

## UNAOC Director Briefs the United Nations Security Council



Ms. Nihal Saad, Director of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), briefed the **United Nations Security Council** on the freedom of religion and belief, as well as the protection of religious sites within the context of the war in Ukraine.

In her remarks, Ms. Saad noted that the politicization of religion in the war in Ukraine fuels intercommunal tensions, stokes fears, and triggers violence. She reiterated the work of UNAOC in promoting the universality of religious sites as representatives of the history, identity, and traditions of people in every country and community and stressed that they must be fully respected and protected.

She told the Security Council that “restrictions to freedom of religion and the safety of religious communities, both in territory controlled by the Ukrainian Government and in Russian-occupied areas, is a matter of grave concern”.

Citing UN human rights reports, Ms. Saad noted that incidents of violence against members and supporters of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church increased between February and April of this year.




April also saw several city and regional councils banning Ukrainian Orthodox activities, as well as a surge in hate speech and several incidents of violence.

Ms. Saad urged both sides to respect and uphold freedom of religion or belief. “Targeting religious actors and faith communities across Ukraine is short-sighted, miscalculated and counter-productive,” she said.

“The role of religious leaders in maintaining solidarity across ecumenical lines is crucial to preserving the social fabric of a unified Ukraine and will be a key factor in peacebuilding if and when the war comes to an end,” she added. (26 July)

### UNAOC MARKS 18 YEARS OF FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

 **UNAOC – United Nations Alliance of Civilizations**   
@UNAOC

 UNAOC is 18 years old today! Today, we reaffirm our commitment to fostering mutual respect and understanding among cultures, faiths, and civilizations. We are many cultures, but [#OneHumanity](#).



On 14 July, **UNAOC** celebrated its **18th anniversary**. Nearly two decades ago, on 14 July 2005, UNAOC was established by former United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan, and co-sponsored by Spain and Türkiye, as a special initiative to bridge divides and promote harmonious coexistence. Today, it benefits from the political support of the **UNAOC Group of Friends** that has 160 Members of which are 130 UN Member States, 1 non-member state, and 29 international organizations. Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos is currently the High Representative of UNAOC, appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General in January 2019.



UNAOC, in collaboration with the **United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)** and the **United Religions Initiative (URI)**, organized an expert-level briefing in the context of the **Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Threats against Vulnerable Targets**. Entitled “**Cooperation between Religious Leaders and the Public Sector to Protect Religious Sites against Terrorist Attacks**”, the virtual meeting focused on promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration and sharing best practices to counter attacks on religious sites.

UNAOC Director Ms. Nihal Saad moderated the briefing, which featured insights from panelists Ambassador Mr. Mussie Hailu, URI’s Regional Director for Africa; Ms. Elizabeth Birungi, founder of Nature Sacredness and Cultural Rights Initiative; and, Shaykh Dr. Umar Al-Qadri of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council. Also present were Mr. Ignazio Ibanez, Head of the UNOCT Madrid, and Ms. Karen Volker, Director of Partnerships and Violence Prevention at URI.

During the session, Ms. Saad elaborated on the **UN Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites** and emphasized that religious leaders and faith-based organizations play a crucial role in the holistic approach needed to effectively counter terrorism and protect religious sites. (19 June)

USG Mr Moratinos condemned – *in statements released on 29 June, 15 July and 20 July* – repetitive incidents of burning of the holy Qur’an in Sweden in fuelling anger and violence among societies. He emphasized the need for mutual respect in building and promoting just, inclusive and peaceful societies rooted in human rights and dignity for all. In this context, he recalled the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, which advocates for the promotion of religious pluralism, mutual respect, and human dignity.



The High Representative reiterated that while the desecration of sacred religious books and religious sites is a disrespectful and provocative act, he stressed “violence is never an appropriate response to provocation”. Mr. Moratinos noted, “The desecration of religious books is not an expression of freedom. It is rather an expression of contempt and religious hatred... I strongly encourage governments to take action and enact measures that address such manifestations of religious hatred and racism so as to prevent the recurrence of acts of intolerance that often lead to violence”.

