



United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends Meeting (Permanent Representatives' Level)

New York, 17 July 2013

Summary Report

At the invitation of the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, UNAOC convened the Meeting of the Group of Friends on July 17, 2013 (at the Heads of Missions and Delegations level). The Meeting was conducted in an open format and focused on two agenda items:

1. UNAOC Strategic Review and Plan for 2013-2018;
2. UNAOC Schedule of Events for August-December 2013 and Beyond.

Opening remarks

Having welcomed all participants, the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations opened his statement by discussing the UNAOC's Strategic Review Document. The UNAOC's Secretariat collected delegations' feedback provided during April-May 2013 and consulted EOSG in preparing the Document. The Plan contains information regarding the new structure of UNAOC and High Representative's priorities for 2013-2018. The High Representative invited all participants to contribute their thoughts on the Strategic Review Document and its implementation.

The High Representative informed the Group of Friends members that the Annual Report on the UNAOC's activities (July 2012 – June 2013) had been submitted to the Secretary-General, who will then share the document with the General Assembly.

The High Representative emphasized that the Alliance will play a coherent and coordinated role within the UN system. Since the Vienna Forum (February 2013), he has been working toward this vision through close contacts with other UN agencies and departments (UNDP, DPA, OCHA, DESA), and participation in events (examples include June 2013 mission to Mindanao, conducted by his Chef de Cabinet, and April 2013 meeting of religious leaders in the Middle East, attended by the Director). In consultation with EOSG, the High Representative created the first ever guidelines for the work and function of UNAOC. This document will enable the UNAOC's team to work cohesively under the leadership of the High Representative and in coordination with the Secretary-General and relevant departments.

The High Representative thanked all Group of Friends members for their continued support of UNAOC as it works to deliver on its objectives, especially given its limited human and financial resources. He highlighted a range of upcoming events and advancements in the UNAOC's current programmes (e.g. Fellowship Programme, Youth Solidarity Fund, Intercultural Innovation Award, regional conferences, PLURAL +, etc).

The High Representative will continue to travel to a number of countries to build relationships and deepen cooperation with the Alliance. There will be no Focal Points Meeting in 2013, but the Alliance will continue to discuss appropriate meeting times and locations.

The High Representative shared his concerns for escalating challenges facing people of the world, and subsequent increasing demands on the UN, including radicalization, hate and xenophobia. In light of these issues, the High Representative believes that UNAOC must play an active role in building peace and tolerance. In referencing Malala Yousafzai's speech at the UN, the High Representative emphasized the importance of resisting the efforts of those who abuse religion and the UNAOC's role in direct response to messages of hate. The High Representative thanked the Group of Friends members for their financial contributions; he will write to foreign ministers in the coming months to ask for their continued support and remind of pledges made by their Governments.

The Sixth UNAOC Global Forum will take place in September 2014 and the planning process will begin soon. The Host Government of Indonesia will confirm the dates very shortly. The High Representative invited members to host regional and sub-regional preparatory meetings for the Forum, as well as a Focal Points Meeting in 2014.

The Deputy Secretary-General reiterated greetings from the Secretary-General to the Group of Friends members and thanked the High Representative for his comprehensive report of the Alliance's activities. He emphasized the importance of the Alliance's programmes today, and also referenced Malala's Yousafzai's speech as an example of a global movement for mutual understanding and the need to promote education for all. He emphasized the importance of intercultural dialogue and constructive engagement that the Alliance has undertaken.

The Deputy Secretary-General commended the High Representative for initiating a thorough review of setbacks and successes of the Alliance of Civilizations and suggested that the Strategic Review Document deserves the active support of member states and continued advice.

He stressed a great potential of UNAOC to mobilize a range of partners (youth, grassroots organizations, global corporations, religious leaders), as well as the importance of embracing a message of understanding, brotherhood and sisterhood to lay the foundation for trust, understanding and lasting peace and security.

Representatives of the two co-sponsors – Spain and Turkey - thanked the High Representative and the Director for the development of the Strategic Review and expressed confidence that the Strategy will help in moving UNAOC forward. Both emphasized the need to find innovative ways of financing the Alliance's activities.

