



From: High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
To: Participants of the UNAOC Group of Friends Meeting
Date and Venue: Tuesday, 3 April 2018, ECOSOC Chamber, UNHQ, New York

Concept Note

Preventing Violent Extremism and Sustaining Peace

The dual resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council (Res 2282) and General Assembly (70/262) in April 2016 placed the “sustaining peace” concept at the center of the UN’s peacebuilding work. Both resolutions recognized sustaining peace as “both a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account”. Moreover, the constantly evolving and multi-faceted nature of contemporary violent extremism underlines the need to address the root causes of this phenomenon. The sustaining peace agenda is well-positioned to recalibrate responses to violent extremism through engaging actors within and outside the UN system.

The commitment to prevention has become central to the UN system response to the threat of terrorism. The Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in 2016 was specifically designed to enhance implementation of the UN Counter-Terrorism Strategy cross all four pillars, including Pillar on “Addressing the Conditions Conducive to the Spread of Terrorism” by drawing on the experience and strengths of all parts of the UN system in order to support Governments and societies in achieving their goals.

Governments cannot act alone in preventing violent extremism. Member States are encouraged to engage with all concerned social actors (including women, youth, religious leaders, and victims of violent extremism). Promotion of community-led initiatives aimed at strengthening social cohesion and grassroots-generated solutions to local grievances remains paramount. The Secretary-General tied this notion to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 16. In his remarks in February 2017, he reaffirmed that principle: “Promoting social cohesion, so that diversity is seen as a benefit rather than a threat, is investing in sustaining peace. As societies become more multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious, people must feel that their identities are valued, even as they feel a sense of belonging to the larger community.” Communities and grassroots organizations are best placed to bring to the fore their needs and debate possible avenues to address them. Discussions in this respect should promote a true exchange of ideas that would engender or strengthen a sense of belonging among members of the community.

An “All-of-United Nations” approach has always been at the heart of the Secretary-General reform efforts of the UN peace and security architecture. In this respect, UNAOC has been committed, dating back to the High-level Group Report of 2006, to promote initiatives aimed at rejecting violent extremism. The political interventions of the High Representative have consistently been guided by the need to advance efforts to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. UNAOC project activities have similarly been anchored in this principle. Our project activities have evolved into a solid and growing portfolio that tackles the phenomenon from multiple directions. In all instances, UNAOC project activities are designed to promote the underlying values that are essential to preventing violent extremism and to advancing the goals of sustainable peace and security – tolerance, dialogue, inclusion and coexistence.

UNAOC youth-oriented activities provide opportunities for capacity building for civil society as well as peace education for young civil society leaders. Media programming provides young people with an opportunity to develop their media and information literacy and critical thinking skills to tackle hate speech and incitement to terrorism both in the online and offline spheres. The UNAOC Fellowship Program continues to provide opportunities for young professionals to expose themselves to new cultures and to gain a greater respect for cultural diversity. All of these initiatives represent key preventative elements.

At the end, sustaining peace aims to build a common vision of a society which, when inclusive and peaceful, will become the primary reference point for action on countering and ending violent extremism.

The High Representative will brief the members of the Group of Friends on the agenda for UNAOC activities in 2018.