve much more than when you try to wave these flags."<sup>51</sup> The RC, therefore, made it very clear to both the UN and to donors, that publicity around UN support to the elections would be avoided at all costs, which enabled the UN to overcome the initial resistance on the part of the election commission to accept international support.

That is not to say that the strategy came without challenges. Despite full support from DOCO and BCPR, competition between DPA and UNDP around electoral support, and

between UNHCR and OCHA with regards to humanitarian support for the Libyan crisis slowed down the initial response and created unnecessary and unhelpful tensions. The RC was also lacking analytical and explicitly *political* support on the ground, and was only able to secure a political advisor in 2013, relying in the meantime on expertise hired for specific initiatives – including those related to elections and the constitution, for example. The absence of an aid coordination mechanism, notwithstanding the best efforts on the part of the RC and EU partners to put one in place, also hampered international efforts to avoid duplication. And, despite an explicit Policy Committee decision that “UN assistance for the democratic transition process in Tunisia will be closely coordinated and holistic, led by the Resident Coordinator, based on the UNCT’s transition strategy and supported by all parts of the UN system”, evidently not all UN officials regarded the RC as *their* RC<sup>52</sup> – leading to a situation in which the RC was too often the last to know about visits from Executive Directors, undermining his efforts towards a unified approach amongst the UNCT (the RC, after all, is *primus inter pares* and there is no accountability system supporting the role that is expected).

Lastly, the “hegemony of English speaking experts in all rosters” clearly became “a constraint and a discriminating factor when it comes to providing support in countries where English is neither the first nor second language.”<sup>53</sup> The RC’s insistence in recruiting, whenever possible, Arabic speakers from the region certainly helped build credibility and overcome the concerns of the host country, even if it sometimes came at the cost of delays in the hiring process and timely provision of support.

Despite these challenges, and thanks to his patience and determination, the RC was able to effectively and consistently position the UN system “as a central, respected and credible partner whose collaboration was sought for in the area of governance and institutional reforms.”<sup>54</sup> These engagements, it can be argued, took the form of *prevention* since transitions are notoriously conflict-prone and the stakes in Tunisia were extremely high. Among the most critical contributions during the 2011-14 period were: support to the elaboration of the new constitution; the elaboration of new electoral laws; strengthening of the National Constituent Assembly, and the Independent Electoral body. These efforts were complemented by: regional employment plans; support for job creation endeavours; the development of a social contract, signed by the government and two leading unions (UGTT and UTICA<sup>55</sup>) in early 2013; and, on the humanitarian front, coordinated efforts to provide support to (approximately) 350,000<sup>56</sup> refugees on the border with Libya in 2011, and longer-term support to develop multi-sectoral contingency plans.

In the eyes of some, 2014 is often regarded as the point at which Tunisia, having completed its first ever democratic parliamentary-level elections, passed its electoral “test”<sup>57</sup> and completed its transition. This narrative appears to

undermine rather than bolster the prevention objectives of much of the UN work, objectives which rely upon a long-term rather than short-term horizon on the protracted and difficult road towards democracy, equality and justice. Indeed, rather than the end of the transition it would be more apt and appropriate from a ‘prevention’ standpoint to see 2014 as marking the mid-point of the transition: an important hurdle after which the government would face the arguably much more difficult challenges of implementing new laws in line with the new constitution, and entrenching the values of the social contract, in partnership with civil society. The localized violence shortly after but not directly-related to the elections was a potent reminder of the tensions ‘beneath the surface’, the ongoing societal divisions and the need for those in power to deliver on their promises if Tunisia’s on-going transition and transformation is to be peaceful and sustainable.<sup>58</sup>

This was the critical context in which Mounir Tabet<sup>59</sup> assumed his position as RC in 2013. Mr. Tabet ‘inherited’ a UNCT with established collaborative working practices, and a solid track record of working with the government and civil society, based on a conflict prevention approach that had proven to be successful. He focused a significant part of his effort on UNDP’s pressing initiatives in the area of democratic governance. Since UNDP was leading much of the work in this space and since the majority of this work had been put in place under Belhocine, Tabet competently ensured a smooth and effective implementation in these critical areas that contribute to prevention and work in this domain during his ‘tenure’ flourished. By some accounts, however, the new RC may have benefited from embracing a more ‘political’ approach and invested greater efforts to rally UNCT members behind prevention objectives. Neither the formulation of the 2013 CCA nor of the 2015-19 UNDAF, for example, were leveraged as occasions to fundamentally reassess evolving conflict risks and threats to Tunisia’s transition - nor to align the rest of the UNCT accordingly. Given the sensitive moment in Tunisia’s transition and despite the strong efforts via UNDP to support the transition, it is possible that – from a prevention perspective – some opportunities may have been missed as a result of this more apolitical and less ‘UNCT-wide’ approach.

