



United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting

New York, 22 September 2017

Summary Report

Background

On 22 September 2017, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held a Group of Friends meeting at the level of ministers of foreign affairs and heads of international organizations. The event focused on the theme “*Youth Engagement: The Nexus to Building Inclusive Societies and Sustaining Peace*”. It was live streamed on UN Web TV and embedded on the UNAOC website. UNAOC covered interventions live on Twitter and Instagram, having displayed social media activity on a screen in the conference room to engage meeting participants. The live social media coverage benefited from the attention of Twitter accounts with large followings, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Jordan with 145,000+ followers, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with 14,500+ followers. The posts were delivered to 352,550 accounts and totaled 2,032,575 unique impressions.

Opening Session

The **High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations** opened the meeting by recalling that youth is one of the core pillars of UNAOC. They will continue to remain one of the main target audiences of its programmes and policy work.

UNAOC is a member of the Steering Committee for the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, as a follow up to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 of 9 December 2015. It supports and enhances youth-led peacebuilding processes and addresses funding challenges that youth have during their implementation. The following UNAOC initiatives focused on youth are an example of these methods in practice:

- The Youth Solidarity Fund was established in 2008 as a response to calls by youth-led organizations on the importance of establishing funding mechanisms for youth. Since then, 57 youth-led and youth-based organizations have received funding from UNAOC to implement projects promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue. These projects were completed in 30 countries and directly impacted nearly 80,000 beneficiaries. Thanks to the generous support of the Governments of Finland and Spain in 2017, seven youth-led projects from Afghanistan, India, Liberia, Morocco, South Sudan, Pakistan and Uganda are currently receiving support from the Youth Solidarity Fund for projects to build inclusive societies.
- In 2016, UNAOC launched Young Peacebuilders - a regional programme designed to enhance a positive role, which youth play in peace and security. The programme supports growth of networks of young peacebuilders, who are equipped with the tools to address stereotypes, prejudice and polarization in order to build more inclusive and peaceful societies. First pilot edition of Young Peacebuilders was successfully implemented in West Africa in 2016. Thanks to the support of the regional government of Extremadura in Spain, UNAOC, with the local collaboration of Generations For Peace, is currently implementing a regional chapter focused on the Middle East and North Africa region.

The High Representative has updated participants on the UNAOC Forums. Between 2008 and 2016, the Host Governments and UNAOC convened 7 Forums in Spain, Turkey, Brazil, Qatar, Austria, Indonesia and Azerbaijan. The past practice has been to have all logistical and protocol arrangements costs borne solely by the Host Government. The programme theme, sessions and outcomes have been jointly designed by the Host and UNAOC. In view of the national budgetary limitations and with an understanding of the actual scope of all financial and human resources responsibilities, a number of Governments advised that they are unable to host the 8th Forum. Based on the assessment of the High Representative, Forums need to be held less frequent and convened at least on a biannual basis, allowing an ample time to follow through the outcomes of the past Forums and thoroughly prepare for the future one. The UNAOC team consists of less than 20 project and administrative staff members and, therefore, keeping up the schedule of more frequent Forums is not efficient and effective. The future Forums could be led either by one Government or a group of Governments, which, respectively, will co-share the financial responsibilities. The High Representative invited all members of the Group of Friends to share their views on modalities and frequency to organize the UNAOC Forums moving forward.

The United Nations Secretary-General thanked all members of the Group of Friends for their support to UNAOC and to the Alliance itself for its efforts to promote tolerance and mutual understanding. We witness in too many places the rising of sectarianism and extremism, divisive political appeals and the scapegoating of refugees and minorities. The Alliance came into being at a time when some historians and other commentators were predicting a so-called clash of civilizations. When people clash, it is almost never over civilization but, rather, other factors. Identity is often a proxy for these issues but it is rarely at the core of the dispute. As we look ahead, the Secretary-General advised to think of UNAOC more and more in the context of diverse people coming together to uphold the values of the United Nations Charter. He welcomed the focus on youth in the Alliance's programming. Young people are crucial for achieving sustainable and inclusive development, and are critical for building and sustaining peace. He suggested that it is important to teach youth not only skills, but also the values of peace, tolerance, pluralism and global citizenship, because values are not inherited - they have to be taught. He reminded that as a result of migration, commerce and communications, all societies are becoming more multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious. This diversity enriches us and if we want diversity to be a success, we need to invest in social cohesion. UNAOC has done just that throughout its existence and the Secretary-General encouraged members to support its valuable work.

