



United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting

New York, 23 September 2016

Summary Report

Introduction

On 23 September 2016, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held its annual Ministerial Group of Friends meeting on the margins of the 71st session of the General Assembly. The meeting focused on the theme “Countering Xenophobia Through Fostering Inclusive Dialogue”. The discussions were built on the outcome of the high-level summit on address large movements of refugees and migrants as well as explore the best means to foster inclusive dialogue to prevent and counter xenophobia.

The High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, chaired the meeting in which the UNSG, President of the 71s Session of the General Assembly and the Foreign Ministers of Spain and Turkey the co-sponsors of UNAOC participated. The meeting was open to civil society representatives, media, UNAOC partners, as well Member States that are not members of the Group of Friends.

Opening Session

The High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations opened the meeting by welcoming the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and thanking him for the continuous support that he has provided for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations throughout his mandate. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser also seized the opportunity to express his gratitude to the Members of the Group of Friends for their strong political and financial support, without which UNAOC would not be able to continue to deliver the high quality product it has become known for.

The High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations recalled the UN High Level Summit to address the large movements refugees and migrants and the Leaders Summit on refugees, as well as the role of the Alliance of civilizations on issues related to migration and xenophobia, including the #SpreadNoHate initiative on hate speech. After having expressed its concern about the rise of and xenophobic rhetoric used by political leaders and candidates in the media, he called upon the Members of the Group of Friends to stand up against stereotypes and exclusion and commit to upholding the values of pluralism and diversity, as well as the rights and dignity of everyone forced by circumstance, including through the UN Secretary-General’s campaign, “Together – Respect, Safety and Dignity for All”.

United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, addressed his special appreciation to the governments of Turkey and Spain for their leadership and commitment. He reiterated his strong support to the Alliance of Civilizations for almost a decade. He deplored demagogues around the world who are demonizing people just because of their faith, race or some other superficial differences. He stressed the importance of the Alliance’s mission in building bridges and expressed his pride in supporting it. In his address to the UNGA on Tuesday, the Secretary General called upon political leaders and candidates to reject the political math that says you add votes by dividing people and multiplying fear. He recalled that the New York Declaration adopted after the UN High Level Summit to address the large movements refugees and migrants will only have a meaning if Member States honor their promises. The Secretary General reminded the launch of the new campaign “Together – Respect, Safety and Dignity for All” that will carry forward the work that the Alliance has been doing for years to promote intercultural understanding. In this context, he welcomed UNAOC projects and activities, such as the Glossary on Migration that was developed to help the media tell the story in a constructive way, or the Hate Speech project aiming at improving the treatment of migrants and refugees in the media.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon also commended the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, for his leadership and effort in mobilizing a wide range of partners, including civil society and youth around the world. He welcomed the work achieved by the Alliance in empowering youth and acknowledging their greatest potential as weapons against violent extremism, which is a component of the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. In conclusion, he encouraged Member States to continue to support the Alliance in its mission to foster understanding and inclusion, and in advancing the UN core values.

The President of the 71st session of the General Assembly, Mr. Peter Thompson, expressed his appreciation on the role of the Alliance of Civilizations as a leading platform at the United Nations for promoting intercultural dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. He thanked and commended the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, for his tireless leadership of the Alliance. After setting the context of a world witnessing the worst humanitarian and refugee crisis since the Second World War as people flee armed conflict, violence, and persecution, Mr. Thompson recognized that communities around the world require more than ever empathy, compassion, collaboration, and partnership in order to address this global situation and, deplored the increasing evidence of xenophobia, racism, hate speech, as well as attacks on basic human rights and fundamental freedoms that we see instead. He reported that during the September 19th Summit, Member States collectively took an important step forward towards addressing the global refugee and migrant crisis with the adoption of the New York Declaration, which presents numerous steps for combatting xenophobia, racial discrimination, and intolerance. He welcomed the fact that the Alliance plays a key role in the matter and contributes to dehumanize vulnerable people at the time of their greatest need. Mr. Thompson emphasized that the Alliance's work – specifically through its four priority areas of Youth, Education, Media and Migration – is essential to the success of the Secretary-General's newly launched campaign to combat xenophobia. The President of the General Assembly added that the principal objective of the 71st session of the General Assembly would be to apply a widespread and vigorous push for meaningful progress in implementing all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that development gains reach all people, particularly the most vulnerable. He reaffirmed his support to the Alliance through the 71st session and encouraged everyone to work in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration, and to uphold our common humanity in order to deliver on our commitment to the World.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain described current global transformations as the source of identity crises many communities are facing today. He noted that the effects of such crises could be seen in the worrying increase as racism, intolerance, xenophobia and violent extremism, including in moderate societies. He underscored the ability of the Alliance to constantly adapt to new challenges and to remain a tool to combat radicalization, to build inclusive societies and to prevent and mediate conflicts with cultural or religious dimension. Spain welcomed the series of measures set up during the 7th Global Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations in Baku, aiming at establishing a committee on tolerance and at disseminating positive messages of tolerance and harmonious living over the Internet in order to counter extremist views. These measures targets all the major social media companies as well as video-game and software-application producers for computers and other devices. Spain indicated its commitment to promote interreligious dialogue among leaders in Palestine and Israel, as well as its offer to host an upcoming interreligious meeting. The country also set up the establishment of a taskforce of religious leaders aiming at addressing crisis situations and contributing to community dialogue, including experts on interreligious and intercultural matters who would be contributing to the implementation of peacekeeping operations. Spain also insisted on the need for the Alliance to focus on engaging sectors that are most in touch with young people, such as sports and arts. He highlighted the urgent need to promote platforms for religious messages of peace such as in Syria, Israel, Iraq, Palestine, to help communities to cooperate on joint programs. In the area of education, he advised for the development of a guide of best practices on education and diversity for social inclusion. He suggested that the Alliance convene an international meeting to develop a compendium of educational ideas that could be disseminated in different countries in order to promote inclusion in schools. He expressed the need for all these initiatives to also promote the role of women, in line with Security Council resolution 2242, adding that peace could not be achieved without the participation of women in building and consolidating peace.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey welcomed the Alliance's efforts in combatting xenophobia and stressed that we are faced with bigger challenges in terms of fighting racism, discrimination, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-Christianism. He highlighted that irregular migration and uncontrolled refugee flows are the cause of this worsening trend and illustrated his point by linking the increase of refugees a refugee center and the rise of attacks against Mosques in the same city in a western European country. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey condemned polarization exercised by extremists and terrorists in host societies and warned against the threat that it constitutes for our security but also for our belief in harmony, diversity, core values, and humanity. He denounced the strategy of extremists willing migrants and people with different backgrounds to suffer from exclusion, discrimination, and isolation so that they can exploit their anger to marginalize young vulnerable generations. He also deplored populist politicians who further fuel discrimination and social exclusion and take advantage of this fear and grief to win cheap victories. In response to this situation, he called upon the international community to work collectively to reverse this trend and stand behind respect for diversity, harmony and social inclusion. Finally, he commended the efforts of the Alliance towards intercultural and interreligious dialogue and stressed the importance of programs targeting youth and education. According to him, "tolerance, empathy, mutual respect and understanding should be the first lessons that we teach our young generations." He concluded by wishing to see the Alliance take the lead in providing to people worldwide objective information about Muslims,

