

11th UNAOC Global Forum

14–15 December 2025

RIYAH, KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

📅 SAVE THE DATE

Two Decades of Dialogue for Humanity:

*Advancing a New Era of Mutual Respect
and Understanding in a Multipolar World*

VIII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions — Astana, Kazakhstan



The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) took part in the **VIII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions**, a landmark gathering in **Astana, Kazakhstan** that brought together voices of faith and dialogue from across the globe.

Addressing the Opening and Plenary Session, **Under-Secretary-General Miguel Ángel Moratinos**, High Representative for UNAOC and UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, expressed gratitude to **H.E. Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev**, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, **H.E. Mr. Maulen Ashimbayev**, Speaker of the Senate of the Parliament, and to the Government and people of Kazakhstan for “convening and nurturing this unique global platform of interreligious dialogue.”

He praised Kazakhstan’s leadership, noting, “The very fact that this Congress has become an enduring tradition is testimony to Kazakhstan’s vision of fostering peace through dialogue, rooted in respect for diversity and the conviction that humanity is stronger when united.”

Highlighting the important role of religious leaders, he added, “Spiritual diplomacy complements the work of states and international organizations by appealing to the deepest aspirations of the human heart: the longing for peace, dignity, and justice... At UNAOC, dialogue across cultures and religions is at the heart of our mandate. We know that dialogue, when sincere and sustained, becomes the foundation for peaceful living together.”

In his Opening Remarks, President Tokayev highlighted the UNAOC Special Session on Safeguarding Religious Sites and thanked USG Moratinos “for his global commitment to humanistic values and for protecting human civilization.”

The landmark Astana Peace Declaration 2025, adopted by the Congress participants on 18 September, acknowledged the special role of UNAOC in promoting deeper understanding and respect among civilizations, cultures, religions, and people, while also noting the importance of the **United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites**. Such recognition of UNAOC in the official documents of the Congress has reaffirmed its leading role in promoting mutual respect and living together peacefully within the United Nations and globally. (17–18 September)

Special Session on Safeguarding Religious Sites



In the framework of the VIII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, and building on the longstanding partnership between the Republic of Kazakhstan and UNAOC, #UNAOC and the Congress Secretariat jointly convened a "Special Session on Safeguarding Religious Sites: Reflections and a Call for Action by the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions and State Actors" in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Convened at a critical time marked by escalating conflicts, attacks on places of worship and religious sites, as well as a surge in discrimination and violence based on religion or belief, the Special Session was a timely opportunity for government representatives, religious leaders and faith-based organizations to elaborate on practical recommendations and points of action addressed to all concerned stakeholders, the media and the public at large.

In his remarks, Under-Secretary-General **Miguel Ángel Moratinos** called attention to attacks that "strike at the very core of every community's sense of identity and belonging."

"Around the world, we're witnessing a disturbing rise in terrorist attacks on religious sites, resulting in the deaths of innocent worshippers and the distortion or complete destruction of the targeted sites," he said.

"Religious sites," the **United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites** underscores, "are representative of the history, social fabric and traditions of people in every country and community all over the planet and must be fully respected as places of peace and harmony where worshippers feel safe to practice their rituals". (16 September)



Under-Secretary-General **Miguel Ángel Moratinos**, High Representative for UNAOC and UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, was received in Astana by **H.E. Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev**, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. During the meeting, USG Moratinos conveyed deep appreciation for the President's steadfast support of UNAOC's work in advancing intercultural and interreligious dialogue, as well as for the High Representative's new mandate as UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia.

The discussion reaffirmed the strong partnership between UNAOC, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan. Both parties expressed their commitment to further deepening collaboration, with a particular focus on fostering mutual respect among cultures, civilizations, and religions. (17 September)



In Astana, Kazakhstan, **Ms. Nihal Saad**, Director of UNAOC, addressed the **XXIII meeting of the Secretariat of the VIII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions**. Organized by the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions is an international platform for constructive interreligious dialogue, and aims to promote peace and mutual respect. (16 September)



The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, bestowed on H.E. Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos a Commemorative Medal and an Official Diploma of Laureate of the Astana International Award, in recognition of his outstanding personal contribution to the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

During the ceremony, President Tokayev also conferred a Medal of Honour to Ms. Nihal Saad, Director of UNAOC. Ms. Saad wrote on social media, "I am immensely grateful for H.E President Tokayev for this memorable moment of recognition in the beautiful city of Astana, Kazakhstan... This recognition is a testament to the values of dialogue and peace we continue to uphold. Even as I accepted it in a wheelchair due to an injury 2 days earlier, the moment reminded me that resilience and purpose transcend circumstance. Such circumstances should never dim our gratitude or commitment to serving peace and dialogue."

