



United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

Group of Friends Meeting – Permanent Representatives’ Level New York, 14 February, 2014

SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held its Group of Friends Meeting (Permanent Representatives’ Level) on 14 February, 2014. The Meeting’s main theme was *Strengthening International Cooperation in Preventing Terrorism*. It addressed four agenda items:

1. Preventive measures to combat global terrorist threats and violent extremism, in accordance with Pillar one of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy and exploring linkages for effective collaboration between UNAOC, CTED and CTITF;
2. 6th UNAOC Forum in Bali, Indonesia, 29-30 August 2014;
3. Briefing on UNAOC’s Activities in 2013;
4. UNAOC Voluntary Trust Fund update.

The United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, chaired the meeting. The event was open to civil society representatives, media, UNAOC partners and those member states and organizations, which are not formal members of the Group of Friends.

Opening Session

The High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations started his remarks by emphasizing the ability of terrorist groups to use unexpected violent acts against civilian targets to attract large amounts of media attention. Subsequently, the spread of fear, anxiety and uncertainty result. He stressed that preventative measures should be taken as the threat of terrorist attacks continues to jeopardize international peace and stability.

The Alliance of Civilizations’ overarching goals are to counter factors that cause polarization, radicalization and violence between and within communities. To that end, in regards to counter terrorism efforts, the High Representative underlined the Alliance’s stance on a global need to combat the root factors that allow violent ideologies to spread.

The High Representative reminded member states that UNAOC activities fall under Pillar One of the UN Global Strategy, as UNAOC focuses its work in the areas of young people, media and religion. UNAOC’s unique ability to provide effective, context-specific and locally tailored programs is due to a community-focused approach, relying on trust built with local civil society actors. The High Representative also cited

work at the institutional level, as UNAOC collaborates closely with DPA and CTITF to combat violent extremism.

He closed by reiterating that counter-terrorism efforts must be global and that UNAOC's four pillars (youth, education, media, migration) must be observed and implemented together in a balanced manner. The High Representative insisted on increased activity and investment in prevention instead of only spending resources on reactionary efforts and reaffirmed the readiness of the Alliance to actively engage in the 4th review process of the Strategy.

Mr. Jean Paul Laborde, the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) then outlined 11 points in regards to combatting terrorism:

1. We must work together on preventing terrorist activity through legal action and the promotion of dialogue and education – an area in which UNAOC can be a valuable partner.
2. CTED and UNAOC must find ways to strengthen and solidify their collaboration and can together identify good practices to prevent terrorism and violent extremism. This could happen by, for example, establishing innovative ways to educate youth about tolerance.
3. There must be a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach to counter terrorism efforts, as education, media, and business all play a critical role in promoting tolerance and understanding.
4. Tolerance must be taught in the classroom. In agreement with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and Tony Blair, himself, education is a security issue and vital to countering violent extremism.
5. There is a need to bridge the gap between the security agenda and the development agenda in order to ensure that interventions bring about the best possible synergy.
6. Youth participation and input in counter terrorism strategies are crucial.
7. Civil society groups have a deeper understanding of the impact of policies and are therefore helpful to counter terrorism practitioners. UNAOC successfully works with them and CTED should also integrate civil society work.
8. CTED is happy to learn that UNAOC has been reaching out to women, who are generally overlooked as a resource in counter terrorism planning and play a significant role in the home, their communities and in government.
9. There is a need to develop strategic communication surrounding the counter terrorism narrative to reach citizens on the societal level. Terrorist organizations have narratives and marketing plans that allow them to convince and recruit people. We must figure out how to deradicalize youth before they enter conflict zones and debrief those returning.
10. There is a need to train local media practitioners so that journalistic standards include elements to discourage incitement to terrorism.
11. There must be good governance at the local level that will respect the rule of law and promote human rights and use interventions to diminish the appeal of terrorism.

Afterwards, the Director of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force emphasized that UNAOC and CTED are central to CTITF efforts. He underlined the importance of strengthening initiatives in poverty and lack of social inclusion that can create the opportunity for terrorist activities

to develop and recognized UNAOC's efforts in this capacity. CTITIF highlighted joint efforts with UNAOC like providing support to a Nigerian University, designing workshops for religious leadership in Central Asia, and engaging with youth to provide employment in South Asia. He thanked member states for providing content to the 4th UN Report on combatting terrorism and announced that the report would be presented on 12-13 June, 2014. The Director reiterated his interest in strengthening CTITF's partnership with UNAOC and member states.