migrants, Islam and Christians, Christianity, Judaism, Jews, and urging the international community to expand its efforts to overcome the challenges that our societies have been facing.

Group of Friends: General Discussion

Hungary raised two issues during the ministerial meeting: Christian phobia and migration. After indicating that serious attacks have been committed against Christian communities and Christian people and highlighting that the global terror like ISIS actually poses a civilization threat on Christianity, Hungary requested that AOC strengthen protection for Christians. On the migration, Hungary called upon the international community to support Turkey, Jordan, and the Kurdish region of Iraq, emphasizing that people should stay close to their homes as much as possible in order to be able to return after the crisis is over.

Jordan expressed its appreciation for the timeliness of the meeting “in what has proven to be a key high level segment of the UNGA.” The Member State made further reference to the rhetoric of xenophobia, racism, hate, Islamophobia, discrimination, and ethnic and sectarian divides, which constitute the narratives underlying the many conflicts we are witnessing around the world. He commended UNAOC for its efforts in addressing these narratives, as well as the rhetoric of hatred and xenophobia, and most notably in presenting coexistence, peace and harmony as alternatives to these narratives. Jordan addressed the two main areas of concern of the Alliance that are Youth and Migration, and highlighted Jordan’s pioneering role in the areas of youth, peace and security, including through its efforts to put youth at the forefront of the United Nations and the Security Council’s agenda and more specifically through the adoption of the Amman Declaration and UN Security Council Resolution 2250. The country highlighted that the importance of this action cannot be underestimated since without education, opportunities, social and political empowerment, youth become deprived and desperate, and that desperation can lead to extremism. On migration, the Jordanian delegation recalled that Jordan is hosting 1.4 million Syrians and is home to 2.1 million refugees from Palestine, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. Despite being a small country, Jordan is the second largest host of refugees worldwide and the largest host of Palestinian refugees in the world. Jordan urged the Members of international community to come to the aid and to the rescue of other Members when they are carrying a burden on behalf of the rest of the international community, and invited them to work together on addressing these issues that are global rather than regional or country-specific. In addition, Jordan discussed the idea of coexistence, stating that acceptance of differences is more inclusive than just tolerance of differences. In this context, he mentioned as an example of coexistence and acceptance Jordan’s welcoming of persecuted Christians from Iraq. He focused on the need to eliminate xenophobia, Islamophobia and all rhetoric that is discriminatory in nature or that promotes hatred as well as the need to fight extremism, “not with a bullet but with a better idea.” He affirmed the need to not allow criminals to hijack our respective religions with extremism, which uses the language of murder and violence, and concluded by inviting the international community to continue to dialogue to overcome them.

Tunisia welcomed the efforts of UNAOC in its 4 pillars and look forward to expand the goals of the Alliance in combating violent extremism and terrorism. Tunisia stressed the importance of addressing discrimination and division requires assessment of the real reasons behind extremism and hate. In addition, Tunisia encouraged the international community to acknowledge the humanitarian dimension of all civilizations and all religions, and insisted on the importance of raising awareness and expanding partnerships between communities worldwide to build bridges, especially among the youth. Therefore, Tunisia advocates for reforming educational systems by establishing values of tolerance and dialogue among the young people. Tunisia has been very active in promoting UNAOC goals and set up a national committee for dialogue among civilizations last year in order to complement the national plan and achieve peaceful coexistence and dialogue and tolerance.

The League of Arab States recalled that the Alliance of Civilizations is an initiative that was set up a decade ago in order to spread the values of justice and tolerance as well as dialogue among civilizations and to refute those who call for a shock among civilizations and confrontation among cultures. The League of Arab States Secretary General set the context of the crisis situation with the plethora of conflicts in the Arab world and the influx of millions of refugees and migrants to the shores of the European continent, and stressed the urgent need to promote rapprochement between the Middle East and Europe, combat violent extremism and reject hate speech and intolerance. The League of Arab States has set up the unified strategic plan for the Alliance of Civilizations for the period 2016-2019, which includes a number of programs and projects that aim at promoting peaceful coexistence, tolerance and mutual understanding among nations and countries. The League of Arab States referred to the deadlock in the situation in the Middle East with the ongoing occupation of Palestine by Israel since 1967, and stressed that Palestinian youth have nothing but oppression and occupation. The League urges the international community to address their problems and reach a just settlement of the Arab Israeli conflict with the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. The League of Arab States reaffirmed its support to UNAOC and its commitment in the fulfillment of the goals stated that are included in the memorandum of understanding signed between the two organizations.

