



Concept Note

Annual High-Level Meeting of the UNAOC Group of Friends

“Shaping a Better World: Building Cohesive and Inclusive Societies in a Challenging COVID-19 Environment”

Tuesday, 29 September 2020, virtual event via WebEx online platform and live
webcast

On 14 July 2020, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) turned fifteen. The Alliance of Civilizations was created as the special initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who launched it in 2005 at a time when the United Nations recognized an urgent need to fill a policy gap in the governance of cultural and religious diversity, which was threatened by growing divisions between communities and polarization of attitudes triggering the rise of violent extremism, terrorist attacks and the exacerbation of frequent manifestations of intolerance, xenophobia and racism.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic unraveled, there was a strong push-back on cultural diversity, religious pluralism and human rights. Rightly described as a global human crisis, the pandemic threw under a magnifying lens critical issues that lingered on and metastasized over the years. It laid bare entrenched inequalities and fractures. Societies are divided across cultural, ethnic and religious lines. We see it in the resurgence of Neo-Nazis organizations and anti-Semitism. Manifestations of hate speech, racism, xenophobia, and all forms of discrimination against vulnerable communities continue, leading to a vicious circle of extreme violence and terrorist attacks. Youth and women were further marginalized depriving communities of significant potential sources of resilience.

Coincidentally as we mark the 15th anniversary of UNAOC, the international community also celebrates this year the United Nations at 75. It is worth recalling that the existing multilateral governance structures emerged from a devastating global war and the world-wide depression and a pandemic that preceded it. Only events of such global consequence could generate the solidarity, resolve and vision necessary to create those structures.



Events as such remind us of our common fragility and our interconnected fate. If a neighbor, family member, friend, or country is not safe, none of us is safe. History taught us that our well-being and safety are linked to what happens to our neighbor. There is no alternative to standing together in unity and solidarity in cohesive and equitable societies. Fulfilling Goal 16 “Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies” of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is more imperative now than ever before. It is the *raison d’être* of UNAOC.

The current dark moment in the history of humanity also presents a rare opportunity to emerge from this pandemic closer delivering as one. After all, sustaining peaceful, inclusive and just societies require an integrated and coherent approach through strong collaboration across the different sectors in any society.

In this context, the overarching theme of the opening plenary session of the annual high-Level meeting of the UNAOC Group of Friends ***“Shaping a Better World: Building Cohesive and Inclusive Societies in a Challenging COVID-19 Environment”*** will serve as an occasion to mark the 15th anniversary of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and take stock of what has been accomplished. It will be also an opportunity to present to the Group of Friends, which has grown to 124 member states of the United Nations, along with 27 international inter-governmental organizations and 1 non-member state, the progress made by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations since September 2019 across the different pillars. The High Representative will also present the new *initiatives* launched in the areas of prevention and mediation, as well as the new actions taken to address challenges posed by the global pandemic of the coronavirus in 2020.

The opening plenary of the meeting will provide the Group of Friends with the space to express their views regarding these underlying questions: *What future do we want for our societies, and how do we get there? What can the UNAOC Group of Friends do to support UNAOC in its endeavors?*

The opening segment will start at 09:00AM (EDT/New York time) and conclude by 11:30AM (EDT/New York time). It will be followed by 2 interactive webinars, each for 90 minutes, focusing on: 1) “An Intergenerational Conversation: The Future They Want”, and 2) “Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination: The Tearing of Our Societies”.



Programme as of 22 September 2020

Annual High-Level Meeting of the UNAOC Group of Friends

“Shaping a Better World: Building Cohesive and Inclusive Societies in a Challenging COVID-19 Environment”

Tuesday, 29 September 2020

08:30 AM - 09:00 AM Speakers and participants access the Webex event lobby

09:00 AM - 09:40 AM Opening segment

Introductory Video: “Commemorating the 15th Anniversary of UNAOC”

- H.E. Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos, Under-Secretary-General, High Representative for UNAOC, chairs the meeting, welcomes participants and delivers remarks
- Remarks by H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (video message)
- Remarks by H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkır, President of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly (video message)
- Remarks by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey and Spain
- Presentation on the UNAOC’s progress and activities, by the High Representative for UNAOC

09:40 AM - 11:25 AM Plenary segment

Statements by Member States, Observers and International Organizations (per the list of speakers; interventions are limited to 2 minutes)

11:25 AM - 11:30 AM Closing segment

H.E. Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for UNAOC



11:30 AM - 11:45 AM Intermission 1

11:45 AM - 01:15 PM Webinar 1 “An Intergenerational Conversation: The Future They Want”

Leading the conversation:

H.E. Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for UNAOC

Panelists:

- Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)
- Ms. Diene Keita, Deputy Executive Director for Programme, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Assistant-Secretary-General
- H.E. Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the United Nations
- Ms. Corinne Momal-Vanian, Executive Director, Kofi Annan Foundation

Special guest:

- Ms. Aya Chebbi, Youth Envoy, Africa Union

UNAOC youth alumni panelists:

- Ms. Sif Heide-Ottosen, Fellowship Programme 2019 EUNA, Denmark
- Mr. Tomas Horvath, Fellowship Programme 2017 EUNA, Slovak Republic
- Mr. Ahlem Nasraoui, Intercultural Innovation Award 2017, Tunisia
- Ms. Magdalen Amony, Intercultural Innovation Award 2019, Uganda
- Ms. Theresa Saade, Intercultural Innovation Award 2014, Lebanon
- Mr. Syed Ali Abbas, Intercultural Innovation Award 2017, Pakistan
- Ms. Louise Kanza, PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival 2017, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa
- Ms. Sivatharsini Raveendran, Youth Solidarity Fund 2019-2020, Sri Lanka
- Mr. Mohammed Ghanem, Young Peacebuilders 3rd edition, Egypt



- Ms. Farah El Alami, Young Peacebuilders 3rd edition, Jordan
- Mr. Afaf Lamkoutar, Young Peacebuilders 3rd edition, Morocco

01:15 PM - 03:00 PM Intermission 2

03:00 PM - 04:30 PM Webinar 2 “Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination: The Tearing of Our Societies”

Moderator:

H.E. Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for UNAOC

Panelists:

- Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC), Acting Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (UN-OSAPG)
- Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
- Mr. Jason Isaacson, Chief Policy and Political Affairs Officer, American Jewish Committee
- Ms. Nayeli Chavez Geller, New York Correspondent, Primer Impact, Univisión
- Mr. George Salama (*tbc*), Head of Public Policy, Government, and Philanthropy – MENA Region, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, Twitter
- Ms. Alex Walden (*tbc*), Global Head of Human Rights, Google