



## **PANEL DISCUSSION ON “THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN PEACEBUILDING IN THE MIDDLE EAST”**

Follow-up to the “Summit of Religious Leaders for Peace in the Middle East”,  
held in Alicante, Spain, 14-16 November 2016

### **Concept Note**

#### **Description of the Event**

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is organizing a panel discussion on “The Role of Religious Leaders in Peacebuilding in the Middle East”. The event will take place on 18 July 2017 at the United Nations headquarters, New York. It will feature keynote speakers and religious leaders from the three monotheistic religions of the Holy Land – Muslim, Jewish and Christian.

Religious leaders, as part of civil society, and with great influence in their communities, have a very important role to play in peacebuilding and in stability through the promotion of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation among communities. They also have a prominent role to play in facing extremism and preaching tolerance.

The Middle East is a key region for the stability of the world and where religious leaders have a valuable role to play in the promotion of peace, trust and mutual understanding for the two peoples living in the Holy Land.

#### **Background. Alicante Declaration**

The panel discussion will serve as a follow up to the November 2016 Summit of Religious Leaders for Peace in the Middle East, held in Alicante, Spain - an initiative facilitated by the Spanish Government and co-sponsored by UNAOC.

Religious leaders from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths met with the objective of supporting peace and peaceful coexistence between the Israeli and Palestinian societies. The Summit was of special relevance since it was the first time that influential religious leaders from Israel and Palestine met together publicly. As a result of the debates, the religious leaders adopted a Declaration by consensus.

The Alicante Declaration emphasizes that religious leaders are responsible for promoting a life of mutual respect based upon justice and safety, recognizes the holiness of the Land for all three religions, declares that the violence that is conducted supposedly in the name of God is a debasement of faith. It calls for the cessation of incitement, misrepresentation and distortion of the image of the other. The religious leaders commit themselves to educate future generations to uphold mutual respect. They call for a solution that recognizes the right of the two peoples to exist with dignity. They declare that religious leaders bear a special responsibility to contribute to the desired peace and they urge the Israeli and Palestinian political leadership to work toward a solution. Finally, they agreed to establish a standing committee that will work to implement the principles of the declaration. The Declaration is attached.

### **Objectives and Goals of the Alicante Process**

The Alicante Process aims to facilitate the contribution of civil society to peace among Israelis and Palestinians:

- To make a call for peace in the Middle East and to support peace for the two people living in the Holy Land, including the populations for whom religion and tradition are central in their identities.
- To strengthen dialogue among the religious leaders and contribute to build trust and peaceful coexistence. To promote mutual respect between people of all faiths in the Middle East.
- To stress the positive role of religious actors and their contribution to peacebuilding, acting as peacemakers, through the promotion of mutual understanding, respect and reconciliation and in this way contributing to conflict prevention and resolution.
- To face extremist ideology and engage in a dialogue for peace and mutual respect.
- To prevent religion from being used as a source of conflict, and describe violence in the name of religion as the desecration of religion itself.
- To prevent incitement to hatred and violence.
- To promote respect for the holy sites of all faith communities and to counteract any expression of disrespect, desecration or abuse of holy sites. To recognize the religious attachments of each faith and call on their adherents to promote coexistence and reconciliation.
- To promote education of religious leaders and young people for a culture of peace, and promote messages of mutual respect through the social media.

### **Aims of the Panel Discussion**

The panel discussion on “The Role of Religious Leaders in Peacebuilding in the Middle East” will promote the goals of the Alicante Process. The religious leaders will present the actions that they are undertaking in order to implement the principles of the Alicante Declaration and will discuss concrete actions to foster their contribution to tolerance, mutual understanding, and the prevention of extremist ideology.

Invitations are addressed to the Group of Friends of UNAOC and to rest of the United Nations member states.