## Third Dialogue on Exchanges and Mutual Learning among Civilizations (Beijing, China)

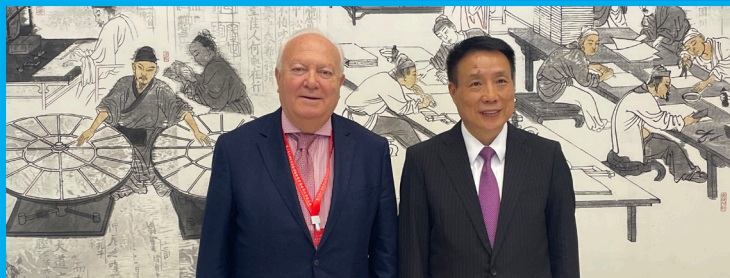
The Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for UNAOC, Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, participated in the **Third Dialogue on Exchanges and Mutual Learning among Civilizations and the First World Conference of Sinologists** organized by the **Chinese Association for International Understanding in Beijing, China**. Under the theme **“Implementing Global Civilization Initiative and Joining Hands to Draw a New Picture of Modernization”**, the dialogue aimed to facilitate the implementation of the Global Civilization Initiative and enhance exchange and mutual learning among civilizations.

Speaking at the opening ceremony and the session on **“Valuing the inheritance and Innovation of Civilizations: Creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture”**, the High Representative reiterated UNAOC’s commitment to fostering understanding among different identities and providing a global space for dialogue among state and non-state actors. (3–4 July)



*“It is imperative to build inclusive and peaceful societies... All this is possible if we all work together in opening new channels for dialogue. Dialogue nurtures trust, understanding and respect. Dialogue between peoples serves as a diplomatic tool that contributes to fulfilling peace...”*

*Miguel Ángel Moratinos, High Representative for UNAOC*



During his visit to Beijing, China, the High Representative for UNAOC, USG Miguel Moratinos met with **Mr. Zhu Rui, Assistant Minister, International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee**. They discussed means of collaboration to advance intercultural dialogue. (4 July)



## Women's Alliance for Peace Workshop in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

UNAOC and **Fundación Mujeres por África (MxA)** co-organized a 4-day capacity-building workshop for 50 women peacemakers from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Central African Republic, and Mozambique, in Kinshasa, DRC. Convened within the framework of **"Women's Alliance for Peace"**, the training was a joint initiative of UNAOC and MxA and marked the fourth of a series – following previous iterations in Bamako, Mali; Bukavu, DRC; and Fez, Morocco. The Kinshasa workshop, hosted in collaboration with Pelagie Foundation, provided a platform for women mediators to focus on the crucial topic of mitigating conflicts and addressing violence, particularly sexual violence against women and girls. Next year, the participants will return to Kinshasa for a fifth iteration. (17–20 July)



The **'UN Global Programme on the Security of Major Sporting Events, and Promotion of Sport and its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism'** (*UN Global Programme on Sports*) organized a virtual expert meeting on **"Fostering Gender Mainstreaming to Pursue PVE Goals through Sport,"** which successfully brought together the Programme's National Focal Points, sports federations, and other relevant stakeholders.

UNAOC Project Manager Bram Van Haver highlighted the need for cooperation in implementing gender-sensitive preventing violent extremism (PVE) through sport initiatives and policies and for integrating those into national action plans and PVE strategies. (12 July)

# HIGHLIGHTS



11-13 AUGUST 2023 | New York

**BREAK THROUGH**  
TO A BETTER FUTURE  
28<sup>th</sup> AFS Youth Assembly

28th AFS Youth Assembly



On the occasion of the **International Youth Day**, widely celebrated every year on 12 August, UNAOC participated in the **28th Session of the Youth Assembly** in New York, hosted by **AFS Intercultural Programs**. Ms. Dana Podmolikova, UNAOC Programme Management Specialist for Youth, spoke at a panel on “Global Trust: Institutional Responsibilities” along with other distinguished speakers from the United States Institute of Peace, International Peace Bureau and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She highlighted UNAOC Youth Programmes that help develop a global citizen mindset and empower youth-led peacebuilding efforts, based on an understanding that #YouthLead the way in building bridges of peace and understanding between communities. (12 August)



UNAOC supports “Power of the Pitch”, a special podcast from the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) Behavioural Insights Hub in Doha, Qatar. The podcast is inspired by the work of the multi-year “Global Programme on the Security of Major Sporting Events, and Promotion of Sport and its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism”, delivered

in partnership with UNAOC, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), and the International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS). This 7-part series examines how behavioural insights are applied to sports and how they address factors conducive to violent extremism and terrorism. *To learn more, visit <https://unoct-bihub-sportspodcast.podbean.com/>*

During a side event entitled “**Renewing the Commitment for the SDGs - Spotlight on Young People Progress on Youth 2030, the UN Youth Strategy**”, organized by the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth and partners on the margins of the 2023 High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development, the third Youth 2030 Progress Report was launched. Each year the report summarizes the status of the implementation of the UN Youth Strategy, highlighting how the UN system advances global commitments for and with youth, the impact of UN strategic planning, the availability of funding and coherence and coordination on youth work across the UN system. UNAOC is recognized for both its youth programming as well as policy work throughout the report. (19 July)