While in Astana, the High Representative held bilateral meetings with:



H.E. Mr. Maulen Ashimbayev, Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions



H.E. Mr. Akan Rakhmetullin, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Deputy Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions



Dr. Nazir Mohamed Ayad, Grand Mufti of Egypt



Mr. Li Guangfu, President of the China Taoist Association



Mr. Ivan Ivanov, International Center Alliance of Civilizations (ICAC) Chairman of the Executive Board



Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad, Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue of the Holy See



H.V. Allahshukur Pashazade, Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims' Board (CMB)



Dr. Samir Shantilaal Somaia, President of Somaia Vidyavihar and Chancellor of Somaia Vidyavihar University



On the margins of the **80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**, UNAOC convened Member States and International Organizations for the **UNAOC High-level Group of Friends Meeting**. UNAOC benefits from the political support of its Group of Friends, a community of 161 countries and international organizations that support UNAOC's mission at the global, regional and local levels.

Under-Secretary General Miguel Ángel Moratinos, High Representative for UNAOC and UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, reflected on UNAOC's progress and highlighted key achievements, including: the successful **10th Global Forum in Cascais** (Nov 2024), the launch of the **UN Action Plan to Monitor & Respond to Antisemitism** (Jan 2025), his appointment as **UN Envoy to Combat Islamophobia** (May 2025), and the launch of "**A Call for Peace, the End of Wars, and Respect for International Law**" in Gernika, Spain (April 2025).

Looking ahead, he affirmed, "Strengthened by your support and commitment to UNAOC's objectives, I am determined to steer UNAOC as a soft power tool for preventive diplomacy, and I will spare no effort in standing up against all forms of hatred and discrimination, promoting dialogue, fostering mutual respect, and upholding human rights and the dignity of all." (26 September)



H.E. Mr. Levent Gümrükçü, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye



H.E. Mr. Diego Martínez Belío, State Secretary for Foreign and Global Affairs of Spain

During the meeting, H.E. Mr. Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, announced the **11th UNAOC Global Forum**, to be held in **Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**, on **14–15 December** this year.

Inviting all members of the UNAOC Group of Friends to the Forum, he stressed, "The 11th UNAOC Global Forum in Riyadh... will be an occasion for the international community to renew the commitment to dialogue and respect. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia looks forward to welcoming you all in Riyadh."



On the sidelines of the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly, the High Representative held a spate of high-level bilateral meetings, including:



H.E. Mr. João Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola



H.E. Mr. Raşit Meredow, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan



H.E. Mr. Elmedin Konaković, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina



H.E. Mr. Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug, Minister for Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Mauritanians Abroad of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania



H.E. Mr. Mohamed Ali Nafti, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad of Tunisia



H.E. Mr. Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba



H.E. Mr. Mehmet Paçacı, OIC Secretary General's Special Envoy on Islamophobia



Mr. Jaume Duch, Counsellor European Union and Foreign Action of the Government of the Generalitat of Catalonia



Ms. Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris, France



Mr. Alejandro Domínguez, President South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL)

USG Moratinos, in his capacity as UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, addressed the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** high-level event on the **"Promotion of the Culture of Peace and Tolerance"**, marking the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of Prophet Muhammad (*Peace Be Upon Him*), the most revered figure in Islam.