The Slovak Republic highlighted that countering xenophobia to foster inclusive dialogue is crucial, and insisted on the importance of preventing youth radicalization and radical extremism through education and literacy programmes. The Slovak Republic underlined that promoting individualism interest at the expense of common good often leads to persistent poverty and deepening of

inequalities. Added to these, cultural and religious differences, lack of education, and intolerance lead to deep and extensive conflicts worldwide. The fast spreading of violent extremism and radicalization among young people is alarming. Therefore, the international community needs to take a deeper look at its driver and tackle the reasons why violent extremism happens so often. The Slovak Republic also pointed to Internet as a place which created hatred and where violent extremism mainly targets young people, and recommended a deep cooperation through science, culture, education, academia, and the private sector, as well as the mobilization of online communities and Internet intermediaries to combat violent extremism. The Slovak Republic called upon the international community for common and long-term actions that strengthens solidarity, and integrity to combat violent extremism.

The Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) highlighted the rise of xenophobia and violence towards refugees and migrants and deplored the spread of hate speech and populism that jeopardize their human dignity but also stability and security. Polarization threatening the social fabric of multicultural societies, OSCE urges the international community to join forces to create a paradigm shift in the current migration debate, address the root causes of displacement and promotes tolerance and diversity. OSCE emphasized the need to develop an effective strategy to counter xenophobia and bias-motivated violence in a comprehensive manner and based on knowledge and facts. The organization recalled that it produces the largest international compilation of hate crime data in Europe, and provides advice and support to governments and other groups in implementing programs to combat intolerance and foster inclusive dialogue in partnership. Recognizing the critical role of youth, women, religious leaders and the media in spreading messages of tolerance and acceptance, OSCE shares the Alliance's values and goals and look forward to build an ever-stronger partnership with UNAOC.

The Republic of Azerbaijan acknowledged the danger arising from discrimination and violence based on religious belief and the importance of dialogue as the way to proceed, as well as the success of the 7th UNAOC Global Forum in Baku. He invited all those present to consult the main outcome of the Forum: The Baku Declaration, and to use it as a guideline in their efforts to promote dialogue and to fight violent extremism. Regarding the role of youth, Azerbaijan announced the Summit on the role of youth in preventing and countering violent extremism, co-organized by the Turkic Council and UNAOC, to take place 20-21 October in Istanbul. He reminded the attendees that The Year of Multiculturalism will continue in Azerbaijan and that the country will hold the 4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in April 2017. The Minister also announced that the Baku Process will continue, together with the Alliance, and will be marked by the launch of a new project: The Baku–Alliance of Civilizations award for intercultural dialogue.

Malta discussed the importance of promoting trust and understanding amongst our diverse communities as a means to counter xenophobia. Protecting basic human rights is fundamental if we are to truly promote the social inclusion and integration of migrants, thus enabling them to lead economically productive as well as culturally and socially enriching lives. Furthermore, Malta addressed xenophobia as a global issue affecting countries of origin, countries of transit and countries of arrival. The Member State added that persistent anti-migrant sentiment and discriminatory practices are key obstacles to migrants' integration and equal access to human rights in host societies. Moreover, Malta outlined that legislation and policies that restrict migratory flows and criminalize irregular migration often reinforce anti-migrant sentiment, and recommended that instead host countries address both integration and negative perceptions of migrants. It also recommended to focus more on the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Malta reminded that it has a strong legal framework promoting equality and prohibiting direct and indirect discrimination, as well as harassment and victimization. This framework includes a National Action Plan against Racism and Xenophobia as of December 2010, as well as a framework for migrant integration that advocates for an inclusive society based on pluralism, diversity, non-violence and solidarity, encompassing all aspects of social development. In this context, Malta confirmed that protecting human rights of migrants will be a general objective of the Maltese Presidency of the EU. In addition, the Member State will try to advance the work on the accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights. Malta also intends to encourage the development and implementation of national and regional strategies or policies for integrating migrants into host societies and for counteracting racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. In this context, the Malta Presidency will promote fair recruitment practices and strengthen the capacities of local authorities and civil society to advocate for and protect migrants' rights.

Afghanistan outlined that the country has been a point of conversion where many countries from different corners of the world have been together, cooperating for a common goal which is to support the people in their long standing struggle to secure a peaceful, and prosper future following more than four decades of armed conflict. The Member State shared its own experience that led the country back on the path of stability and self-reliance, and offer a unique example of cooperation between nations and people of diverse backgrounds can live together. Thorough its history the country has been promoting tolerance, intercultural understanding and peaceful coexistence. On migration issues, Afghanistan welcomed this year's UNGA High level Summit on migrants and refugees convened in recognition of an unprecedented levels of human mobility: millions of people worldwide are migrating beyond their control and as they re-settle in new communities and societies they add a growing trend of multicultural societies where people of diverse backgrounds live as one. Afghanistan condemned all manifestations of xenophobia and religious and racial intolerance. The country welcomed the Secretary-General's campaign to counter xenophobia and underscore the efforts undertaken by all

stakeholders to ensure its implementation, and stressed the increasing need for the Alliance. Moreover, Afghanistan reiterated its steadfast commitment to advance the Alliance's goals and underlined the crucial role of UNAOC to help achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as inclusive societies promote peace and security, which in turn reinforces progress on the development front. Finally, the Member State stated that the adoption of the Baku Declaration at the 7th UNAOC Global Forum marks a new chapter in the work of the Alliance and on the outcomes called upon all stakeholders to maintain effective collaboration to adequately fulfill the joint commitments.

The United Arab Emirates recalled the principles of cooperation and renouncement of any forms of violence and extremism on which it is based, and expressed its concern about the global scourge that extremism and sectarianism have become for international and regional security. The Emirates stated their commitment to take rapid steps to put an end to extremism through the promotion of a moderate religious discourse that addresses terrorism, refutes all form of fanaticism, and impacts hate speech in the media. In that context, the UAE has reaffirmed its support to UNAOC and to the development of intercultural dialogue. The UAE stressed the importance of developing measures aiming at preventing incitement while respecting human rights and international instruments, including policies that are effective at a global and social level, and mentioned the existence of a national institution, the Hedaya center, to fight violent extremism in all its forms through dialogue programming and research. The UAE has adopted a number of initiatives related to strategic communication and the role of social media in combating terrorism and violent extremism. In addition, the Sawa center, in cooperation with the United States of America, was created in 2013 to use social media online for correcting wrong ideas and promoting moderate voices. Combating violent extremism rest upon cultural development among societies. The Emirates support inter nations and interreligious dialogue and seek to translate into actions the principle of deepening collaboration between the Muslim and Christian Worlds. Therefore, the UAE called upon the international community to develop intercultural dialogue, promote diversity and support the Alliance Of Civilizations.