The High Representative for UNAOC, Mr. Moratinos attended the “Journey through Civilizations” exhibition organized by CCTV United Nations Bureau and sponsored by the Chinese Permanent Mission to the UN, Sino-American Friendship Association and United Nations Staff Recreation Council Chinese Book Club at the UN Headquarters in New York. The exhibition aimed to highlight the power of art, history and innovation in creating a platform to encourage dialogue, reflection, and appreciation in our interconnected world. (29 June)



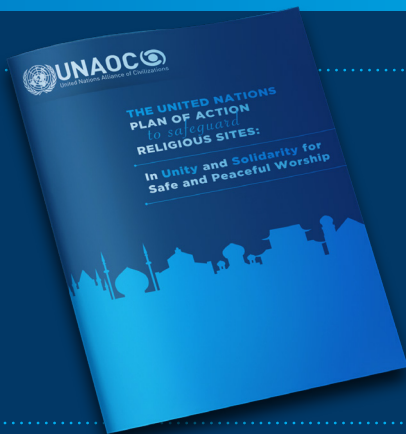
## MEETINGS



The High Representative received the **Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Ms. Alice Nderitu**. They discussed their shared goals in combating hate speech and discrimination. (14 July)



The High Representative met with **Ms. Meritxell Serret Aleu, Consellera d'Acció Exterior i Unió Europea of Catalonia**, to discuss collaborations in the areas of youth empowerment in the Mediterranean region. (14 July)



Join **UNAOC's global Call to Action #forSafeWorship** to celebrate the universality of religious sites as symbols of our shared humanity, history, and traditions. With this campaign, UNAOC is building a stream of inspiring stories shared by people just like you! Selected videos will be featured on our website, social media, and other platforms.

Visit **[www.forsafeworship.org](http://www.forsafeworship.org)** for a chance to watch inspiring multimedia stories from across the globe, and make sure to submit your own story about your special sacred place!



UNAOC, with the support of the **United Network of Young Peacebuilders**, and a generous financial contribution from the **Agencia Extremeña De Cooperación Internacional Para El Desarrollo**, hosted a capacity-building workshop for 19 youth participants from Latin America and the Caribbean as part of its **UNAOC Young Peacebuilders** programme.

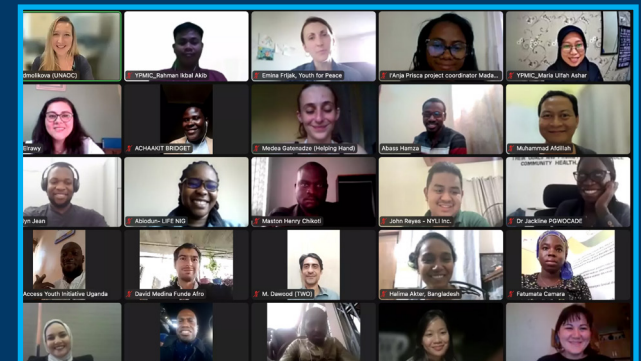
Held in Mérida, Spain, this workshop marked the second phase of this peace education initiative, now in its sixth edition. Guided by experienced facilitators, the participants benefited from interactive sessions on conflict analysis, innovative peacebuilding approaches, fostering harmony, and promoting mutual respect, among others. (3–7 July)



The **North-South Centre of the Council of Europe**, **UNAOC**, **AKDN-Aga Khan Development Network**, **KAICIID Dialogue Centre**, and the **Universidad Católica de Valencia San Vicente Mártir - European Institute of Education for Democratic Culture** have jointly launched a call for participants for a **Tutored**

**Online Training Course on Global Education and Intercultural/ Interfaith Dialogue**. Following a competitive process, 30 participants will be selected for this online course, which is scheduled to take place from 18 September to 15 October 2023.

In April 2023, UNAOC launched a call for applications for the 10th edition of the **Youth Solidarity Fund (YSF)**. More than 600 youth-led organizations from 86 countries submitted project proposals aimed at promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue in their communities. Following rigorous evaluations, 26 youth-led organizations advanced to the next stage of the selection process during which project coordinators will have an opportunity to strengthen their applications through structured workshops led by experienced facilitators. Based on a successful pilot initiative carried out during the previous edition of the YSF, these project clinics allow more young people and youth-led organizations to benefit from technical and capacity-building support, thus expanding the pool of beneficiaries.





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