The representative of Spain emphasized the country's commitment to fighting terrorism and highlighted the media's role in these efforts. He cited UNAOC's important activities surrounding media and expressed a desire to see the Alliance move into more regional strategies. He called for moving efforts into Asia, but also recognized the Alliance's strong activities and results in the Mediterranean region. He stressed Spain's belief in preventive mediation to avoid conflict. The representative voiced support for the Alliance's education and youth programs. He emphasized the need for further support for the Alliance, admitting that though Spain contributed to the Youth Solidarity Fund, they maybe needed to do more in order to invest in this strong and lasting foundation for peace. He appealed to member states to do the same. Spain is pleased with the Alliance's evolution, noting the presence of CTED and CTITF as UN departments that normally wouldn't be involved.

The representative of Turkey also remarked on the Alliance's evolution and thanked all supporters of the organization. He emphasized that further success is linked directly to the sustainability of funds and called on all member states to widen financial support. He mentioned that Turkey contributed 1 million USD to the Trust Fund every year for the past three years and will continue doing that. He expressed a need for the Alliance to disseminate its noble message more widely and noted that with high aims and hard to reach targets there is a long way to go. He reiterated that UNAOC has proven worthy of investment and member states have a duty to help it achieve our collective goals.

Group of Friends: Views on the UNAOC's Role and Activities

- Delegations noted and supported the UNAOC's expanded activity in the UN system and acknowledged the organization's hard work and leadership (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Benin, Egypt, EU, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Montenegro, Mozambique, New Zealand, OIC, Pakistan, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sweden, USA).
- Delegations recognized the Alliance's valuable role in intercultural and interfaith dialogue as tools to pacify societal tensions and threats to peace and security.
- A number of delegations view UNAOC as a positive platform for preventive action against the ongoing threat of terrorism in the areas of youth, education, media and migration.
- Delegates agreed that UNAOC plays an important awareness raising role and is a leader in promoting international peace and prosperity.
- Delegates expressed support for UNAOC efforts to combat xenophobia and terrorism and its results-driven initiatives.

Group of Friends: Support and Commitments

- Indonesia expressed pleasure in hosting the Sixth Global Forum. Member states thanked Indonesia for its efforts and anxiously await the event.
- A number of members voiced a desire to strengthen ties with UNAOC and support partnerships on regions of focus (Qatar, New Zealand, Kazakhstan, Slovenia, Montenegro, Saudi Arabia, OIC, Austria, Republic of Korea, OIF).
- Many member states reiterated their continued monetary support (Qatar, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Kuwait, Turkey, Malaysia).
- A number of delegations noted the ongoing threat of terrorism and voiced support for counter terrorism activities and encouraged partnership among CTED, CTITF and UNAOC.
- Several delegations echoed support for partnership between UNAOC and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation.

Closing Remarks

The High Representative closed the meeting by sharing several observations and some of the achievements made by the UNAOC within its limited resources:

1. UNAOC has built on past achievements within the areas of youth, education, media and migration by strengthening and expanding existing projects. There are considerations to develop a Central-Europe, Central-Asia Regional Strategy in partnership with Austria, Romania, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.
2. UNAOC has in the past year developed close working relationships with DPA, UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and DESA, which has led UNAOC to have much more mainstreamed engagement with the UN Secretariat.
3. UNAOC is devoted to mediation and remains focused on adding complementary tools to the conflict resolution toolbox, for example by its work with the Mediation Support Unit of DPA.
4. UNAOC is working alongside UNDP to ensure that culture has a place in the post-2015 Development Planning debate.
5. UNAOC thanks the member states (Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Ireland, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Spain, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand and Turkey) who collectively provided funds totaling 2,929,957 million USD for 2013 expenditures. However, UNAOC requests predictable robust support from member states.
6. UNAOC has and will continue to hone existing relationships and create new ones with media, civil society, business sector and academic partners as it develops an enhanced role for sports, arts, music and other forms of cultural expression as tools for building bridges among groups.

List of Speakers

Opening Session: UNAOC High Representative, CTED, CTITF, Spain, Turkey

Statements by members of the UNAOC Group of Friends

Indonesia

Qatar

Belarus

New Zealand

Egypt

Iraq

Kazakhstan

Pakistan

Mozambique

Slovenia

OIC

Argentina

Montenegro

Romania

Saudi Arabia

European Union

Austria

Russian Federation

United States of America

Sweden

Kuwait

Australia

Italy

Republic of Korea

Iran

Benin

Closing remarks by the UNAOC High Representative