



United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting

New York, 28 September 2018

Summary Report

Background

On 28 September 2018, 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 “*Building Bridges: Using Soft Power to Promote a Culture of 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 posts were delivered to 642,913 accounts and totaled 2,481,523 unique impressions. In addition, the official hashtag for the meeting, “#Commit2Dialogue”, briefly trended at number 5 in New York, while “Group of Friends” trended at number 18. The live social media coverage benefited from the attention of several social media accounts of ministries and missions participating in the meeting, including @UfMSecretariat (Union for the Mediterranean), @MFAofArmenia, @AmbAlyaAlThani (PR of Qatar), and @EUatUN among others.

Opening Session

The **High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations** opened the meeting by greeting His Excellency, Mr. Fernando Martín Valenzuela Marzo, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Spain, and His Excellency, Mr. Sedat Önal, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, and official delegates. He recalled that each of us, within our own unique mandates and priorities, has committed to a culture of peace. Two out of every three major conflicts in our world have a cultural dimension. It is undeniable that special envoys, economic sanctions, and disarmament are an integral part of the peace and security architecture. Nevertheless, soft power remains an indispensable tool in the peacebuilding toolkit.

Since UNAOC’s founding in 2005, many countries around the world have become more multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious. Globalization has ushered in a new era of cultural exchanges. Migration has increased, with humanity on the move more than ever before. New technologies have revolutionized information and communication, creating unprecedented opportunities for exchange and cooperation, especially among young people.

Today, more than ever, identities are multiple and fluid, a by-product of our interconnected world. However, it is a truism that globalization and innovations in information and communication technologies have been accompanied by deepening divisions and conflicts - both within and between societies. In too many parts of the world, cultural diversity is increasingly perceived as a threat rather than an opportunity. Our shared vision of peace and harmony is being challenged by forces that seek to divide the world and advocate for divisiveness. The values of pluralism and inclusivity - prerequisites for achieving a culture of peace - have yet to be fully assimilated in many societies. In this context, soft power is a powerful, although quite often a neglected peacebuilding tool.

The High Representative defined UNAOC's project activities as soft power tools to address the underlying issues that undermine social cohesion and make conflict and violence more likely, specifically:

- **First**, UNAOC executes its mission by engaging and empowering civil society to work for peace at the community level. Through the Young Peacebuilders Programme and Youth Solidarity Fund, it supports the growth of local networks of young peace-builders through trainings in peace education and conflict resolution. The intensified engagement on this front continues to produce tangible benefits. UNAOC also promotes media and information literacy to tackle hate speech and incitement to violence. As part of the #SpreadNoHate Initiative, UNAOC has convened hundreds of journalists to develop good practices and professional standards to counter negative stereotypes and xenophobia against minorities and migrant populations in the media. Soft power as a form of cultural diplomacy is also significant in achieving a culture of peace. The Fellowship Programme seeks to foster cooperation between young professionals from different cultures and faiths. Over 200 young leaders from 43 countries have harnessed the power of intercultural dialogue and understanding in shaping lasting peace in their local communities.
- **Second**, UNAOC provides a platform for religious leaders from different faiths to work together toward a safer world. Since 2013, it has organized or co-organized more than 30 events involving religious leaders. A notable achievement includes the adoption of the "Alicante Declaration", inspired by the three Abrahamic faiths in 2016.
- **Third**, and perhaps one of the greatest soft power tools of the UNAOC toolkit, is the Global Forum. The Forums have proven to be the premier platform to advance the global conversation on building dialogue and understanding across cultures and religions.

At present, UNAOC is preparing for the 8th Global Forum to be held at the UNHQ on 19 and 20 November 2018. The High Representative invited all members of the Group of Friends to the discussion in November to renew a shared commitment to create more inclusive and peaceful societies. He thanked Qatar for the financial and moral support for the Forum 2018, and Spain and Turkey for their contributions over the years, which have enabled the Alliance to play a fundamental role in preventing violence and conflicts as well as sustaining peace.

The United Nations Secretary-General sent a message to the Group of Friends, which the High Representative read out to the participants. He greeted the Group of Friends gathered for a new session of the United Nations General Assembly. He underscored UNAOC's work on building bridges, trust and understanding, as well as its crucial role in nurturing the productive cooperation among countries and peoples, essential in an era of growing global interconnectedness.