Some of these challenges can be attributed to a lack of capacity, which was significantly enhanced by the deployment of Giordano Segneri as Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) in 2014. The PDA provided a significant conflict prevention-related ‘boost’ to the UNCT by enhancing the capacity of the RC Office (RCO) to integrate political analysis in planning, programming, and coordination activities. He began producing political analysis on a regular basis to share with the RC and in UNCT meetings, where he often made recommendations to the UNCT to improve the political sensitivity of their work; he provided political inputs to the UNDP-led Conflict-related Development Analysis (CDA) in 2015, which placed significant attention on conflict drivers as well as Tunisia’s diverse capacities to address them; he also organized training for staff on conflict analysis, consensus techniques and problem-solving. He made himself available

to all UNCT staff to review project documents from a 'conflict sensitivity' perspective and made important efforts to ensure the regional dynamics of the conflicts were being taken into account.

In this spirit, and in collaboration with Mr. Tabet, the PDA was able to identify an entry-point to begin working on preventing violent extremism (PVE) through work with the National Counter Terrorism Commission (NCTC), specifically on the prevention pillar of their work in 2015 (see below for further details). As a result of this initial engagement with the NCTC, the PDA was able to submit a proposal for catalytic funds from the PDA joint programme to support work in this area. The PDA's efforts to incorporate stronger political awareness, greater levels of conflict-sensitivity in programming, increased levels of information-sharing and inter-agency consensus-building have undoubtedly contributed to changing the *culture* of the UNCT and RC-led engagements. With this approach, the PDA has been able to increase levels of awareness about the inter-linkages between development programming and instability, and the ways in which programming can be harnessed to prevent conflict and create constructive change.

In January 2017, Mr. Diego Zorrilla assumed the RC position. Against the background of the new Secretary-General Antonio Guterres having made prevention an overarching UN priority, and in the wake of the twin 'sustaining peace' resolutions passed by both the Security Council and the General Assembly, Zorrilla built upon and, indeed, expanded the efforts of his predecessors to support the transition's many facets from a conflict prevention perspective. Deemed a "political animal" by many of his UNCT counterparts, Zorrilla is fully aware that democratic transitions are fragile, and that "now is not the moment for the international community to look the other way."<sup>60</sup> He dedicated the first few months of his time in Tunisia, with the support of the PDA, to understanding the fault-lines and conflict drivers. Having reached the conclusion that feelings of exclusion and hopelessness that sparked the revolution in 2010 are not only present, but more intense in light of the increasing perception that the expectations of the revolution have not been met, he has made prevention the cornerstone of his strategy.

His approach, therefore, is focused on not only nurturing and deepening the work of Tunisia's young democratic institutions, but also finding ways to engage the high levels of youth that feel abandoned by society, and by the revolutionary ideals they were so invested in. While the work of the UN continues to be evidently rights-based, "from a rights-based perspective there is no reason", Zorrilla states, "to focus on youth over and above other groups in society" – it is the prevention lens that leads the UN to focus on the most vulnerable populations, along with certain disenfranchised and/or marginalized youth, he believes. This focus on youth also informs Zorrilla's engagement on PVE, which he further developed with the support of the PDA. The UNCT has produced a common assessment of the drivers of violent

extremism in Tunisia and this has led to the development of a comprehensive inter-agency strategic framework, entitled '*A UN integrated approach to the prevention of violent extremism in Tunisia*'. Both the common assessment and the UNCT-wide strategic framework are the first such initiatives to be launched on PVE, putting the Tunisia UNCT well-ahead of the curve in this space.

### Resourcing

Whereas traditionally, fundraising for Tunisia prior to 2011 had been challenging due to its classification as a 'middle income country' and the absence of eligibility for ODI, from 2011 to 2013 the UNCT was able to raise significant funds – with Japan, the European Union, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Spain being some of the most important donors. Fundraising was made significantly easier when, following the revolution, the UN System was able to openly question the social and economic data that had been officially published by the government, revealing the deep vulnerabilities and need for external assistance. During the first stage of the transition i.e. 2011-13, the UN System was able to secure around US\$88 million for the four areas elaborated in the TST. Only 65% of these funds were actually spent during this period, indicating a problem of "absorption capacity"<sup>61</sup> due to the limited resources of the UNCT during this period and limited ability to 'scale up' with enough speed and efficiency.

