



From: The High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
To: Participants of the UNAOC Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting
Date and Venue: Friday, 28 September 2018, 15:00-18:00, TRI, UNHQ, New York

Concept Note

Building Bridges: Using Soft Power to Promote a Culture of Peace

The United Nations Secretary-General has committed to a vision of what he describes as sustaining peace. The Security Council and the General Assembly view this approach 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”. This past April, the Secretary-General addressed the General Assembly on the issue of peacebuilding and said, “we need a holistic approach which prioritizes prevention and addresses the root causes of conflict by integrating peace, sustainable development and human rights”. The international community has long recognized that comprehensive approaches are necessary preconditions for sustaining peace. In this connection, a culture of peace is not simply conceived as the end of a conflict or a diplomatic compromise. Rather, establishing a lasting peace that transforms conflicting relationship is a prolonged process that involves dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding. Moreover, promoting a culture of peace and sustaining it requires support for inclusivity, particularly of those who are frequently marginalized and excluded. That means women and girls, youth and minorities of all kinds.

For UNAOC, soft power remains a crucial tool for conflict prevention, peace building and reconciliation. Since its inception, UNAOC has emphasized the importance of promoting mutual understanding, trust and peaceful coexistence in order to reduce the prejudice and hatred that fuel violence and conflict. A culture of peace is implausible without a genuine commitment to education, both formal and non-formal. Glorification of violence based on racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, hate speech and divisive rhetoric, often propagated through traditional and new media platforms, can profoundly undermine any serious attempt to help create a culture of peace. Conversely, global citizenship education and media reporting can greatly enhance a culture of peace and diminish racist, aggressive, discriminatory and violent attitudes.

Background

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) was established in 2005, as a political initiative of Mr. Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General, and co-sponsored by the Governments of Spain and Turkey. In its 2006 report, the High-Level Group, appointed by the Secretary-General to develop the mandate for UNAOC, identified four priority areas for action: *Education, Youth, Migration, Media*. UNAOC project activities are fashioned around these four areas, which can play a critical role in helping to reduce cross-cultural tensions and to build bridges between communities. UNAOC has been described as the soft power tool of the Secretary-

General for bridging divides and promoting understanding between countries or identity groups all with a view to preventing conflict and promoting social cohesion. Each year, during the high level week of the General Assembly, UNAOC Group of Friends meet at the Ministerial level. Recent themes of Ministerial meetings of the Group of Friends have addressed youth engagement, countering xenophobia and the relevance of UNAOC to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2018, the theme of the UNAOC Ministerial level meeting of the Group of Friends will be “Building Bridges: Using Soft Power to Promote a Culture of Peace”. In light of the Secretary-General’s emphasis on conflict prevention, a focus on the ways in which soft power approaches can contribute to the development of the culture of peace needed to prevent conflicts of tomorrow is needed today.

Issues and Significance

This event will provide the High Representative with the opportunity to brief members of the Group of Friends at the Ministerial level on current and future activities of the organization. It will allow for descriptions of on-going project activities that use soft power approaches to enhance the development of a culture of peace through the use of inclusive and sustained dialogue involving youth, civil society and faith-based organizations, addressing the root causes of conflicts as well as the promotion of tolerance.

Outcome and Format

This event will provide opportunities for Ministerial level officials to provide feedback to UNAOC on its activities. The opening session will be followed by an open debate among Member States and an overview of UNAOC’s 8th Global Forum in November 2018.

The program is envisioned to last 3 hours.