The President of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly noted that UNAOC is an important platform for building peaceful and inclusive societies with a focus on youth. There can be no solution to conflict without young people. Youth involvement is critical to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. A decent life for all includes a decent life for all young people. The PGA noted that 73 million young people worldwide are unemployed and creating opportunities for them will prevent them from succumbing to radicalization. Young men and women are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts and we need a special focus on their protection and, most importantly, also on their participation in conflict prevention and mediation. Young voices must be heard and the PGA will give them a platform to speak their minds at the high-level event on Sustaining Peace in April 2018. Furthermore, he will launch a roadmap for Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, which will include a series of activities where youth can show how they are true peacebuilders and agents for change. He called for mobilizing youth for sustainable development agenda, including to achieve the Goal 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The PGA also reflected upon the high number of migrants and refugees, who are young people. He suggested to not look at youth through the binary lens of a victim or a perpetrator, but to recognize them as innovators and leaders of today and tomorrow.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey expressed appreciation of the Secretary-General's support to UNAOC and to all 146 states and international organizations that are members of the Group of Friends. He urged all members to be more active under the UNAOC umbrella. The world faces polarization, intolerance, xenophobic and anti-Islamic rhetoric, which reached many regions, particularly Europe. Extremists target minority groups, especially young people, who are vulnerable against radicalization. Needs and aspirations of youth should be seen as an urgent necessity. The Minister emphasized that youth need to be engaged in political and decision-making processes. That task falls onto the shoulders of responsible politicians and member states of the Group of Friends should set examples to others. Turkey appreciates that UNAOC has youth as one of its four pillars. UNAOC has

realized a series of meaningful projects and we still have a long way ahead of us – empowering youth with education and employment is essential. Last October, Turkic Council and UNAOC organized a Forum in Istanbul on youth in preventing and countering violent extremism. Turkey hopes to see more examples of such cooperation. As co-sponsors, Turkey and Spain work on an Action Plan for UNAOC, where, in particular, a special emphasis will be put on PVE and fostering integration of migrant communities. It will help UNAOC to better serve its mandate in the current challenges. The plan will be shared with the Group of Friends for consideration and support to effectively implement it.

The State Secretary of Spain recalled his direct participation in the process of establishing UNAOC back in 2004-2007 and expressed his admiration that a great number of states and organizations joined UNAOC ever since. He reflected upon a series of attacks in Europe and Middle East, which represented not a clash of civilizations, but a clash between civilizations and barbarism. As noted earlier, Turkey and Spain have jointly come up with the Action Plan for UNAOC to address the challenges of violent extremism and how to prevent it. Spain suggested that UNAOC continues its work in education and youth, migration and media, with a renewed approach. The State Secretary commended the YSF results and called to expand UNAOC's scope of actions. He also noted that women have to play a key role in preventing conflicts (per Security Council Resolution 2242); it is also advisable to examine how ICTs are being used and how one can silence voices of hatred and intolerance on Internet. Religious leaders have also an important role to carry out towards building peace. In that context, the State Secretary recalled the adoption of the Alicante Declaration 2016 and other initiatives taken by the Government of Spain under the umbrella and sponsorship of UNAOC.

Group of Friends: General Discussion

Reflecting on the main theme of the event and referencing the UNAOC's mandate and its activities, the following key points and recommendations have been made by the delegations:

- Youth represent the majority of the world population and the international community needs to elaborate appropriate youth policies to meet young people's economic and social needs, including developing an international convention on youth rights, employment opportunities, re-training for new technologies advances, timely safety net interventions, leadership and community programmes.
- Member states commended the key global initiatives and policy instruments such as the World Programme of Action for Youth, Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and the International Day of Youth as an important road map for an international community.
- Youth are the main target of uncivilized ideas and ideologies. Therefore, governments must be encouraged to create access for younger generations to a quality education on tolerance and openness, so that youth could assess and choose information that promotes peace and inclusiveness. Enlightenment is the main instrument against ideology of violent extremism.
- A number of speakers shared a conviction that young people can and must contribute in building inclusive societies and sustaining peace. New generations have the potential to prevent conflicts and extremism, but it is also a member states' responsibility to educate youth to the fundamental and universal values of democracy, human rights and mutual respect.
- Promotion of interreligious and intercultural understanding in the field of youth education is crucial for countering xenophobia and achieving peaceful coexistence. Educational institutions should be actively and strongly involved in the efforts for fighting violent extremism and radicalization.
- Youth participation in governance, peace and political processes is important for democracy, effective and legitimate policy-making, and for a peaceful society. Including girls and young women in these processes should be especially encouraged. Otherwise, the risk of exclusion and marginalization is high and it will generate apathy, and, in worst cases, can lead to violence. The resolution of the IPU on Youth Participation in the Democratic Process is an existing international framework that illustrates respective principles.
- Global citizenship education conceptual framework is getting more attention recently as a new education paradigm to empower young people and equip them with tools and sense of responsibility to resist extremism and intolerance.