Bangladesh deplored the growing misunderstanding between faiths, religions and cultures, and the way it has been exploited by some extremist groups thanks to modern technologies and social media to fuel misperceptions. Bangladesh recalled the war and sacrifices through which it went through, as well as its values and principles of tolerance, peace, dialogue, ethnic diversity, inclusiveness, and justice that are enshrined in its Constitution. Guided by these principles, Bangladesh has been tabling the UNGA Resolution on a Culture of Peace since 2001. Believing that an alliance of civilizations aims at achieving harmony and lasting peace, Bangladesh voiced its support to all initiatives fostering inter religious dialogue and its constitutional obligation to ensure equal status and equal rights of all people practicing different religions. In this spirit, the country allocated special budgets to the development of religious minority groups, celebrates religious festivals all across the nation, and addresses any attack towards religious communities with zero tolerance. Bangladesh has been a firm supporter of the Alliance since its inception and welcome its projects and 4 pillars that are interlinked and mutually exclusive. Bangladesh insisted on the importance of education in teaching lessons on peace and tolerance to youth, as well as on the role of media in advancing goals towards international peace and security, and projects on migration to avoid cross-cultural polarization and exclusion.

Qatar expressed its concerns regarding the spread of xenophobia in all societies without exception and called upon the international community to pay great attention to this phenomenon that has an impact on the lives of millions of people who are forced to migrate from their countries and to seek asylum in others in search of safety, security and dignity. Qatar recalled the link between this phenomenon and violent extremism and stressed the importance of developing practical measures to combat and uproot this phenomenon. Qatar outlined that the attempt of exploiting individual incidents or violence to connect violence to a certain religion represents hatred, particularly hatred of Islam or Islamophobia, which leads to the real reasons that feed extremism. Therefore, defaming or abusing religions gives rise to further spread of extremism. The Member State applauds here the valuable efforts of the Alliance. Since protracted conflicts worldwide leads further violence and extremism, Qatar has adopted a policy that aims to promote peace among nations and has exerted great efforts to resolve conflicts through mediation based on the Charter of the United Nations as a *sine qua non* in resolving conflicts, which was welcomed by the international community. The Member State has made great efforts since the inception of the Alliance of Civilizations to support it so that it can become an effective agent in achieving intercultural and interreligious peace. Qatar recalled its religious legacy that gives priority to tolerance and cooperation with everyone, as well as the important role played by The Doha Center Forum for Inter Religious Dialogue which promotes all counter terrorism and counter violent extremism efforts and build bridges between the followers of different religions. Qatar also mentioned Hamad bin Khalifa Islamic Center in Copenhagen that was established thanks to international efforts to promote peaceful coexistence between religions and represents a model to follow in the world since it raises awareness on the reality of Islam and promotes counter hatred dialogue. Qatar also recalled its support to UNAOC trust fund wit a yearly basis 1 million dollars and called upon other Member States to contribute to the fund. The State of Qatar reiterated its appreciation to UNAOC and expressed its wish to further cooperate with the Alliance.

The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) welcomed the timely theme after the past week that focused on migration since xenophobia is often a response to migration, and stressed the key role of Parliamentarians in promoting diversity and changing perceptions. As public opinion makers, Parliamentarians have the responsibility to combat xenophobia and racism by all means. The Secretary General's report indicates that sadly some of them this year have failed this responsibility. More work needs to be done and the IPU

needs to focus on policies that addresses the root causes of xenophobia and make sure that manifestations of xenophobia are condemned and rejected. IPU recalled the importance of youth and its commitment to bring young people together as they are at the forefront of the changes we want, in developing democracy and human rights. The Young parliaments are a new IPU constituency and are working on issues related to intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural understanding through regular meetings and following up activities. IPU recalled its 133 IPU assembly last year in Geneva on the moral and economic imperative for a fairer, smarter and more human migration, as well as the IPU 2012 Quebec City Declaration on Citizenship, identity, linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world, which provided two major opportunities for political dialogue and discourse on countering xenophobia. These declarations coordinate Parliaments to prevent, combat and eliminate discrimination. The Union also recalled a 2008 resolution that called on Parliaments to pass laws prohibiting political parties and private organizations that promote sexism, racism and xenophobia or related intolerance, protect the victims of violence and abuse related to xenophobia, and develop education programs that strengthen solidarity, cultural diversity and acceptance of people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. Last year, the IPU published a book for Parliamentarians on migration, human rights and good governance together with the ILO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that presents in very accessible terms, actions that can be taken to implement peace and combat discrimination and xenophobia. On the basis of this year's GA Resolution on the interaction of IPU, national parliaments and the UN which encourages closer cooperation to advance the mission of the Alliance, IPU hopes to be able to capitalize on these initiatives and measure the results on the ground.

Kazakhstan recalled that the UN has its foundation shaken and challenged by an unprecedented human crisis under the form of xenophobia, racism, bigotry, and extremism resulting in intense human suffering. Kazakhstan underlined that nobody is born a racist and therefore the international community needs to develop education programs and implement a culture of peace with a resolute search for equality for all. Kazakhstan encouraged the international community to implement national legislations to combat xenophobia in all forms, and mentioned Resolution 1325 on women and peace agenda, which has the foundations for a just order, together with the judicious use of social media as agents of change. Kazakhstan reminded that as a multicultural society is home to more than a hundred ethnic communities and some 16 religious denominations has a long-standing tradition of preserving its cultural diversity and has many best practices and lessons of learned to offer. That is why Kazakhstan initiated with UNESCO the international decade of rapprochement of cultures, the Islamic Rapprochement initiative with Turkey in OIC, convened the congress of the leaders of World and Traditional Religions and the International Parliamentary Conference on religions against terrorism in Astana in 2016. In this context, Kazakhstan seized the opportunity for thanking the UNSG for his plan of action to prevent violent extremism.

