



H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser was designated as the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations on March 1, 2013. Throughout his career, he has contributed to advancing the multilateral agenda in the realms of peace and security, sustainable development and South-South cooperation.

Mr. Al Nasser was the President of the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly from 2011 to 2012. His career as a diplomat spans for more than three decades. From 1998, he represented Qatar in the United Nations and worked on core issues such as security, terrorism, poverty, hunger and natural disasters.

Mr. Al-Nasser has received numerous awards and honorary doctorates from various countries and universities for his work in fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Interview with Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations

Q: His Excellency, you and your organization are vocal and active in the need to strengthen partnerships and cooperation on international migration. Recent events, including but not limited to the tragic events of the drownings off the Italian coast, underscore the need for this crucial work.

What do you believe is the role of the media in helping people to understand the issues? And how well or how poorly do you feel the media is doing in that regard?

A: News headlines featuring stories of migrants who tragically lose their lives onboard ships of death are a blunt reminder of how crucial the issue is. The role of media on shaping public opinions and perceptions of migrants, in that context, is crucial, but can equally be a double-edged weapon. It can play a constructive role when used responsibly. It can also be destructive when it tends to stereotype or reinforce negative portrayals. An understanding of the issue of migration and placing it in the right context is needed more than ever given the shrinking budgets and in a 24-hour news cycle which, in turn, makes in-depth reporting and specializations challenging for news organizations. The economic and financial crisis also enhances tensions around migrants often perceived as a threat to stability, prosperity and identity, overlooking the overall development component migrants bring to the countries of destination and origin. Of course, there is excellent journalism being done but we also see stereotyping and

shortcuts. A continuous effort is needed to ensure accuracy, objectivity and context and avoid polarization.

Q: This year News Xchange brings almost 500 news professionals, including a large delegation from the UN and its agencies, together to discuss the new realities facing the industry. The BBC is producing a key session on media coverage of migrants and migration-related issues. What do you believe is critical for our delegates to know and to understand as a result of these conversations?

A: I am delighted that such an important conference decided to organize a session around migration. After all, migration is one of the four areas of focus for the UN Alliance of Civilizations. We often discuss the importance of technology - which is crucial - but tackling such issues directly is key to support quality journalism. This session is a tremendous opportunity for participants to discuss their experience, share challenges and best practices amongst professionals. Secondly, to understand the scale and complexity of the international migration phenomenon and the importance of context, terminology, figures ± away from dramatization or stereotyping. Finally, that behind each migrant, there is a unique and individual story. We often read about tragic events. Yet there are so many successful stories.

Q: You recently stated the following: " The process of globalization is transforming societies, making them increasingly diverse and interconnected. This is a time of unprecedented mobility. Presently, there are currently 232 million international migrants.

That number is expected to grow. How this dynamic is portrayed in the media, discussed by political and cultural leaders, and managed by governments will determine whether populations view increased diversity as a source of strength or as a threat.

A look at the headlines in the news shows how migration is shaping our world. By focusing on migration and how news stories about migrants are covered in the media, the UNAOC addresses a critical and timely issue."

How is the UNAOC currently partnering with media? How could see this effort growing and expanding in the coming year?

A: By focusing on migration and how news stories about migrants are covered in the media, the UNAOC addresses a critical and timely issue. The key to improving coverage begins with developing journalists' knowledge of the subject. The debate around migrants and migration-related issue must change. This is why the UNAOC regularly invites high level migration experts and journalists to share their ideas on best media practices and ways to support journalists as they turn these practices into habits. A recent high level meeting taking place in Paris last January with high level experts and editors in chief from 30 countries led to rich debates and concrete outcomes. A Swiss edition took place in May. We worked jointly with a number of media and media support organizations to raise awareness and launch a discussion. For the

coming year we have a number of projects underway. I can already share with you that based on the positive feedback from participants, meetings of editors and experts are an effort we wish to replicate.

Q: Do you believe audiences truly understand what is meant by the term "migrant"? Do you believe that audiences understand that ours is a mobile population and that migrant does not necessarily mean refugee? How might media help clarify this distinction?

A: International migration has grown substantially in the last two decades. Today, some 3% of the world's population live outside of their country of birth. But there are many nuances in statuses and situations, and understanding them is crucial to avoid stereotyping, shortcuts and confusion. This is why the UNAOC will be launching a glossary of migration-related terms specifically together with the Panos Institute jointly with a pool of experts to provide a user friendly style-guide for journalists. It will be available in 2014 in English and we hope to launch it in various languages, starting with Arabic, French and Spanish. We hope to distribute it at the next NewsXchange conference!

Q: Several very large news organizations, including The Associated Press, have recently announced that they are no longer going to use the term "illegal immigrant". Others, however, continue to use that phrasing or something similar. Do you feel this is an important step or more a matter of semantics?

A: Words matter. The UNAOC believes that the use of the word "illegal" should not be associated

with a human being but only with an action. Examples of labeling individuals or groups have showed how detrimental it can be in the way people think and feel about each other. Labels may be easier, but not accurate. The AP has shown true leadership. It is for each news organization to make that choice, but successful practices are always inspiring.

Q: Your organization has recently compiled a series of recommendations for more objective and more effective media coverage of migrants and migration-related issues, and you have also completed a very successful social media campaign on Facebook and Twitter, reaching more than 5 million people. How can media organizations access this information? And, equally, will there more opportunities for News Xchange delegates, for example, to add to this very important conversation?

A: The recommendations that emerged from Paris and Berne were all produced by journalists and editors themselves, with the guidance of the best experts on migration to ensure knowledge. This is why NewsXchange is the most relevant setting to share these outcomes which are primarily relevant to journalists. Delegates can take part in the ongoing conversation through the #coveringmigration campaign or by attending the meetings we organize. Exchange of best practices with other professionals, across different types of media, countries and continents can only be mutually beneficial. This is precisely what NewsXchange offers.

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