Nonetheless, the US\$88 million represents a 219% increase in funding for the transition when compared to the funds available in 2011, but funding was variable across the four pillars of the transition strategy. Support for democratic governance increased by 271%, support for inclusive and equitable development by 433%, support for the environment by 102% but support for humanitarian crisis response by only 28%. The 5 largest projects include supporting the Constitutional Dialogue, the Electoral Process, Security Sector Reform, Transitional Justice and the National Integrity System (anti-corruption). Support to the Resident Coordinator's Office almost doubled from 2012 to 2014, going up from US\$76,312 to \$139,529, and remaining close to the 2014 level thereafter.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, in 2014, the UNDP-DPA Joint Programme for Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention invested in Tunisia for the first time, allocating over US\$250,000 for the year. In 2017, the RC and PDA helped secure over US\$ 2 million, plus the hiring of three senior consultants to work on technical aspects related to PVE. Tunisia has not yet received any funding from the Peacebuilding Support Fund.

The RCO is now in a process of almost doubling its staff. When RC Zorrilla arrived at the end of 2016, there were 3 staff in the RCO; by April 2018, there will be 6 staff (including 2 Y-UNV and 1 UN-DESA Fellow), and by June 1st there will also be a senior PVE specialist, potentially supported by a junior coordination specialist (taking the team up to 8 by the end of 2018). Whilst not all staff will be focused 100%

on peace and development issues, prevention work will be substantially strengthened by this significant staff increase.

### Specific interventions and initiatives

In the case of Tunisia, there were numerous initiatives, projects and programmes launched by individual UN agencies, in particular UNDP, aimed at addressing specific conflict drivers or advancing specific prevention objectives. This section, however, will only look at those initiatives and approaches, in which the RC had a significant role and/or which were jointly carried out in an interagency context and which hold particularly valuable lessons for RCs elsewhere.

#### *Transition Strategy for Tunisia (TST)*

While RCs have formulated Transition Strategies in a number of country settings, the way in which it was used in Tunisia provides several useful insights. The rapid change in context following the revolution demonstrates clearly the constraints of using UNDAF's in fragile and complex contexts, where planning according to a four-year cycle is not only impossible, but also unhelpful. The TST helped to capture the multiple dynamics present in the country at the time: the need for medium-term planning for the democratic transition on the one hand, for example, and the need for immediate response to the fast-evolving humanitarian crisis on the other. Due to the fact that the TST had been framed as a holistic, comprehensive and flexible approach to the post-revolution transition context, it could also be used as a tool for fundraising, successfully mobilizing US\$88 million from 2011-13.

Most importantly, the TST served as a flexible reference guide for action which allowed for adaptation to new dynamics and issues as they arose. The importance of flexibility is underscored by the fact that in 2012, just one year after the revolution, at the request of the RC the UNCT agreed to undertake a strategic analysis of Tunisia's socio-political situation, and of the "profound transitions on various levels and fronts"<sup>63</sup> – the results of which informed the implementation of the (evolving) strategy. The goal was to facilitate a common understanding amongst UNCT members of key conflict drivers and their linkages with development programming. This RC-led strategic analysis represented an understanding – and indeed *learning* – on the part of the UNCT that the situation was in flux, and required an approach that was not 'business as usual'. Indeed, the "CCA light"<sup>64</sup>, as it was called, was deemed necessary in order to facilitate a common understanding by all UN agencies. It enhanced the UNCT's level of *conflict sensitivity* and "its ability to identify entry-points for supporting social cohesion and reconciliation through support to policy and political dialogue, development and social protection programmes."<sup>65</sup>

#### *"Youth, employment and migration (YEM)"*

The YEM programme, within the UN MDG Achievement

Fund (MDG-F) – implemented by five UN agencies (FAO, ILO, IOM, UNIDO, and UNDP) in collaboration with national partners (the Ministries of Employment, Agriculture, Industry, Development and International Cooperation)<sup>66</sup> – focused on institutional capacity-building to respond to the problem of unemployed youth and migration particularly in the poorer regions of Tunis, El Kef and Gafsa. It is estimated that over 2,200 jobs were created directly as a result of the programme, along with a fund for young entrepreneurs, supporting 20 projects and programmes in 12 regions.<sup>67</sup>

While the project started in 2009, the way in which the programme was re-oriented in light of the 2011 revolution and subsequent transition demonstrates once more the importance of flexibility, tailoring to the national context, and the ability of the RC to reorient programming towards shared objectives under the TST. While job creation remained central to the programme, post-2011 programming was also used as a means to encourage democratization and decentralisation through the development of Local Committees of Regional Development, which helped ensure local representatives, NGOs and civil servants were at the heart of the decision-making process. In a context where the absence of political participation had been one of the causes of unrest, this new way of working ensured ownership for the project was transferred from the national level where it had been 'guarded' during the Ben Ali era, to the regional and local levels – providing an opportunity to "translate political choices into development planning"<sup>68</sup> in the area of employment. This approach also enabled the UN to keep a low profile, letting local actors take the lead on programming.

