

**United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
Group of Friends Meeting – Permanent Representatives’ Level**

New York, 18 February, 2015

SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held its Group of Friends Meeting (Permanent Representatives’ Level) on 18 February, 2015 under the overarching theme *‘Ethnic and Cultural Dimensions in Disasters and Emergencies’*. At the occasion of the meeting, co-sponsors Spain and Turkey, and a group of other states who hosted or will host the UNAOC Forums (Brazil, Qatar, Austria, Indonesia and Azerbaijan) tabled a draft resolution on UNAOC for membership’s attention.

United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, chaired the meeting. The event was open to civil society representatives, media, UNAOC’s partners and those member states and organizations, which are not formal members of the Group of Friends.

Opening Session

The **United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations** opened the meeting by welcoming two new members in the Group of Friends (San Marino and Benin). He also welcomed the Under-Secretary-General Emergency Relief Coordinator and highlighted a growing cooperation between UNAOC and OCHA on the basis of a number of common issues which the two entities address. He recalled examples of cultural, religious and politically-driven conflicts and emergencies which lead to abuse of human rights. The High Representative emphasized that humanitarian assistance must remain a priority and be delivered to civilian population with no discrimination, coherently and efficiently. Protection of civilians through preventive actions is the objective of UNAOC as a soft power tool to prevent violence and foster post-conflict reconciliation. He pointed out that all over the world there was a terrifying increase of radicalization, extremism and terrorism, especially manipulating the youth and caused the wrong interpretations of religion, cultural and humanitarian factors. He underlined at that juncture the role that UNAOC and OCHA can play together to deliver as one in the United Nations system.

The High Representative reiterated his support for the United Nations World Humanitarian Summit (Spring 2016, Turkey), around which OCHA invited UNAOC to cooperate. Cooperation will include: substantive inputs on preventive action based on UNAOC’s mandate; appropriate modalities related to addressing the rise of cultural tensions and its humanitarian impact. Exploration of joint activities and programs between UNAOC and OCHA is also undergoing.

The **Under-Secretary-General Emergency Relief Coordinator** informed the participants that nearly 80 per cent of OCHA's work is in countries and regions affected by conflict. It is being increasingly called on to provide lifesaving assistance and protect civilians. UNAOC and the UN's humanitarian agencies deal with the effects of conflict and the breakdown of social order, and there is a lot to learn from each other's experiences. Many of conflict situations arise from or gain strength through the exploitation of ethnic, religious and cultural differences. Furthermore, displacement within and across borders is a defining feature of conflict, and is now at record high levels. Much of this displacement, fuelled by conflict, is rooted in a lack of understanding, dialogue and respect between communities, and the principles and initiatives of UNAOC have an important role to play. Its work with grassroots organizations can help to build openness and tolerance in communities from the ground up. When children and young people are involved in these initiatives, their influence can last a lifetime and help to build peace and inter-communal respect. The UNAOC's Youth Solidarity Fund shows what can be achieved (from bridging the gap between Dalit and Muslim people in Bangladesh, to promoting dialogue and human rights in Somalia, as an example). UNAOC's work with faith-based organizations is also significant and its support can help these groups increase their reach and make an important contribution to humanitarian action.

The **Ambassador of Spain** reiterated his Government's commitment to support UNAOC. At the occasion of the approaching 10th anniversary of UNAOC, and before the situation of violent extremism and terrorism in the name of religion, intercultural and religious conflicts and rising intolerance between societies, he invited all to reflect on the UNAOC's mission. While results of UNAOC's programmes in the areas of education, youth, media and migration are encouraging, Spain believes that more stakeholders should be included in the Alliance's work. Specifically, 1) UNAOC can establish a platform of Religious Leaders for Peace in conflict areas and offer trainings to religious actors so they can contribute effectively to peace at local and national levels to promote peaceful coexistence; 2) cooperation in the field of mediation between UNAOC and the UN Mediation Unit could be strengthened; a team of expert mediators in intercultural and interfaith issues can be created and deployed in support of the efforts of mediation, negotiation and dialogue; finally, 3) experts on intercultural and interreligious issues could be included in the United Nations' peacekeeping operations.