The Philippines as a multi-cultural nation shared its own experience in countering xenophobia and intolerance through the example of constructive engagements undertaken with differing parties in conflicts between Muslim and Christian communities through dialogue and the establishment of a transition commission. The Philippines initiated and supported inter and intra-faith discourses, youth focused interactive conversations, community-based cultural tours and exchange visits, as well as the establishment of spaces for peace or zones of peace where violent expressions and issues of conflict are deconstructed, resolved, and transformed. The country stressed the importance of including civil society groups, religious and economic sectors in the process of combating extremism, as well as the youth that are vulnerable and particularly targeted. The Philippines also highlighted the empowerment of women in building capabilities for peaceful relationship and harmony, and mentioned the important role of the Mother in Peace movement in peace dialogue. The Philippines stated its vision of spreading peace as a way of life and enshrining cultural understanding and acceptance of differences as the bedrocks of sustainable peace and development for humanity.

Egypt has always been active in supporting UNAOC and working on activities that are directly linked to its four pillars. The Member State has taken the lead at a regional level through the Arab League and developed a set of initiatives to enhance a culture of peace and coexistence. One of these initiatives is titled "In search for understanding" which takes place every year at the UN, either here in New York or in Geneva, with diplomats working on multilateral diplomacy from everywhere gathered to look for common ground and overcome issues that resulted out of understanding. Egypt emphasized its full support to the adoption of the New York Declaration on refugees and migrants on 19th September and its belief that the document will serve as a positive first step towards a more equitable response to addressing large movements of refugees through the adoption of the principle of responsibility sharing between States as well as strengthening global governance on migration. Egypt condemned all acts of racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance against refugees and migrants, and the stereotypes that apply to them. Egypt currently hosts 5 millions of migrants and refugees, including over 500 000 thousands Syrians benefitting of free education and health services. Egypt called upon the international community for shared responsibility and sustainable solutions for migrants and refugees, including through the adoption of comprehensive strategies, which prioritize the developmental dimension, particularly in the countries of origin of such flows. The country recalled the positive coalition between migration and the growth in national income in host societies. Moreover, Egypt stated that its strong belief in the opening of legal channels of migration as one of the most important and sustainable solutions to confront irregular migration, and expressed the hope that messages of tolerance and humanity that were expressed during the meeting would contribute to enable people to circulate in peace all over the world.

Romania highlighted the utmost importance of using soft power tools such as the Alliance of Civilizations to diminish tensions and risk of conflicts and to address mass migration, increased hatred and violent extremism. Romania added that it fully supports the global platform provided by the Alliance for sharing best practices, for building inclusive societies, and for counteracting the challenges of hatred and violent extremism. The country recommended that the platform should be further expanded to include best practices on countering xenophobia and intolerance as a contribution to the recent commitments adopted at the High Level Meeting on refugees and migrants. The Member State also expressed its appreciation for the addition of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in particular goal 16, as a new focus area of UNAOC alongside its traditional pillars. In addition, Romania commended UNAOC's initiatives to sensitize the media with respect to its role and responsibilities in combatting negative stereotyping of foreign nationals and providing correct information to the public. The Member State reminded the adoption of its three national plans that aim to mainstream the objectives of UNAOC in Romanian public policies, including activities meant to foster interethnic, intercultural, and inter-confessional dialogue, and to encourage partnership with civil society and academia in attaining these goals. According to Romania, the new national plan for 2017 aims to highlight migration and to put more focus on projects that strengthen nation-wide dialogue for promoting tolerance through diversity and respecting human rights of migrants and refugees in a democratic society.

Kyrgyzstan acknowledged its first ever participation in the annual GOF meeting in New York, as a Member State that recently joined the Group in March 2016. Kyrgyzstan expressed its appreciation for this opportunity and its full support for the mission of UNAOC, and acknowledged the importance of the theme of the meeting, as xenophobia has become a pressing issue and Kyrgyzstan has faced extremism, xenophobia and racism increasingly. The Member State recalled its legislation against xenophobia and related intolerance, as well as the criminal code of Kyrgyzstan foresees liabilities for actions aimed at inciting national, racial or religious enmity. Kyrgyzstan stated the example of laws on mass media prohibit the use of media to incite ethnic intolerance and hateful acts. In the framework of intercultural dialogue and fighting xenophobia, Kyrgyzstan recently launched a new initiative, The World Nomad Games. The Games were first proposed in 2011 and the first games held in 2014. The Second Games took place three weeks ago in Kyrgyzstan with delegations of 62 countries. The Nomad Games are a global platform designed to strengthen understanding and to promote friendship among people of different backgrounds, an alternative to ideological contradictions and contemporary conflicts. Kyrgyzstan is working with UN Member States and UNAOC to include the World Nomad Games in the UN General Assembly resolution on promotion of inter-religious and intercultural understanding and cooperation for peace. The country concluded by calling Member States to support the initiative.

Sudan welcomed the theme of the meeting and stressed the importance of countering radicalization while focusing on equality before the law and respecting the principle of non-discrimination. Stating that respect of national law and international human right law is vital for dignity and human rights, the Member State called upon the international community to find a way to counter xenophobia through fostering inclusive dialogue, taking into account diversity and integration of refugees and migrants. Sudan engaged with its diaspora on the refugee issue and countering human trafficking. Since Soudan hosts refugees from eastern Africa and northern Africa and is a transit country to different parts of Africa, the country has offered to share its experience and good practices in terms of welcoming refugees and providing them with the basic services they need despite the embargo and our difficult situation. Sudan expressed its best wishes of success to the Alliance for its efforts towards promoting dialogue between cultures and reiterated its support to all of those working to achieve UNAOC goals, including through national programs.