The Alliance's mission is especially important in addressing racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of intolerance, which are increasing in many places, feeding each other and fomenting extremism. Minorities, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable communities face bias and abuse across the world. Discrimination against women remains pervasive. As the Secretary-General noted to world leaders in his address earlier in the week, this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the human rights agenda is losing ground and universal values are being eroded.

In his message, the United Nations Secretary-General thanked the Group of Friends for the commitment to address these complex challenges, promote a culture of peace and create opportunities for young people. The efforts undertaken can also help people recognize that, as societies become more multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious, there is a need for greater investments in social cohesion. Diversity is richness, not a threat.

The United Nations Secretary-General will join the UNAOC 8th Global Forum and the Group of Friends High Level segment, organized during the Forum.

The State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Spain, His Excellency, Mr. Fernando Martín Valenzuela Marzo, thanked the High Representative of UNAOC for his important role in promoting international dialogue and mutual respect. He also thanked the United Nations Secretary-General and Turkey as co-sponsor. He stated that, in 2004, the Spanish government appealed to the United Nations General Assembly to awaken the world of the risk of a clash of civilizations, and contributed to create UNAOC to overcome prejudice, polarization, and marginalization. In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on a Culture of Peace and since then it has promoted the link between such culture and human rights. To the same end, UNAOC has organized seven Global Forums and implemented programs on Education, Media, Youth, and Migration. But more can be done in terms of cooperation, media engagement, and dialogue among cultures and religions. Spain suggests preparing (1) a guide on good practices on the four pillars and promoting them for possible replication and expansion, and (2) a Communications Strategy which can reach out to youth, arts, and sports actors. In addition, Spain reminds the importance of including women in interreligious and intercultural dialogue as they can contribute a lot in terms of cultural diversity. Successful initiatives which have been mentioned include: PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival, the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) program, the #SpreadNoHate campaign, and the PEACEApp. The State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Spain concluded by pledging Spain's support for the upcoming Global Forum, underscoring that the overall theme is aligned with the Secretary-General's vision on prevention. The Alliance can help address challenges that require contributions and responsibilities from all, especially the necessity to build partnerships and adopt new approaches engaging young people, universities, the private sector, and other stakeholders.

The Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, His Excellency, Mr. Sedat Önal, thanked the High Representative for his important work and 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 stated that building bridges of communication and understanding is becoming very important. The Alliance started with promoting social cohesion and preventing violence and conflict, and a lot has happened since its creation in 2005. The Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey informed that more progress has to be made in light of the ongoing conflicts, economic crises, and displacement. Racism, xenophobia, and intolerance are on the rise. In this framework, the mission of the Alliance has become more relevant. All the four priority areas are soft power tools to promote the culture of peace, diversity, tolerance, and understanding. The Vice Minister mentioned the important role traditional and social media play in shaping public opinions and perspectives. They can have a positive but also negative impact as they might be used for manipulation. It is fundamental to refrain from stigmatization of some religions and cultures, and disseminate messages that describe how migrants can enrich societies and help build bridges instead of threatening communities. He concluded by renewing the commitment of Turkey to the activities of the Alliance. The Vice Minister thanked the High Representative; the United Nations Secretary-General; Jorge Sampaio, previous High Representative of the Alliance; and Kofi Annan, previous United Nations Secretary-General.

The Chief of Cabinet and Spokesperson for the High Representative, Nihal Saad, thanked the High Representative, the United Nations Secretary-General, the two sponsors of the Alliance, Spain and Turkey, and all participants to the meeting. She provided an overview of the theme, format, and registration process of the 8th Global Forum.

"#Commit2Dialogue: Partnerships for Prevention and Sustainability of Peace" is the theme of the 8th Global Forum, decided after several consultations with the co-sponsors. The purpose is emphasizing the Secretary-General's vision on prevention, sharing good practices for possible replication and expansion, and building partnerships. All members of the Group of Friends have received an invitation package including the concept note, the programme, and the logistical note. The website (<https://8thglobalforum.unaoc.org/>) was launched on 18 September 2018 and it will be updated in due course with content, list of speakers, and other information. Ms. Saad encouraged logging in regularly to check the updates and the contact information for any inquiry.