The flexibility on the part of the MDG Fund was critical in this regard, as it enabled a complete revision of the logical framework and the timeframe of the project to take into account the turbulent national context. Equally important were analyses conducted throughout 2011 of the social, economic and political context – including on 'Regional planning for employment', 'Conditional cash transfers study', and 'Analysis of the potential development of the weaving sector' – which helped ensure that engagements were tailored, and as much as possible targeting conflict drivers in some of the poorest regions.

#### *Constitutional support*

RC-led support to the elaboration of the constitution, as well as the creation and consolidation of constitutional independent bodies from 2011 to 2014 was designed to "produce a document with strong legitimacy that could lay solid foundations for a new social contract."<sup>69</sup> In this spirit, the UNCT provided direct support to the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) in conducting an inclusive national dialogue process that helped identify people's expectations, and foster the promotion of a wide range of human rights, including gender equality, children rights, the access of youth to leadership positions,<sup>70</sup> freedom of speech and assembly, the right to health and social assistance, and a



ban on torture. The UNCT gave comments at each stage of the process, providing and transmitting consolidated comments, and clearly indicating areas where the text fell short of Tunisia's human rights commitments. When requested, the UN provided legal advice to the leadership of the NCA during and after the national dialogue, in order to better facilitate and reflect the results of the dialogue into drafts of the constitutions, switching between support to the NCA and the national dialogue as and when required in line with changing circumstances on the ground. The result is a constitution that fundamentally redefines state-citizen relations.<sup>71</sup>

This approach was premised on key elements that guided the UNCT's engagement on the constitutional process, under the auspices of the RC. First, the UNCT would work in unison; this meant that individual agencies would not approach individual Ministers in their respective thematic areas, but that advice, support and comments would be consolidated and fed through focal points at the NCA. This approach helped reduce the burden on national counterparts, prevent waste of precious resources, and ensure coherence in response amongst agencies. Second, the UNCT would ensure that the consultation and drafting process was highly inclusive, and accompanied by the strengthening of institutional capacities and constitutional dialogue mechanisms at local and national levels – capable of ensuring inputs from civil society and citizens at all stages of the process. In this regard, the UN actively supported a series of public constitutional debates in all 24 governorates across Tunisia, including in disadvantaged regions – which brought together trade unions, CSOs, NGOs and other leading public figures. And, third, the UNCT would provide both technical support and substantive support on the *content of the constitution*, an element which was sensitive in light of Tunisia's weariness of external interference – especially on human rights issues.

The last point required a solid understanding of the political context, and how engagements could be approached in a way that would be acceptable, while protecting the UN's reputation and mandate, and simultaneously maximising support. Some more risk-averse UNCT members and colleagues in New York, were concerned that such engagements could be misconstrued as "interference"; they cautioned against the UNCT inserting itself into a conversation on the substance of the constitution, arguing the UN should limit itself to provision of technical support and coordination. The RC was able to overcome host country resistance as well as internal skeptics by framing the UN's substantive contributions as advancing and protecting international standards and good practice, which was not perceived as interference in sovereign affairs.<sup>72</sup> This receptiveness on the side of the government to this approach was illustrated by the fact that, following the draft of June 2013, the UNCT was able to conduct a human rights-based analysis of the draft constitution, which highlighted ongoing challenges and served as a basis upon which the RC and the UNCT could constructively engage with Tunisian authorities to ensure greater compliance with international legal obligations – in turn fostering a broader debate among different national stakeholders.<sup>73</sup>

#### *Instance Verité et Dignité (IVD)*

Under the framework of the transitional justice law adopted on 15 December 2013, Tunisia established a Truth and Dignity Commission (Instance Verité et Dignité or IVD) mandated to investigate human rights abuses and corruption since 1955. UNDP, OHCHR, the ICTJ with the support of the UNCT – and led by the RC – worked closely on the establishment and procedures of the Commission, supporting it through the provision of material, expertise, accompaniment, and training of its members. The Commission was able to prepare 62,596 dossiers on the violation of human rights, corruption, and the falsification of elections, and remains on track to present its recommendations to the Government of 2018; the IVD has requested an extension of its mandate until December 2018.

Comprehensive technical support to the IVD was complemented by the provision of 'good offices'. The issue of justice, and how to deal with crimes committed in the past is a highly politicised and divisive one. Secularists and Islamists have very different positions on the issue, which feed into ongoing political debates, exacerbating tensions and creating political conflicts. With a view to overcoming these differences – and fully supported by the RC – OHCHR provided a platform since 2013 for civil society organisations and members of the IVD to come together on a weekly basis in a non-publicised, informal forum to discuss issues related to transitional justice and to help build relationships across 'divides'. This helped position the UN as a trusted interlocutor, willing to provide low-profile support aimed at maintaining dialogue on a key, highly sensitive issue.