"Prophet Muhammed's life was a testament to tolerance, forgiveness, empathy, wisdom and human dignity," he said. "Let us be clear: combating Islamophobia is not about privileging one faith above others... It is about defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief — a right enshrined in international law and indispensable to peace"

The High Representative delivered keystone remarks at the high-level opening segment alongside **H.E. Ambassador Hameed Opeloyeru**, Permanent Observer of OIC to the UN, and **H.E. Mr. Mehmet Paçacı**, OIC Special Envoy on Islamophobia. Meanwhile, the Ministerial segment featured remarks from OIC Member States, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, Morocco, The Gambia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Tunisia, Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Türkiye. (22 September)



On the margins of UNGA80, the High Representative delivered keynote remarks at a side event on **"Keeping Faith in Dialogue: Reimagining Interreligious Cooperation for a New Agenda for Peace"**. The event was organized by the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) and the Multi-Faith Advisory Council to the UN Inter-Agency Taskforce on Religion and Sustainable Development (MFAC), in cooperation with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), Religions for Peace, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Office of the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG), and co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of the Republic of Austria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Portuguese Republic to the United Nations. (25 September)



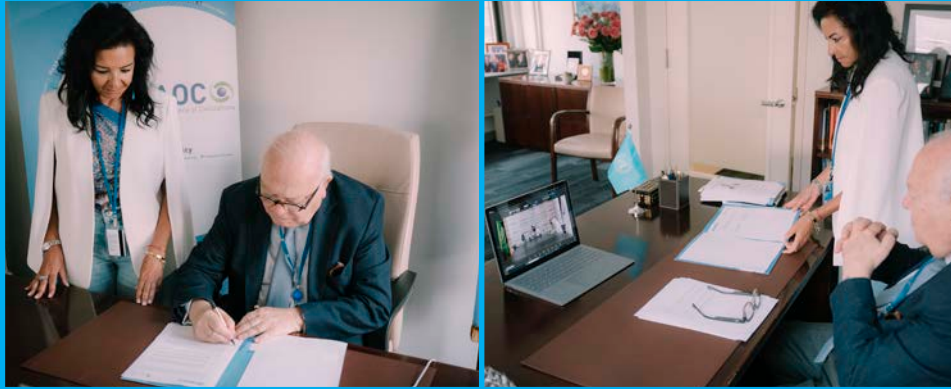
The High Representative was the keynote speaker at the High-level Meeting on **"Multilateralism at a Crossroads: Challenges and Pathways to Peace"**, organized by the **Nizami Ganjavi International Center (NGIC)** in New York.

Addressing the high-level panel, Mr. Moratinos emphasized the need to rebuild trust, make multilateralism more inclusive, and adapt institutions to current realities. "Let us seize this moment to renew our collective commitment to multilateralism—not as an abstract concept, but as a daily practice of solidarity, equality, and respect," he said. (24 September)



During the reception and gala dinner on the occasion of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center's High-level Meeting, the High Representative conferred a plaque of recognition to **H.E. Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga**, President of Latvia (1999-2007), in appreciation of her life-long dedication to promoting dialogue, diversity, and shared values.





The High Representative for UNAOC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with **H.E. Prof. Abdullah Mohammed Al-Fawzan**, Secretary-General of the **King Abdulaziz Center for Cultural Communication (KACCC)**, to foster collaboration and jointly implement projects aligned with their respective areas of work and priorities. The MoU aims to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue and support the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, along with other areas of mutual interest. (25 July)



At the **Quarterly Briefing of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) to Member States**, UNAOC Director **Ms. Nihal Saad** outlined UNAOC's key efforts in preventing and countering violent extremism, in support of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The session, chaired by **Mr. Vladimir Voronkov**, Under-Secretary-General of UNOCT, also featured interventions from Member States and United Nations entities. (8 September)



At the invitation of **His Eminence Dr. Nazir Ayyad**, Grand Mufti of Egypt, and **Dr. Ibrahim Negm**, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat for Fatwa Authorities Worldwide, the High Representative and UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia delivered a prerecorded message for the 10th International Conference of Egypt's Dar al-Ifta. Held in Cairo, Egypt under the theme, "**The Making of the Competent Mufti in the Age of Artificial Intelligence**", the Conference brought together muftis, ministers, academics, and experts from over a hundred countries. (12–13 August)



Ms. Nihal Saad, Director of UNAOC, attended the **26th Anniversary of the Accession to the Throne of His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco**, at the invitation of **H.E. Ambassador Omar Hilale**, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations. Posting about the event on social media, she said, "When Moroccan hospitality meets diplomacy — it's always memorable! This was not only a festive occasion, but a reflection of Morocco's deep roots and forward-looking spirit." (30 July)