Argentina recalled the various migration flows that populate the country. Therefore, Argentina believes in the right of everyone to migrate and strongly rejects discrimination and criminalization of migrants and refugees that increases xenophobia. Argentina reaffirmed its support to UNAOC and to the importance of cultural diversity in achieving peace and development within and among societies. Argentina expressed its commitment to the work of UNAOC in favoring peace and intercultural dialogue, and in underscoring cultural and religious diversity within the international community. Argentina also commended UNAOC's work in fostering peace and intercultural dialogue, as well as its role in facilitating joint work to build a fairer and safer world in which every nation has equally relevant contributions to make.

Sweden continues to strongly support the work of the Alliance of Civilizations and its core principles for building bridges and new highways of communication between cultures and creeds. Sweden also continues to believe that the core activities of the Alliance, focusing on media, youth, education and migration are precisely what is needed to eliminate the most toxic social venoms exploited by groups engaged in violent extremism and identity-based violence, namely the lack of awareness and knowledge, alienation, hatred and fear. The Member State welcomed the important role of the Alliance in ensuring cultural perspectives on these larger challenges. For Sweden, today's challenges to the world order cannot only be tackled by governments and the UN but together with civil society. The struggle against the root causes of identity-based violence today needs to mobilize the widest possible array of actors. This has been a priority for Sweden as well. The country concluded by sharing that beyond violent extremism, there are other threats to open democratic societies such as racism, Islamophobia and other forms of violence. For Sweden, efforts to combat violent extremism must be accompanied by efforts to eliminate these forms of intolerance in our society, with a special focus on interreligious understanding.

Thailand highly values the role of UNAOC in promoting dialogue in the preventive diplomacy arena and fully agrees with the theme of the meeting “countering xenophobia and inclusive dialogue”. Dialogue and channels of expression must be open to everyone in order to eradicate xenophobia. As a pluralistic society, Thailand condemned the exclusion of minorities, which is one of the roots of extremism and violence, and has undertaken initiatives this year to foster inter religious dialogue and cross-cultural understanding, both domestically and within the region. In January, the Foreign Ministry hosted an international symposium on “Interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies” in Bangkok, in collaboration with the Research Center for Islamic History. Sessions of the Symposium focused education and the role of youth, as well as on the media, two of the four UNAOC pillars Thailand underlined the crucial need for an education system that introduces youth to a culture of peace. In this context, the government of Thailand signed memoranda of understanding with over 20 universities in the country and is developing programs to help students better understand and appreciate the multiculturalism of South Asia, region that encompasses most of the Muslim population in the country. In addition, the Thai prime minister has issued an order to ensure freedom of religion and protection for all that will be guaranteed under the new constitution. This requires new authorities such as the Department of religious affairs, and a National Security Council among others. Thailand is committed to promote interfaith understating and reconciliation among people, and stands ready to work with UNAOC in bridging peoples and nations to achieve the ultimate goal of a peaceful world.

Armenia, once again, indicated that it did not support the Baku Declaration and reiterated its position on the adoption of the document, as well as on the conflict with Azerbaijan. In response, the High Representative recalled the Armenian delegation of the response provided during the last GoF meeting and invited the Member State to move forward with the discussion on countering xenophobia.

Slovenia stressed the importance of embracing tolerance and diversity, and respecting the dignity and the equal rights of all, notably through an example from its own experience on organizing a special session on the role of media encountering hate speech and intolerance. The country deplored that the media pinpointed a large amount of information in social media where they do not adhere to the ethical standards of reporting. Slovenia welcomed UNOC projects such as the Media Friendly Glossary for Migration or Plural+, and emphasized that reaching mainstream media with the message of tolerance is not enough and recommended to try to reach every individual. Therefore, the Member State emphasized on the importance of including human rights in education, as well as cultural understanding. In addition, Slovenia also insisted on the important role of political leaders who have the responsibility to reject intolerance and hate.

Bulgaria reaffirmed its support to the objectives and the work of UNAOC in the global effort to promote diversity and fight violent extremism, and noted that the four pillars of UNAOC address some of the most pressing and complex challenges faced by the international community today. The country strongly believes that building societies based on respect for human rights and the rule of law through education and social inclusion creates the favorable conditions for preventing and combatting xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance. Bulgaria is encouraged by the special attention that UNAOC attaches to preventing and eliminating the marginalization and radicalization of young people since youth is particularly vulnerable to extremist narrative and xenophobic language. Bulgaria welcomed the Hate Speech initiative as a very important one, advising that it should be further developed. In that regards, Bulgaria commended the outcomes of UNAOC side-event co-organized by the European Union, the International Organization for Migration and the Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations on September 15th 2016. The event served as a good platform for Member States and other stakeholders to share experiences and best practices related to preventing and countering hate speech against refugees and migrants. Bulgaria stressed the importance of combatting stereotypes and prejudices of any forms, as well as of education considering its crucial role in preventing discrimination and xenophobia. Being the transit point of hundreds of thousands of migrants, the country stated its commitment to ensure good living condition to all those fleeing wars and pay particular attention to the rights and needs of refugee children. In this context, the Member State undertook a series of measures, including guarantying the right to free education of refugee children, Bulgarian language courses to refugees in order to enable their rapid integration in the society. Bulgaria particularly insisted on the situation of unaccompanied children that are most at risk of the worst forms of violence, and invited the international community to take immediate action to ensure that there is no lost generation.

Finland highlighted UNAOC's role as a much needed soft-power tool with the capacity to improve dialogue among civilizations. Finland made key recommendations for ensuring success in combating xenophobia through dialogue: a) Dialogue should be one of equals: Inclusive dialogue means including those at the margins of society, who should have an important role in the overall creation of societal resilience if given the chance; b) the international community must find ways to reach those who are opposed to our kind of encounters; c) participation of religious actors is crucial; d) interfaith dialogue is needed at different levels. From grassroots organizations to the leaders, a meaningful religious coexistence is a key element in combating xenophobia; d) We must apply high standards to inter- or intra-religious dialogue. This requires a genuine willingness to learn and to be influenced by the other. Good intentions may fail and lead to more fear, suspicion, and even hatred unless prepared and managed carefully and in responsible ways. In its concluding remarks, Finland noted: “If someone does not matter or does not even exist in the eyes of the others, one is tossing the most dangerous fuel into our societies.”