In 2017, these relationships of trust – established amongst IVD members and with the UNCT – were put to the test. Six months prior to the completion of their mandate, four out of the nine commissioners suspended their activities and refused to engage in the work of the IVD; elected by Parliament with limited participation from civil society, the members of the Commission were both representatives of their own political parties with different visions of the future, who are asked to serve together on the IVD – often creating inevitable clashes of different proportions.<sup>74</sup> The 'abstention' of four members for over three months had prevented the IVD from meeting as a council, and risked derailing the work on transitional justice.<sup>75</sup> When these same members threatened to leave the IVD entirely, the remaining members turned to OHCHR for support. Dimiter Chalev, OHCHR Representative at the time, convened the IVD members at the OHCHR office and they worked throughout the night to resolve their differences, with Chalev serving as mediator. This serves as small yet illustrative example of the multitude of ways the UN used a combination of good offices and low profile engagements to resolve political conflicts and prevent them from becoming conflicts at the societal level.

### “Ways of working”

While it is difficult to pinpoint precise impacts of his efforts in the realm of “ways of working”, the PDA’s efforts to incorporate stronger political awareness, greater levels of conflict sensitivity in programming, increased levels of information-sharing and inter-agency consensus-building have undoubtedly contributed to changing the *culture* of the UNCT and RC-led engagements. By changing the culture of the UNCT, the PDA – under the leadership of the RC – has been able to increase levels of awareness about the inter-linkages between development programming and conflict, and the ways in which programming can be harnessed to prevent conflict and create constructive change.

In this spirit, for example, in June 2017, the PDA created standard operating procedures on ‘UNCT short-term mechanism to provide assistance in response to social conflicts’ as a result of the increasing number of social protests and the risk of such protests igniting violence or conflict. Inspired by the Sustaining Peace agenda, the SOP are designed to help the RC and UNCT to build a common understanding of social conflicts, and to prompt efficient, coordinated response across the three pillars of human rights, development, and peace and security – clearly linking early warning with early action. Consequently, following the social unrest of January 2018, for example, the PDA prepared a ‘Situation analysis on the drivers of instability and priorities’, which fed into the geo-localized vulnerability mapping, and the UNCT field projects prepared by the RCO through an online App.

Albeit at the early stages, another area where “ways of working” may appear to be yielding positive results is in the area of PVE. Initiated under RC Tabet, the PVE work has since been further developed by RC Zorrilla with the support of the PDA. The UNCT has produced a common assessment of the drivers of violent extremism in Tunisia and this has led to the development of a comprehensive inter-agency programme, entitled ‘*A United Nations integrated approach to the prevention of violent extremism in Tunisia*’. Both the common assessment and the common programme on PVE are the first such initiatives to be launched on PVE, putting the Tunisia UNCT well-ahead of the curve in this space. Despite the rhetoric at the HQ level around ‘risk-informed development’, there is a low appreciation of risk management in the UN outside of security and humanitarian spheres; in this regard, the UNCT in Tunis has also been pioneering, commissioning the first ever (in the UN) explicit risk assessment of PVE programming in Tunisia (commissioned in November 2016). All the recommendations of the risk assessment were taken on board, leading to a significantly more robust and conflict-sensitive programme. As a result of this holistic approach and the ability of the RC to position the UNCT in this space, US\$2 million has been mobilised to support UNDP work in the PVE space, and a PVE expert, working in the RCO, will be hired in 2018 to lead and implement the programme. A mobilization strategy for the UNCT Framework (Joint Programme) will begin following the expansion of the RCO in April 2018.

### 3. Overall Contribution of RC- and UNCT to Prevention

While the successful and peaceful transition in Tunisia can only be attributed to Tunisians themselves, the UN was able to play a small, yet important, role in supporting that transition and preventing tensions from escalating into conflict. UN support, led by the RC, allowed for the smooth holding of the country’s first democratic elections, ensured key human rights provisions were enshrined in the new constitution, facilitated the establishment of a functioning transitional justice commission, and, reduced conflict risk as the result of socio-economic development projects (including job creation) at the local level.

Just as important as *what* the UN worked on was the *how* of the engagement. The low profile strategy, which left national counterparts in the ‘driver’s seat’ at all times, was key given the political context and the low appetite for a visible international role on sensitive issues. The impartial approach and emphasis on keeping equidistance from all counterparts was critical for fostering trust among all key players. The ability to ‘mainstream’ dialogue and consensus as key instruments in the UN *modus operandi* irrespective of the domain, sector or initiative in question enabled the UN to use even technical engagements as opportunities to build bridges and deeper levels of understanding between stakeholders not accustomed to working together. The position of the UN as ‘protector’ of international norms and standards enabled it to provide substantive support on sensitive political issues in a manner which furthered the ‘human rights up front’ agenda. And lastly, adopting the Transition Strategy as a key platform for engagement allowed for flexibility that ensured the UN could keep pace with the changing context, and served as an effective resource mobilisation tool.

