



## CONCEPT NOTE

### ***#SpreadNoHate: A Global Dialogue on Hate Speech Against Migrants and Refugees in the Media***

MENA Edition – In partnership with Egypt Media Development Program (EMDP)

**Wednesday 13 December 2017**

Sofitel Cairo Nile El Gezirah, Cairo, Egypt  
08:30 – 18:15

**@UNAOC #SpreadNoHate**

## **1. Background and Context**

In 2015, the world witnessed its highest levels of forced displacement recorded since World War II, with a considerable increase in the number of refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people across various regions of the world – from Africa to the Middle East and South Asia<sup>1</sup>. While the so-called migrant crisis and its impact on Europe have dominated public debate, much less sustained attention has been dedicated to the processes of migration and displacement in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, in spite of the fact that they have carried the lion's share of the burden.

Just like in many European countries, the large number of newcomers in the MENA region has put a strain on governments as they struggle to cope with migrants crossing their borders and moving through their countries. MENA countries have had to confront new sets of social and legal issues, which have at times have led to incidents of violence against migrants and refugee communities.

In this context, the influence of the media in shaping public opinion and in setting the agenda of public debates is crucial. The media have the ability and the power to challenge pre-conceived perceptions and to become a channel for new ideas and perspectives. Through balanced, accurate news coverage, including informed analysis and debate, journalists and editors can contribute to reducing tensions between cultural and identity groups. However, journalists who report on migration too often exacerbate tensions and contribute to polarization by basing their narratives on sweeping, misleading generalizations and stereotypes about migrant communities and falling into propaganda traps laid by politicians.

Considering these challenges, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) launched the #SpreadNoHate initiative in 2015 with the goal to provide global media with a platform to engage in an international dialogue on hate speech against migrants and refugees and to share good practices to promote positive narratives.

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<sup>1</sup> Global Migration Trends Factsheet 2015, International Organization for Migration (IOM) <http://publications.iom.int/books/global-migration-trends-factsheet-2015>

To date, UNAOC has organized four #SpreadNoHate Symposia: at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York (December 2015 and September 2016), in Baku, Azerbaijan (April 2016), as well as in Brussels, Belgium (January 2017), with the support of the European Union.

Each Symposium has benefited from the participation of renowned journalists, policymakers, representatives of international organizations, and tech companies such as Facebook and Google. Participants have examined different measures to prevent and counter hate speech in the media and formulated concrete recommendations to address hateful rhetoric against these populations in the media. More information about past UNAOC #SpreadNoHate Symposia can be found on the UNAOC [website](#).

## 2. Action

UNAOC will organize a fifth #SpreadNoHate Symposium. This new Symposium will draw on the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted by the UN General Assembly on 19 September 2016, and its commitment to counter hate speech and racial violence. It will also dovetail with the UN global campaign against racism and xenophobia, “TOGETHER: respect, safety, and dignity for all” aiming to change negative perceptions and attitudes towards refugees and migrants, and to strengthen the social contract between host countries and communities, and refugees and migrants.

### *UNAOC #SpreadNoHate Symposium in Egypt*

The number of migrants in the MENA region reached 34.5 million in 2015, rising by more than 150 percent since 1990, according to the latest data on international migration stocks published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. That is more than double the growth of migrants globally. Besides, the MENA region hosts 18 percent of the world’s refugees and roughly 16.4 million internally displaced persons.<sup>2</sup> There are indeed more people internally displaced by armed conflict and generalized violence in the MENA region than in any other area in the world.

UNAOC will organize its fifth #SpreadNoHate Symposium in Cairo, Egypt, which will provide an excellent platform for discussion on hate speech against migrants and refugees in MENA media. The new #SpreadNoHate Symposium will shed light on the various dimensions and experiences of migration and forced displacement within the MENA region, their media coverage, and lessons learned by journalists from the region. In addition, the Symposium will build and expand upon the observations and recommendations made at previous UNAOC #SpreadNoHate Symposia and will contribute to two other pillars of the initiative, namely:

- 1) A strategic media campaign that has reached millions of people online with the hashtag #SpreadNoHate – which trended as number 1 on Twitter in Belgium –,
- 2) A full report with policy recommendations to be published at the end of the cycle of #SpreadNoHate Symposia.

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<sup>2</sup> “Migration to, from and in the Middle East and North Africa - Data snapshot.” IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (August 2016)

### 3. Policy Impact

Through the presentations, active discussions, as well as through the general public's participation on social media, this new #SpreadNoHate Symposium will result in a full report. The report will include concrete recommendations on ways global media, particularly media in the MENA region, can work to counter hate speech against migrants and refugees and to foster more inclusive societies.

The new #SpreadNoHate report will continue to inform political debates on hate speech at relevant United Nations agencies and international fora. Moreover, it will be made available for download on the UNAOC website. UNAOC will also share the report with its global network of UN Member States, organizations, religious leaders, and interfaith groups, media organizations, journalists, academia, including graduate schools of journalism and communications, as well as think-tanks.

Finally, thanks to the #SpreadNoHate Symposium in the MENA region, UNAOC will be able to include additional media professionals to its extensive network of hate speech experts, who will help measure and monitor the impact of the #SpreadNoHate initiative. Based on those results, they will provide inputs and advice on how future UNAOC programming in the fields of media and migration can have a concrete impact on the ground.

### 4. Symposium Participants

UNAOC will invite a group of 80 carefully selected participants and will ensure diversity and gender balance. Particular emphasis will be placed on engaging international journalists as well as journalists working in the MENA region. UNAOC also plans to include representatives of interfaith organizations, as well as religious leaders, as they play an influential role in the region. The #SpreadNoHate Symposium will include representatives of international organizations, migrants and refugees, representatives of think-tanks, the private sector, academia, and civil society.

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**The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)** is a special initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General established in 2005 and co-sponsored by the Governments of Spain and Turkey. UNAOC works to build bridges between societies, promote dialogue and understanding, and seeks to forge the collective political will required to accomplish these tasks. UNAOC works as a convener and facilitator to bring all sectors of society together to strengthen intercultural dialogue, diminish hostility, and promote harmony among the nations and cultures of the world. UNAOC's activities are fashioned around the four pillars of Education, Youth, Migration, and Media. To read more about UNAOC's projects and initiatives, visit [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org)

*For additional information about UNAOC's #SpreadNoHate initiative, visit [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org) or email [HateSpeech@unaoc.org](mailto:HateSpeech@unaoc.org)*