The European Union stated its commitment to tackle discrimination and exclusion, as well as xenophobic, and called upon the international community to stand up for migrants and refugees, and foster their integration in inclusive societies. In this context, the EU welcomed the side event on “combating xenophobia in the media and fostering inclusive societies” held on the margin of the UNGA in September, and, as stressed in New York Declaration on migrants and refugees, strongly condemned any manifestation of xenophobia and related intolerance against refugees and migrants. The EU also expressed its strong support to the UN campaign proposed by the Secretary-General to counter xenophobia and will continue to take concrete actions to fight such attitudes, including initiatives countering hate speech. In this climate, the 4 UNAOC pillars are now, more than ever, crucial areas to focus on. The EU recalled that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a comprehensive common respond for tackling global challenges, and recognized the role of young people and the necessity of achieving inclusive societies. The EU emphasized on its priority on youth and on the important role of the next generation to promote cultural and religious understanding and acceptance and achieve inclusion and integration. The EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018 involved an active and young people society as well as promoting the understanding and respect for culture through diversity and inclusion. The EU indicated that earlier this year, the High Representative/ Vice-President, Federica Mogherini, announced its intention to gather youth organizations and young people from the Mediterranean. In this regard, the EU welcomed UNAOC’s work through the Fellowship program and the Alumni network, and expressed its interest in developing further cooperation with the Alliance on shared goals.

Brazil focused on the importance of combatting xenophobia by ensuring inclusive societies. According to the country, such societies are based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law and can only prosper through inclusive dialogue, and for such dialogue to take place, Brazil underlined the importance of teaching and learning multiculturalism and introducing intercultural dialogue in all aspects of life, including from an early age. Responsibility lies with governments as well as schools, families, and the media. Brazil noted that the discourse of xenophobia is growing throughout the world, and ethnic and religious intolerance are widespread. The speaker pointed out that a core principle of a democratic society is protecting its citizens from all types of discrimination, including xenophobia. The practice of social inclusion is a means to put an end to xenophobia. Brazil recommended that the following principles be applied to promote socially inclusive societies and inclusive dialogue, insisting that the Alliance has a crucial role to play in that promotion: a) A tolerant, accepting society is founded on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which can only prosper through inclusive dialogue; b) Diversity should be embraced as an asset rather than a problem, minorities protected instead of being marginalized; c) Enhancing inclusive dialogue is necessary to tailor the social fabric while maintaining and valuing the differences and the diversity inherent to mankind; d) To secure inclusive dialogue, citizenship and participation must be nurtured and strengthened, e) Multiculturalism needs to be both taught and learned and intercultural dialogue should be introduced in all aspects of life, f) Governments have the responsibility to promote these human values but these should also be instilled by families, schools and the media. Exposure from an early age is critical.

Lithuania referred to the UNAOC annual report and recognized the key role of cultural and religious organizations in building inclusive dialogue among societies of different cultures and faith, which addresses problems such as xenophobia. Lithuania shared its own efforts to counter xenophobia by focusing on the education of youth, promoting values of diversity and tolerance, and fighting hate speech. Thereafter, the country addressed the issue related to countering hate speech, in particular in the context of Crimea that was “occupied and annexed by the Russian Federation”, which forced many people from Crimea to face xenophobia in their own land. Lithuania recalled the adoption of the UN General Assembly Resolution that affirms Ukraine territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders, as well as the reporting of OHCHR and other international bodies on the situation. Lithuania outlined xenophobia against Crimean Tartars and cited the example of the Supreme Court of Crimea declaring the *Majlis* a self-governing body of Crimean Tartars to be an extremist organization and banned its activities in Crimea. In conclusion, Lithuania urged the international community, including the Members of the Group of Friends to call on the Russian Federation to comply with international human rights standards and its obligations under international law.

Morocco welcomed the timely debate on combatting xenophobia through the promotion of inclusive dialogue, considering the state of current events and the spread of xenophobia that disregard tolerance, human rights and the rule of law. Morocco strongly deplored that many terrorist attacks are mistakenly linked to Islam, which is a religion of peace and tolerance that prohibits the killing of any individual and condemns xenophobia, racism as well as all forms of segregation. The Member State also recognized that often hate speech is spread by religious, political and community leaders. Based on such observations, Morocco stressed the importance of dialogue within communities, as well as interreligious dialogue as an effective mean to combat xenophobia. Therefore, Morocco insisted on the duty that religious leaders have in educating their community to the values of tolerance and respect for others. Therefore, Morocco considers as crucial to involve religious leaders in the promotion of coexistence and reconciliation, and in countering hate speech and incitement to violent extremism. In addition, the country also denounced the critical situation and challenges that refugees are facing, including xenophobia and racism that have been spread by the media and new technologies.

Algeria highlighted that cultural dialogue should promote tolerance and mutual respect, which it considers as the only defense against xenophobia and racism. In addition, Algeria denounced stigmatization that is being used to create differences between human beings or States, and stated that promoting tolerance constitutes the main way for us to prevent present and future generations from any kind of threat. Furthermore, the country underscored its own choice of tolerance and reconciliation, after experiencing terrorism,

which gave them the opportunity to go back on the way of stability, progress and development. Algeria pointed out that the Alliance of Civilizations is doing a very noble objective and should be promoted in this time of instability in many regions of the world.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) recalled that more than one fifty million people live outside their countries of origins as migrants and refugees and are highly vulnerable to discrimination, xenophobia, racism and related intolerance. OIC and UNAOC have dedicated efforts towards combating negative stereotypes, discrimination and intolerance. Moreover, OIC expressed its willingness to pursue its work on democracy and tolerance, good governance, and full implementation of the High Level Group report of November 2006. OIC share the conviction that dialogue and inclusiveness are part of the essence of a culture of democracy. These are qualities that need to be nurtured. To this end, OIC indicated its intention to work further on such projects under the framework of the MoU signed with UNAOC.