The transition is far from complete. The year 2017 witnessed 8,000 protests<sup>76</sup> and, in January 2018, violence flared in the context of protests that marked the anniversary of the revolution, in the context of which the government is accused of undermining the legacy of the Arab Spring and of insufficient progress.<sup>77</sup> Corruption is perceived as having shifted from being systemic under Ben Ali, to endemic post-revolution.<sup>78</sup> Police are still perceived as repressive, as demonstrated by the 2018 heavy-handed response to protests, and prisons are overcrowded. And, as the euphoria of the revolution dwindles,<sup>79</sup> the reality for many Tunisians feels as bleak as it was prior to the revolution, fuelling the perception that the democratic transition has benefitted a few but not the many. In this light, RC Zorrilla’s goal is to reorient the UN’s engagement towards the reduction of conflict risk factors, which includes addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities at the local level, increasing trust in public institutions by fighting corruption, and strengthening early warning and conflict prevention. In order to implement this prevention-oriented, conflict-sensitive vision, the RCO will be expanding its capacities; this will enable it to work more concertedly both on PVE work and socio-economic conflicts, and to further support Tunisia to be a positive example of how to ‘sustain peace’.

#### 4. Lessons, Good Practices and Recommendations

##### **Real entry-points only exist where there is political space:**

The RC was extremely constrained prior to the revolution, and was not able to operate in a particularly ‘political manner’. This, of course, did not mean that the search for entry-points was futile. Far from it, the engagements led by the RC prior to 2010 provided useful building blocks for what came next, in particular with respect to local-level human rights-based programming focused on socio-economic rights in the 2000s. However, it was only when there was political space following the revolution – communicated clearly by the interim government’s ‘road map’ – that the RC was able to make meaningful contributions.

**Effective RCs prioritise impartiality over neutrality:** The risk-averse approach, advocated by some UN actors, to provide advice on the constitution would have led to UN-support focused on technical issues alone, missing a vital opportunity to assist Tunisian stakeholders to incorporate human rights standards into the constitutions, laying solid foundations for a new relationship between state and society. The RC was able to overcome the risk of being perceived as ‘interfering’ in internal affairs by effectively framing UN engagements as supporting international norms and standards.

**Flexibility is key for RCs, UNCTs and donors alike for rapidly changing transition contexts:** Engagements must be led by the contextual needs and not driven by constraints imposed by headquarters, donor planning cycles or logical frameworks. The UNDAF, with its four-year planning cycle to align with government planning processes, tends to be an ill-fitted framework for volatile and dynamic transition contexts. In order to support a preventive approach, RCs need to ensure programmes are needs-driven. In Tunisia, both the TST and the YEM programme benefitted the context due to their flexible nature. It is important to note, however, that at the end of the day, RCs and UNCTs will only have the level of flexibility that the national authorities tolerate – hence the importance of building trust and advocating to create the largest possible space for flexibility.<sup>80</sup>

##### **A low profile is vital in politically-sensitive contexts where stakeholders may be wary of international intervention:**

While a high profile may be constructive in some contexts, in those situations where the political landscape is sensitive and/or where national stakeholders are weary/suspicious of international actors, a low profile helps the RC to maintain a position as a key interlocutor. This ‘behind the scenes’ approach also allows the UN to use ‘good offices’ in a strategic and fruitful manner.

##### **High quality expertise is an ‘offer’ the UN can make to create entry-points, and the language skills of those experts matter:**

The ability to offer high quality expertise can create entry-points for the UN, especially on complex issues

such as elections, constitutions and transitional justice – all areas where the UN has extensive expertise and is able to draw upon comparative lessons learnt. Expertise in these areas in Tunisia was vital, but it needs to be delivered in a timely manner if it is to be useful and provide the entry-points required. Having access to staff with the right language skills is vital, especially in politically-sensitive contexts. In Tunisia, the ability to – after some time and hard work – hire Arabic experts in elections and constitutions was an important part of the ability of the UN to position itself as a trusted, credible and *qualified* partner.

##### **RCs must be politically savvy and unafraid to engage with and work in a political manner and support their efforts with continuous context, conflict and political analysis:**

‘Being political’ does not mean working with government alone, but ensuring all engagements are grounded in a solid understanding of the political context, in the way they are designed, framed, communicated and implemented. In many contexts, this means relying on the support of strong PDAs able to provide timely and comprehensive analysis. ‘Being political’ also involves an ability to leverage challenges as opportunities, as evidenced by the RC-led work to use the UN’s ‘good offices’ to promote deeper understanding between political counterparts. The failure to work in a political manner could be damaging in transition and fragile contexts, and/or lead to significant missed opportunities.