- Many delegations expressed their full support to the UNAOC Fellowship Programme, Summer Schools, Young Peacebuilders and Youth Solidarity Fund, as well as to the work of UNAOC with the alumni – young people who benefited from those programmes. They also support UNAOC in promoting integration, confronting xenophobia and encouraging inclusive dialogue within and among societies – a goal in which youth engagement plays an essential role. Trainings of journalists to encourage unbiased reporting were also recognized and advised to continue.
- One of the delegations would very much welcome if UNAOC, together with other relevant United Nations actors, could participate in facilitating the necessary implementation of the Kofi Annan’s report findings regarding the Rahingya situation in Rakhine state.

Several delegations referred to the most recent and upcoming initiatives, noteworthy in the context of the event:

- In March 2017, EU launched the Young Med Voices Plus initiative to promote youth advocacy, dialogue and partnership across the Mediterranean region. A dialogue of EU leadership with youth from the Sahel, the Maghreb and Europe took place in June 2017 in Bamako.
- In May 2017, the OSCE Malaga Conference “Working with Youth for Youth”, jointly organized with Spain, gathered more than 100 young people from across the OSCE area. It discussed and adopted a number of recommendations on key priority areas such as countering violent extremism, public participation and countering intolerance online.
- The Government of Germany has started a new initiative “Responsibility of Religions for Peace”. At a first Conference in Berlin in May 2017, more than 100 representatives of different faith communities agreed that religions fulfill important social tasks in their societies.
- The EU Strategy for Youth 2010-2018 highlights that "youth need to be equipped to take advantage of opportunities such as civic and political participation and global engagement".
- In 2017, EU celebrates the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus Programme, which has enriched and empowered 9 million people through student mobility and exchange.
- The League of Arab States issued its plan for AOC 2016-2019, in which, inter alia, youth activities are being implemented by its member states.
- In June 2017, Republic of Korea and Qatar launched the Group of Friends on Education for Global Citizenship with the participation of 35 member states.
- The Government of Kyrgyzstan, together with partners, is working on improving access to child justice and building the capacity of the local government, which will play a crucial role in building social cohesion and preventing violence.
- The Government of Malta has launched a public consultation process for the national voting age to be lowered from 18 to 16.
- PAM has established an Academic Platform in order to facilitate a closer interaction among members of parliaments, universities and students.
- As an example of involving youth in political and economic life, Hungary has introduced a Stipendium Hungaricum scholarships programme, which encourages studies of the best foreign students. Today more than 600 students from Africa and more than 2100 students from Asia are studying in Hungary.
- The National Youth Strategy has been adopted by the Government of Montenegro for 2017-2021 period, providing a strategic and legal framework for building of national and local youth policy implementation capacities.
- IOF is currently implementing its Youth Strategy for 2015-2022, with a number of projects for youth participation, youth employment and community work being carried out.
- The Government of Kyrgyzstan will host on 28-29 September 2017 an international conference “Islam in a Modern Secular State”, discussing the preservation of the cultural identity of states, prevention of the penetration of radical ideas under the guise of promoting religious values, and the post-exchange of interreligious dialogue.
- On 14-22 October 2017, Russian Federation will host the 19th World Youth and Students Festival in Sochi; over 20,000 young people from 150 countries are expected to participate.
- The 5th Africa-EU Summit (28-29 November 2017, Abidjan) will focus on "Investing in Youth". A pre-summit Youth Forum will take place and feed substance into the Africa-EU Summit.

- In 2018, the Government of Kazakhstan will convene the Sixth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, where the role of youth will be the key issue.

Closing Session

The **United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations** thanked everyone for attendance and participation in the meeting. The annual report of UNAOC on 2016 activities has been approved by the United Nations Secretary-General and will be circulated by the General Assembly through the regular channels, as well as posted on www.un.org/en/documents and UNAOC websites. Spain, Turkey and UNAOC are drafting the Action Plan for UNAOC, which will be shortly submitted to all members of the Group of Friends within a regular consultation process framework.

Annex: List of Speakers

High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
 United Nations Secretary-General
 President of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly
 Turkey
 Spain
 Uzbekistan
 PAM
 Azerbaijan
 Malta
 IPU
 LAS
 Morocco
 Indonesia
 Jordan
 Armenia
 Kazakhstan
 CPLP
 Philippines
 OSCE
 Hungary
 Austria
 Iran
 UFM
 Montenegro
 Pakistan
 Bangladesh
 Germany
 Qatar
 Sweden
 Libya
 Thailand
 Brazil
 Egypt
 OIC
 Sudan
 Russian Federation
 European Union
 Benin
 Kyrgyzstan
 Republic of Korea
 IOF