The Russian Federation stressed the importance of addressing the causes that force people to flee their home countries. In order to do so, conflicts should be settled by political means first, ensuring security and respect for human rights. The country outlined that interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States should be ruled out in order to prevent human catastrophes, terrorism, conflicts, and consequently mass flows of migrants from the assigned regions. Furthermore, the Russian Federation stated that States involved in interference must bear the primary responsibility and provide aid to refugees and forced migrants, and that the migration issues in Europe can only be resolved by settling the problems in their home countries and providing assistance to those countries that need to build economic progress. In this context, the Member State mentioned its assistance to Syrian people, including by helping Syrian refugees get a higher education in Russia. In addition, the Russian Federation also raised the complex humanitarian situation in Ukraine, which has led to an exodus in the region, particularly towards Russia. In response to Lithuania's comments, the State recalled that UNAOC's GoF is not the right forum to discuss Crimea and underlined the important role of the Alliance.

Malaysia reaffirmed its support and commitment to the efforts undertaken by the Alliance of Civilizations, and recalled its contribution to the culture of peace, as well as the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM) initiated by the President of the UN General Assembly in 2010. Malaysia stressed the importance of moderation as a value espoused by the GMM, which is an important approach that fosters mutual understanding and respect, and emphasizes tolerance and acceptance. According to Malaysia, encouraging the practice of moderation will help to empower those who are at risk to make positive life choices.

The Republic of Korea recommends holistic approaches and preventive steps towards the current challenges resulting from the migration crisis and the rise of violent extremism. In that sense, the Republic of Korea welcomed UNAOC work on intercultural and inclusive dialogue. The Republic of Korea insisted on the importance of youth and education to build inclusive societies and a more tolerant and understanding future. In this context, the Member State welcomed UNAOC activities related to youth and education that contributes to achieving the SDGs through progress and economic growth. In addition, on migration issues, the Republic of Korea strongly supports the Alliance's leading role in political will to countering xenophobia and fostering dialogue, as well as bringing new perspectives to address the issue of migrants that highlight the importance of social integration. The Korean delegation expressed its strong and continuous commitment to the UNAOC's work and its willingness to strengthen its cooperation with the Alliance.

Montenegro commended UNAOC for keeping the rights of migrants and refugees high on the agenda, at a time when discrimination, racism, and xenophobia continue to threaten security in the increasingly diverse societies of many UN member states. Montenegro noted that despite complex challenges of migration and forced displacement, the international community must recognize the positive aspects of diversity for achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development. As such, the Member State welcomed that the outcome document from Summit on refugees and migration highlights the invaluable contribution of refugees and migrants, as well as measures to address their discrimination. Montenegro made the following recommendations: a) Increase understanding of the drivers of intolerance, racism, and xenophobia and be prepared to face these challenges decisively; b) All stakeholders at all levels including civil society, public authorities, etc. must be involved in tackling these issues; c) The international community can address the issue through actions based on promoting and protecting human rights, security and dignity of refugees and migrants; d) There is a need to create a more predictable and systemic way of managing international migration in the future. Montenegro stated that it continues to face challenges in building an inclusive society. Recognizing these challenges, it has placed the principles of inclusive societies and sustainable development as the highest priority of its EU membership pathway and its development strategies. The Member State concluded that it is strongly determined to actively support and contribute to activities that reinforce the interaction and coordination of UNAOC with the rest of the UN system.

Senegal thanked and congratulated High Representative Al-Nasser for his leadership, confirming the support of Senegal in realizing the objectives of the Alliance. He expressed his appreciation for this opportunity to reflect on the best ways to realize the founding ideals and principles of the United Nations: peace, progress tolerance and mutual understanding. The Member State outlined that the most unacceptable manifestation of xenophobia is xenophobia towards migrants and refugees. Senegal insisted that the international community and Heads of State must condemn unequivocally all forms of hate speech and hateful actions towards migrants and refugees who are the most vulnerable. The country made the following recommendations: a) Because migration mutually benefits

civilizations and contributes to development, governments have the responsibility to implement policies that promote inclusion – policies articulated around the priority areas of the Alliance: youth, migrants, media, education and sports; B) Such policies and strategies should be developed according to each society's context and specificities

The Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries (CPLP) commended the Alliance of Civilizations and its work in championing the culture of dialogue and peace, and in combating xenophobia, discrimination, exclusion, radicalization, and violent extremism. CLCP recalled the need to implement a culture of peace based on the respect for human rights and called upon the international community to promote intercultural dialogue in order to face the challenges brought by our interdependent world. The Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries took the opportunity to congratulate the work developed by the Alliance of Civilizations and recalled the engagement of the Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries in cooperating with UNAOC towards these goals, through initiatives targeting youth empowerment, human rights education, and intercultural understanding among others.

Ecuador highlighted the persistence and increasing intolerance and lack of respect for cultural and religious diversity and discrimination that impede the promotion and protection of human rights and encourage violent extremism, particularly against those migrants and exiles poverty, expelled their own land, and forced to leave their countries fleeing local conflict looking in other latitudes the respect to their human dignity. The country outlined that many countries as Ecuador have been challenged to address large-scale movements of refugees and migrants, and that dialogue and solidarity remain the priorities for joint efforts initiatives. Ecuador recognized the importance and the need for dialogue between peoples, cultures, religions and States that lead us to find common responses, to identify meeting points that bring cultures and religions in their diversity, and that contribute to addressing the key challenges of a globalized world. The country also stressed on the importance of cultures and memories, as well as the link between development and identities, and mentioned as an example the consolidation of cultural policies that foster dialogue among intellectual diversity and artistic creation in Ecuador. The Member State also indicated that its Constitution recognizes cultural diversity. Ecuador welcomed the work of the Alliance on inclusive dialogue that takes into account the views of other stakeholders such as women, children, academics, civil society, can help to find new common visions, actions, and ideas, and outlined the increasing voices that joined the principles and objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations to work on inclusive dialogue, tolerance and against xenophobia and discrimination.

The Republic of Azerbaijan was given the right to respond to Armenia's statement by the United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations.

Closing Session: The United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations thanked the Members of the Group of Friends for participating in the meeting, as well as for their continuous support to the Alliance.