##### **RCs are able to foster coordination and cooperation amongst national counterparts when the UN ‘house’ is in order (“practice what you preach”):**

A large part of the UNs ‘job’ is to foster coordination: between international actors, between donors, between political actors and civil society organisations. It can only do so in a credible and legitimate manner if the UNCT itself is working in a collaborative and coordinated manner. The failure to do so creates divisions and fragmentation with the very actors the UN seeks to assist. In the Tunisia case, much of the work on the constitution and the IVD was facilitated by the cohesiveness of the UNCT.

##### **Democratic transitions – and prevention – are long-term endeavours:**

Far from being complete in 2014, three years after the revolution, Tunisia was just beginning its long and difficult transformation. UN engagement strategies, tools and initiatives – and those of donors – must be tailored accordingly. This means: making funding commitments that go beyond three to five years; communicating realistic expectations to local, national and international partners; documenting as you go to build institutional memory;<sup>81</sup> and, remaining engaged, discretely, long after the immediate crisis is over. As long as the structural conditions that created the conflict in the first place have not changed, the risk of conflict remains present, and efforts should remain focused on changing those structural conditions.

## Endnotes

Cover Image: Photo by Christopher Furlong/Getty Images. Tunis, Tunisia. 23 January 2011: Protesters scale government buildings outside the Tunisian prime minister's office in Tunis. Protesters from the countryside and the hamlet of Sidi Bouzid, the town where the 'Jasmine Revolution' started, travelled through the night to descend on the prime minister's office where they tore down razor wire barricades and met no resistance from the police or army.

\* This paper is based on secondary resources and 18 interviews with RCs, PDAs and other RCO staff, other UNCT staff, national interlocutors of RC/UNCT Tunisia, and, UNHQ staff – both via phone and in the context of a brief visit to Tunis in November 2017. The lead writer/researcher would like to sincerely thank all those who participated in this process, either in interviews or in the course of subsequent reviews of the paper, and a special thanks are due to the PDA, Giordano Segneri, and RC Diego Zorrilla for all their support for the project and, in particular, for making the trip both possible and successful.

- 1 Hinds, Roisin. "Conflict analysis of Tunisia." *DFID*. January 2014, p.4.
- 2 Angrist, Michele Penner. "Understanding the success of mass civic protest in Tunisia." *Middle East Journal*, vol. 67, no. 4, Autumn 2013, p.560.
- 3 Alfarra, Jehan. "Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution: 6 years on." *Middle East Monitor*, 14 January 2017, p.8.
- 4 Ibid. p.3.
- 5 A group of four leading organizations: the UGTT, the *Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat*, the *Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'homme*, and the *Ordre National des Avocats de Tunisie*.
- 6 Parens, Raphael and Yaneer Bar Yamn. "Six year report on the Arab Spring." *New England Complex Systems Institute*. February 2017.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 "Arab Spring 'cost region \$600bn' in lost growth, UN says." *BBC Middle East online*, 11 November 2016.
- 9 "The Impact of the Libyan Crisis on the Tunisian Economy An Estimation of the Macroeconomic and Fiscal Impacts of the Libyan crisis on the Tunisian Economy." *United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia – ESCWA*. March 2017.
- 10 Ryan, Yasmine. "How one country emerged from the Arab Spring with a Democratic state." *The Nation*. 12 February 2014.
- 11 Giessmann, Hans J. "Embedded peace: Infrastructures for peace: approaches and lessons learned." *Berghof Foundation, UNDP, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation*. 2016, p.30.
- 12 Including the Bardo National Museum attack in March 2015 which killed 22, the attacks on the Sousse tourist resorts when 38 tourists were killed, and the 2015 Tunis bombing on a bus, which killed 12 – amongst others.
- 13 Belhocine, Mohammed. "Tunisie: La rue a-t-elle donne naissance a la deuxieme republique?" 5 February 2011, p.1.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid, p.2.
- 16 Ibid, p.3.
- 17 Hinds, R. 2014, p.5.
- 18 Translated. Conseil des Droits de L'Homme, Assemblée Générale, A/HRC/WG.6/1/TUN/3, 11 mars 2008.
- 19 Angrist, M. 2013, p.548.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Dahmani, Frida. "Tunisie: classes moyennes, les nouveaux pauvres." *jeuneafrique*. 30 November 2016, [www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/375530/economie/tunisie-classes-moyennes-nouveaux-pauvres/](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/375530/economie/tunisie-classes-moyennes-nouveaux-pauvres/).
- 22 Kaboub, Fedhel. "Analysis of the Arab Uprisings." *Journal of Economic Issues*, vol. 47, no.2, 2013, pp.533-544.
- 23 "Tunisia: Analysing the Dawn of the Arab Spring." *Gallup news online*, 2016.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Hinds, R. 2014, p.4.
- 26 "Tunisia's Elections: Old Wounds, New Fears." *International Crisis Group*. Middle East and north Africa, Briefing no. 44, 19 December 2014.
- 27 Segneri, Giordano. "Tunisia 2017-2018, Trends and perspectives." *RCO Tunisia*. 20 December 2017.
- 28 "Tunisia Unemployment Rate 2005-2018." *Trading Economics*. 2018, [tradingeconomics.com/tunisia/unemployment-rate](http://tradingeconomics.com/tunisia/unemployment-rate).
- 29 "Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modelled ILO estimate)." *The World Bank*, data from ILOSTAT database. March 2017, [data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?end=2017&start=1991](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?end=2017&start=1991).
- 30 "Tunisia's borders (II): Terrorism and regional polarisation." *International Crisis Group*, Update briefing, Middle East and north Africa, Briefing no. 41, 21 October 2014.
- 31 Zarocoastas, John. "More than 7000 Tunisians said to have joined Islamic state." *McClatchy*, Foreign Staff, Washington Bureau, March 2017.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Hinds, R. 2014, p.4.