The representative of Turkey recognized that UNAOC is the foremost organization in the UN system on inter-religious dialogue. In referencing goals of the Strategic Review, he expressed hope that UNAOC will significantly improve its communication strategy, as well as peace-building efforts. He encouraged the Alliance to launch concrete and practical projects with measurable outcomes, and emphasized the importance of the National and Regional Strategies for UNAOC, which will ensure that the goals of the Alliance spread to the grassroots level. UNAOC can play the role of a conflict prevention mechanism per se, particularly in combating hate-oriented speech and expressions targeting sacred values. Turkey reiterated its continued support and cooperation with UNAOC, as emphasized by Ankara authorities during the High Representative's visit to Turkey two months ago.

The representative of Spain congratulated the Alliance on the Strategic Review completion and, in particular, expressed his full agreement with the SWOT analysis featured in the Strategic Review Document (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). He suggested UNAOC to focus on 1) promoting and setting efficient projects that could give an added value to the four priority areas of action of UNAOC; 2) promoting regional cooperation under the UNAOC's umbrella; 3) enhancing the UNAOC's interaction within the UN system, to take advantage of the synergies and complementarities; 4) reinforcing work with non-state actors (NGOs, think tanks, academia and private enterprises); 5) elaborating a fundraising strategy that would suggest innovative ways to promote cooperation with the private sector and foundations. In conclusion, the Spanish representative expressed hope that the Ministerial Meeting in September will endorse projects, contained in the Strategic Review Document, and have substantive discussions. Spain remains fully committed to support the Alliance and its activities.

Highlights of the Discussion

A number of delegations contributed to the discussion, expressing appreciation and gratitude for the work of the Alliance and supporting the process of conducting the Strategic Review. The following short summary includes key views and suggestions emerged from the statements made in reference to the agenda items of the Meeting.

1. UNAOC Strategic Review and Plan (2013-2018)

- Delegations welcomed the Strategic Review process conducted by UNAOC in March-June 2013.
- A number of delegations noted the importance for UNAOC to continue promoting development of National and Regional Strategies for intercultural dialogue.
- Many representatives stressed on the need for UNAOC to enhance coordination with other organizations and departments within the UN system. In doing that, it is important to create synergies and avoid duplication of work.
- UNAOC should keep a balance between ensuring outreach to civil society and other non-state groups, improving collaboration with other UN departments, while keeping in mind that it is an inter-governmental process.
- In recognizing the disparity between the Alliance's ambitions and limited funding, several representatives emphasized the need to diversify sources of funding.
- The recommended zero-growth policy for the Alliance's core staff received comments of support, as did the Strategic Review's focus on ensuring quality of programs over quantity. A representative from civil society noted the possibility of partnering with sports organizations as a way to access additional financial support. Another speaker suggested that "road maps" of proposed projects would be valuable to possible funders wanting to track the progress of various initiatives.
- On the topic of orienting the UNAOC's actions toward conflict prevention and reconciliation, some members expressed enthusiasm, while others expressed the need to avoid duplications of the effective efforts of others.
- Many delegations emphasized the relevance of the Alliance's four pillars (education, media, migration, youth) and how the organization can focus its efforts towards peace-making in these areas. A few delegations reminded UNAOC of other recommendations in the High Level Group Report 2006 (to foster understanding between the Muslim and Western worlds).
- A number of delegations expressed eagerness to welcome the High Representative in their capitals and Headquarters, which could be an opportunity for him to reinforce a call for continued financial support of the UNAOC's Trust Fund.

2. UNAOC Schedule of Events: August-December 2013 and Beyond

- The delegate of Indonesia informed the Group that scheduling of the Forum is almost finalized (Autumn 2014) and that his country looks forward to host the Forum.
- Many delegations welcomed the detailed schedule of events, provided by the High Representative. The PLURAL + festival was specifically mentioned by the IOM and got commended for having the highest number of applicants and number of applicant countries ever this year.
- Delegations noted that September 2013 letters will be sent to them as soon as possible and that no Focal Points meeting will be held this year.

Moving forward

- UNAOC noted various observations made by delegations to the Strategic Review Document on July 17, 2013. It will send a communiqué to members of the Group of Friends (delegations and Missions based in New York), inviting to meet with UNAOC Director to discuss them further, addressing in details all questions.
- The High Representative will issue letters of invitation to the September Group of Friends Meeting, Ministerial level, and send them out to the Missions and Delegations by first or second week of August 2013.
- The High Representative will prepare an 'outcome document' on the Strategic Review, inviting Ministers and Heads of International Organizations to endorse it at the September Meeting. The 'outcome document' will be circulated among all members of the Group of Friends by August 26, 2013, allowing sufficient time to review it and consult with delegations before the week of September 23-27, 2013.