

71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly

UNAOC Side Event:

*“Combating xenophobic language in the media & fostering inclusive
Integration of migrants and refugees”*

**Co-sponsored by the European Union, the International Organization for Migration and the
Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations**

Thursday 15 September, 10:00 – 13:00, Conference Room 5, United Nations Headquarters

CONCEPT NOTE

On the occasion of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) will convene a side event on “Combating xenophobic language in the media and fostering inclusive integration of migrants and refugees.”

Background:

With an increasing number of people and families fleeing poverty, war and persecution, there has been a sharp increase in hate speech against refugees, asylum seekers and migrants by the media worldwide. The dissemination of negative narratives towards migrants and refugees heavily impacts the perception of these populations, and impedes their integration in host societies.

Many refugees and migrants are confined to the margins of the societies in which they live. This situation denies the human potential of refugees and migrants, and results in economic strain and social tensions. All refugees and migrants are entitled to respect, protection and full enjoyment of their human rights, including the right to non-discrimination, regardless of their refugee or migration status.

As stated in the Secretary-General’s report “In safety and dignity: addressing large movements of refugees and migrants¹,” discrimination and marginalization characterize the experience of many refugees and migrants around the world, and must be addressed urgently by the international community. Inclusion of migrants and refugees requires the broad engagement of a wide range of actors, including the media, which play a significant role on the perception and social integration of migrants and refugees.

In this context, UNAOC has developed a niche of expertise on the treatment of migrants and refugees by the media and its impact on their integration in host societies. A recent example is the UNAOC’s #SpreadNoHate initiative, which aims at countering xenophobia, racism and narratives of hatred. The #SpreadNoHate initiative also contributes to changing perceptions towards

¹ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/59

refugees and migrants by engaging a dialogue on hateful language, especially with the media, and providing positive narratives to reject rhetoric that stigmatizes those populations.

The media has an important role to play in providing positive narratives on migrants and refugees, combating racial discrimination and xenophobia, and promoting inclusion. The 71st Session of UNGA represents a unique opportunity to address the global challenges related to the spread of xenophobia and negative narratives in the media, particularly in the context of the September 19th Summit to Address Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, and in line with the Secretary-General's global campaign to counter xenophobia.

The UNAOC side event will serve as a unique platform for Member States, journalists, advocates, activists, policy-makers and other stakeholders to share experiences and good practices to counter hate speech against refugees and migrants, strengthen the collective resolve to combat xenophobia, and build partnerships with different actors that are committed to preventing discrimination and promoting peace, respect and inclusion.

Objectives:

The UNAOC side event will serve as a platform to discuss the different measures that have been taken globally to counter negative narratives against migrants and refugees, as well as their limitations, and to explore ways and means of providing positive narratives, and foster integration and inclusion of migrants and refugees within their host societies. The outcomes and recommendations of the event will contribute to the discussions of the upcoming UNGA Summit to Address Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, especially roundtables 4 and 5, and to the UN global campaign to counter racism and xenophobia.

Points of Discussion:

1. How to explain the increase in negative speech incidents, especially against migrant and refugee populations?
2. What are examples of measures taken globally to curb hate speech and provide positive narratives? What are their limitations?
3. What is the impact of negative narratives on migrant and refugee populations? How can they contribute to countering the negative image portrayed in the media?
4. How can the media avoid disseminating xenophobic language and provide strong positive narratives on migrants and refugees? How can they contribute to foster social inclusion and promote peace?
5. How can Member States develop and implement communication strategies to combat xenophobia and racial discrimination? How can they balance freedom of expression with the necessity to prevent the spread of xenophobic rhetoric? Where can the line be drawn between censoring hate speech and shutting down political debate?

Outcomes and visibility:

UNAOC will take advantage of the momentum of its ongoing social media campaign, with the hashtag #SpreadNoHate, which has already reached millions of people online globally. The side event will be covered live on social media, in order to share key messages in real time, and to engage UNAOC global followers on several social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, LinkedIn, and Snapchat (100,000+ followers across all platforms). Through

this effort, the debate will gain global visibility and reach a maximum number of people, in particular among the youth.

At the conclusion of the event, UNAOC will compile all the information shared during the various presentations and discussions, and produce a policy report, which will include a set of concrete recommendations. This report will be made available on the UNAOC website (www.unaoc.org), as well as on the websites of partner organizations. UNAOC will also share the report with its international network of Member States, international organizations, NGOs, media organizations, journalists, academia, including graduate schools of journalism and communications, as well as think-thanks.