The **Ambassador of Turkey** welcomed new members in the Group of Friends, growth of which is an evidence of the common will of the international community to combat misperception, intolerance, discrimination and xenophobia in all its forms and manifestations. Recognizing the UNAOC's potential to contributing international humanitarian response, he outlined the following principles and approaches: 1) promoting inclusivity and engaging governments, local, national and sub-regional stakeholders as equal partners in disaster relief efforts; 2) establishing and ensuring mechanisms for dialogue, including in humanitarian assistance and protection of humanitarian personnel; 3) building mutual respect among peoples of different cultural and religious identities, as humanitarian response and disaster relief need to be mindful and respectful of the existing local settings in the immediate aftermath of disasters.

Spain and Turkey presented the draft resolution on UNAOC to the Group of Friends members, with a hope that it could be adopted without a vote during the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly under the agenda item 'Culture of Peace'. The last and only resolution directly related to UNAOC dates back to 2009. The 2015 resolution

aims to reaffirm the importance of work in combating intolerance and discrimination, and confirms that the Alliance of Civilizations is an initiative under the United Nations auspices.

All member states are welcome to review and submit their contributions to the resolution during the negotiations, which will begin as of March 2, 2015.

Group of Friends: Views on the UNAOC's Role, Support and Recommendations

Delegations made a series of statements that may be summarized as follows:

- Members of the Group of Friends welcomed the UNAOC's cooperation with OCHA around the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. The Summit will be an important platform for strengthening effectiveness and accountability of the humanitarian system and increasing the number of stakeholders to support humanitarian response and disaster relief (non-traditional actors like private sectors, faith-based organizations, diasporas, etc.).
- During conflicts and emergencies, minorities are often at a great risk, and their protection and respect of ethnic and religious identities is an important aspect of humanitarian support. The protection of minorities also includes the need to respect their religious and cultural heritage, which is essential to preserve their identity.
- Ethnic and cultural considerations need to be reflected in public policies, including those related to prevention of and response to disasters and emergencies. Examples of such policies were highlighted, in particular, by Brazil.
- Delegations acknowledged receipt of the draft resolution and expressed readiness to take an active part in the consultative process in the coming weeks. The co-sponsors will facilitate expert-level negotiations and discussions of the draft text in the form of public meetings at the UNHQs.
- UNAOC was encouraged to continue consultations and actively involve the network of the Focal Points in its work, as well as translate its vision and main principles into national and regional plans.
- A number of participants recalled successful initiatives of the Alliance in the areas of youth and education (i.e. Fellowship Programme, Summer Schools, Youth Solidarity Fund, Entrepreneurs for Social Change, training sessions for the UNAOC's alumni) and welcomed their development and replication.
- Several members of the Group of Friends informed participants of the events organized in the coming months (conference on Combating Radicalization through Universal and Islamic Values in Doha, Qatar, Spring 2015; 3rd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in Baku, Azerbaijan, May 18-19, 2015; Symposium on Peace Education for Development and Interreligious Dialogue in Cotonou, Benin, 26-28 May 2015; 5th Congress of Leaders of World's Traditional Religions in Astana, Kazakhstan, June 2015; 2nd GMMF international conference in Kuala Lumpur, October 2015). Participants have expressed their support to UNAOC and appreciation to the Government of Azerbaijan to host the 7th UNAOC Forum in Baku, Spring 2016.

Closing Session

In conclusion, the **United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations** thanked members of the Group of Friends for the support and commitment, including review and support of the 2015 resolution on UNAOC. He informed that the quarterly Newsletter is being issued for the UNAOC Focal Points' attention. He congratulated the Universal Peace Federation, an NGO that partners with UNAOC since 2013, and signed a bilateral working arrangement document in the area of promoting intercultural dialogue for peace and development.

Annex 1: List of Speakers

United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations
Under-Secretary-General Emergency Relief Coordinator
Spain
Turkey
European Union
Hungary
Qatar
Azerbaijan
Portugal
Brazil
Benin
Kazakhstan
Iran
State of Palestine
UNESCO
FAO
Italy
Mexico
Republic of Korea
Malaysia

Annex 2: (Draft Resolution)