The Opening Ceremony of the Forum will feature the United Nations Secretary-General, UNAOC High Representative, Spain and Turkey. Participants will convene in two Plenary Sessions (PSs) and six Breakout Sessions (BSs). In addition, there will be the Youth Event and the PLURAL+ Awards

Ceremony over a gala dinner. At present, 221 Official Delegations (193 Member States of the General Assembly, State of Palestine, Holy See, and 26 international organizations), over 550 participants and the President of General Assembly have been invited to the Forum.

The themes of the Plenary and Breakout Sessions will be the following:

- PS1: “Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue: A Tool for Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding”. The conversation will describe how interreligious and intercultural dialogue can be tools for prevention of violence and conflict, and sustainability of peace;
- PS2: “Words Matter: The Role and Responsibility of the Media in Shaping Public Perceptions about Migrants and in Promoting Inclusive Societies”. The discussion will focus on the good practices of the media to have an objective coverage without any element of online hate speech and incitement to violence. It will contribute to the objectives 16 and 17 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM);
- BS1: “Digital Diplomacy: Online Citizen Engagement and Social Media Platforms as Mechanisms for Prevention and Countering Online Hate Speech”. The purpose is to provide recommendations based on good practices. There will be a dynamic discussion with experts from social media platforms such as Google, Twitter, Facebook, and others;
- BS2: “Strengthening the Leadership, Inclusion and Visibility of Women in Sustaining Peace Processes”. As Spain mentioned, the Alliance wants to promote the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes following the Security Council resolution 1325;
- BS3: “Partnerships that Work: Leveraging the Private Sector & Civil Society in Peacebuilding Efforts”. The purpose is showcasing the partnership the Alliance has established with BMW with the hope to explore and build new ones;
- BS4: “Many Cultures, One Humanity: The Role & Responsibility of Religious Leaders and Faith Based Organizations in Building Peaceful and Inclusive Societies”. Over the years, the Alliance has been creating a space for religious leaders and faith based organizations to exchange good practices on the promotion of a culture of peace;
- BS5: “Global Citizenship Education”. This session will address education at global, regional, and local levels;
- BS6: “The Silk Road: A Route to Peace”.

The Youth Event will give 100 young leaders the opportunity and space to share their good practices to promote a culture of peace. The selection of youth has been geographically and gender balanced. The Alliance has dedicated particular attention to this event and hopes to receive positive feedback from co-sponsors as well as from all other countries.

In conclusion, the Group of Friends was walked through the registration process by the Web and Multimedia Communications Specialist, Ms. Julie Ann Ladan. She informed that the deadline for the registration is on 5 November.

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:

Key points:

- Member States commended the important role of the Alliance as soft power tool for diplomacy and in promoting a culture of peace through its four areas of work: Education, Media, Youth, and Migration. In addition, they outlined the accomplishments since 2005, year of the creation of UNAOC;
- Regarding education, several representatives stated the importance of promoting innovative and creative methodologies in order to teach children and youth the values of tolerance, respect, and inclusiveness, necessary to develop a peaceful mindset. Some countries have mentioned their collaboration with UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNDP. Others have suggested focusing on minorities and vulnerable groups which cannot access quality education;

- Regarding youth, concrete activities have been shared as good practices. Specifically: the USD 50 million of the Government of Kazakhstan to train and educate Afghan students in Kazakh universities; the Positive Agenda for the Youth 2015 of the Western Balkans; three projects of Slovenia – (1) on mediation for children to raise awareness of peaceful and constructive resolutions of conflicts, (2) on fostering intercultural dialogue and science diplomacy to bring diverse societies, people, and ideas together, and (3) “Our Rights” that has already enabled education for 200,000 children in 26 countries; the Parliament of Youth created by Iraq; the Forum of Youth which Egypt will organize in November 2018 in Sharm El Sheik; and the Armenian TUMO Center for Creative Technologies and the Smart Center in the Lori region for rural youth. Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has been mentioned as a good example of leader who has positively engaged youth around the world;
- Many participants have expressed their willingness to build regional and national capacity, implement or strengthen early warning and monitoring systems, promote spiritual enhancement and social cohesion, create public private partnerships, embrace innovation, and deliver results;
- The collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders, from the public and private sector, on the four pillars of the Alliance, have been recognized as fundamental to advance a culture of peace and its link to human rights. It is necessary to adopt a holistic approach to violence and conflict, as well as build bridges, especially where there is a lack of trust and reciprocity;
- Some Member States have mentioned the diversity-poverty-prevention nexus underling the correlation between peace and sustainable development promoted by the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and recalled the importance of aligning the Group of Friends’ work to that of the Security Council;
- Parliamentary diplomacy is rounded on soft power and the UN System plays a fundamental role in advancing dialogue and promoting peace in the Mediterranean region, Israel and Palestinian territories, and in Libya. To this end, UNAOC’s work has never been more relevant to prevent hate, violence, and conflict, as well as foster collaboration and innovation. For example: the cooperation with Imams in Morocco has proven successful in fighting terrorism in the entire region;
- In Europe, new types of security challenges are to be addressed, such as: (1) massive migration from the Middle East and Africa and tensions among communities which undermine the potential of development and paralyze socio-economic growth; (2) conflicts among different religious groups and violent extremism; and (3) interventions which have not been successful in integrating migrants and minorities. The Christian community is under threat: 215 million of Christians suffer from atrocities and 255 are killed every month. Christianophobia would be the last accepted discrimination of religion and it should not be. However, protecting the Christian community does not seem being a priority for many governments.