- 
- 35 "Common Country Assessment 2006." *United Nations Country Team (UNCT)*, 2006.
- 36 Interview with UN Official. Tunis, Tunisia. November 2017.
- 37 Interviews with UN Officials. Tunis, Tunisia. November 2017.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Cited in Belhocine, 2017. "US embassy cables: Tunisia- a US foreign policy conundrum." Cable dated 17 July 2009. *The Guardian*. 7 December 2010, [www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/217138](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/217138)
- 40 Belhocine, Mohammed. "Sharing Tunisia's experience." Meeting of senior officials: Supporting UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams in Complex Political Situations and 'Special Circumstances', Montreux, April 2017.
- 41 Quoted in Chapter 4, see: "The 'Arab Spring' at the United Nations: Between hope and despair." Chapter 4 in Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies: Human Rights in the Arab Region Annual Report 2011. *Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies*. 2011.
- 42 Belhocine. 2011.
- 43 Interview with UN Official. Tunis, Tunisia. November 2017.
- 44 "Inside the Transition Bubble: International Expert Assistance in Tunisia." Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT). April 2013, pp.1-40.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Belhocine. 2011.
- 47 Segneri, Giordano. "PDA Report January 2015." *UN Resident Coordinator Office*, Analysis of potential post-electoral policy changes and impact on UN strategic programming. January 2015.
- 48 No UN staff members have been able to provide this analysis for the purposes of this exercise.
- 49 Interview with UN Official. Tunis, Tunisia. November 2017.
- 50 Interview with UN Official. Tunis, Tunisia. November 2017.
- 51 Conference call with Mohammed Belhocine. 23 November 2017.
- 52 Belhocine. 2011.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Interview with UN Official. Tunis, Tunisia. November 2017.
- 55 Union Generale Tunisienne de Travail (UGTT) and Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat (UTICA).
- 56 "Tunisia." *International Organization for Migration*. 2018, [www.iom.int/countries/tunisia](http://www.iom.int/countries/tunisia).
- 57 Interview with UN Official. Tunis, Tunisia. November 2017.
- 58 Segneri, G. 2015.
- 59 Unfortunately, Mr. Tabet could not be reached for an interview.
- 60 Interview with Diego Zorrilla. Tunis, Tunisia. November 2017.
- 61 "La stratégie de transition des nations unies in Tunisie 2011-2014." *Revue*. 2013.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 "Resident Coordinator Annual Report, Arab States – Tunisia." 2012.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid. Italics added for emphasis.
- 66 "Resident Coordinator Annual report, Arab States – Tunisia." 2011.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Chalev, Dimiter et al. "The role of the United Nations in the constitutional process in Tunisia and the outcome in terms of Human Rights guarantees."
- 71 Yahya, Maha. "Great Expectations in Tunisia." *Carnegie Middle East Centre*. March 2016.
- 72 Conference call with Mohammed Belhocine. November 23, 2017.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Interview with UN Official. Tunis, Tunisia. November 2017.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 "PDA report November 2017." *RCO Tunisia*. Internal document. November 2017.
- 77 Graham-Harrison, Emma. "Violence flares after Tunisians rally to mark revolution's anniversary." *The Guardian*. 14 January 2018, [www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/14/tunisian-government-plans-social-reforms-after-week-of-unrest](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/14/tunisian-government-plans-social-reforms-after-week-of-unrest).
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Belhocine, Mohammed. Written comments on text. January 2017.
- 81 Belhocine, Mohammed. Written comments. January 2018.