Recommendations:

- Leverage the opportunity offered by the UNAOC 8th Global Forum taking place at the UNHQ in New York on 19-20 November 2018 to showcase the UNAOC work, exchange good practices for possible replication and expansion, and build trust and capacity across countries;
- Promote the use of forums, congresses, and conferences globally to share good practices and disseminate positive messages for prevention and sustainability of peace. In this regards, upcoming events have been mentioned: the VI Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions planned in October 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan; the 17th Summit of La Francophonie entitled “Vivre Ensemble” organized in October 2018 in Yerevan, Armenia; and the 3rd Global Forum against the Crime of Genocide to be held on 9 December 2018 in Armenia;
- Position the Alliance as focal point within the UN System in promoting a culture of peace through dialogue and collaboration, and as catalyst for the stakeholders actively involved in addressing prevention of violence and conflict. The Alliance is perceived as the entity capable of developing global and ad hoc interventions to address the new security challenges;
- Promote innovation for peace designing and implementing effective policies, building new partnerships, and adopting new approaches aimed to advance interreligious and intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, and human rights. Some countries have suggested focusing on popular culture and its expressions: music, movies, and idols as instruments for peace. Music and movies can

inspire and leave long lasting impressions in our minds. Likewise, when an idol speaks or posts on his or her Instagram, million followers listen;

- Include women in prevention and security activities as they can contribute a lot in terms of cultural diversity. Educate young men to respect gender equality and diversity;
- Conceptualize and launch initiatives on matters such as social cohesion, grassroots movements, and Goal 4 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda: “Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All”;
- Include youth in decision-making and peacebuilding processes as they play a critical role in advancing interreligious and intercultural dialogue and sharing good practices given their proactive use of social media;
- Promote a culture of peace through traditional and social media and work with them to shape positive perspectives and opinions of migrants and minorities to end racism, xenophobia, and polarization;
- Prepare and disseminate a guide on the good practices in the four UNAOC priority areas of work (Education, Media, Youth, and Migration) for various stakeholders to use;
- Prepare a Communications Strategy targeted to youth, arts, and sports to contribute to the UNAOC mission;
- Develop a unique methodology to (1) facilitate understanding of politics and dialogue related issues as well as build bridges; (2) create effective knowledge management and engagement platforms for youth, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other key stakeholders; and (3) increase awareness and understanding of women’s empowerment and gender equality as women are agents of positive change and facilitators of dialogue.

Closing Session

The **High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations** thanked the participants for their attendance and participation in the meeting. The annual report of UNAOC on 2017 activities was approved by the United Nations Secretary-General and will be circulated to the General Assembly through the regular channels, as well as posted on www.un.org/en/documents and UNAOC websites.

Annex: List of Speakers

High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
United Nations Secretary-General
Spain
Turkey
Chief of Cabinet and Spokesperson of the High Representative, UNAOC
Web and Multimedia Communications Specialist, UNAOC
Malaysia
Kazakhstan
Qatar
Montenegro
Union for the Mediterranean (UFM)
Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM)
Hungary
League of Arab States (LAS)
Armenia
Finland
Philippines
Sweden
Bangladesh
Brazil
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)
Azerbaijan
Thailand
Belgium

Slovenia
Estonia
Burkina Faso
Pakistan
European Union
Libya
Egypt
Morocco
Iraq
Sudan
Turkic Council (Observer to the Group of Friends)