HIGHLIGHTS



Under-Secretary-General Miguel Ángel Moratinos, High Representative for UNAOC, attended the **Comunidad de Madrid Premier Padel P1**, one of the world's top professional padel tournaments, at the Movistar Arena in Madrid. On the sidelines, the High Representative engaged with young players of diverse abilities, including children fighting cancer, through a series of tailored padel clinics organized under the **UNAOC Sport for #OneHumanity campaign**. (4 September)



UNAOC participated in the **Annual Prayer Service** on the occasion of the opening of 80th Session of the UN General Assembly, organized by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations. During the service, in the presence of the United Nations Secretary-General and the President of the 80th Session of the General Assembly, **Ms. Chuqiu Peng**, UNAOC Administration Senior Assistant, delivered a prayer in Chinese, calling for stronger multilateral cooperation and interfaith dialogue. (8 September)

The High Representative met with the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations, **H.E. Mr. Paruyr Hovhannisyan**. (24 July)



USG Moratinos had a bilateral meeting with **H.E. Mr. Sun Lei**, Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nation. (24 July)





The 8th edition of the **Young Peacebuilders** programme has successfully entered its third phase. During this stage, participants are actively engaged in implementing their local peace-building initiatives within their communities. Their projects focus on a variety of challenges such as hate speech, discrimination, and deep-seated prejudices. Participants are employing innovative strategies, including the facilitation of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, to foster understanding, empathy, and respect among different people. By creating platforms for open communication and shared experiences, they aim to dismantle stereotypes and build bridges between communities often divided by misconceptions.



UNAOC has closed the application process for the 11th edition of the **Youth Solidarity Fund (YSF)**. The call generated an impressive 1,372 project proposals from youth-led organizations spanning 109 countries. Designed to support projects developed and implemented by and for young people, YSF selects projects that aim to bridge divides, promote mutual respect, and build inclusive communities through creative and impactful initiatives. After a competitive selection process, which is currently underway, successful applicants will receive seed funding to bring their ideas to fruition. They will also have an opportunity to benefit from comprehensive capacity-building and mentorship support. This holistic approach ensures that young leaders are equipped with the resources, knowledge, and guidance necessary to effectively implement their proposed projects and amplify their reach and sustainability.



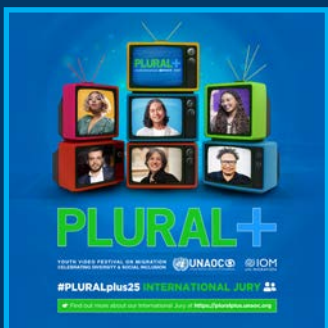
As part of the **World Federations of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)** training series on youth engagement and leadership, **Ms. Dana Podmolikova**, UNAOC Programme Management Specialist for Youth, delivered a presentation to students from the Beijing Foreign Studies University. Speaking at an interactive session in New York, she introduced key UNAOC programmes and initiatives. The session further explored the challenges of bridging cultural divides in an increasingly polarized world and the importance of fostering intercultural dialogue. (28 July)





UNAOC's youth-focused initiative, **"News Generation Against Hate"**, continues to empower young people to express their perspectives through photography and visual storytelling. In hands-on workshops focused on media literacy, intercultural dialogue, and civic engagement, participants are learning to use photography as a lens to explore themes of identity, resilience, and community action. Implemented in collaboration with the municipality of La Courneuve, France, the initiative equips local youth with media literacy and storytelling skills to counter hate speech and promote social inclusion through visual narratives.

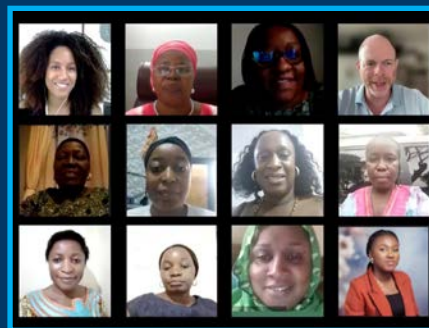
Now entering its final phase, the project will culminate in a photo exhibition to be inaugurated this fall. The exhibit will feature audio interviews with La Courneuve residents and civil society representatives, offering deeper insights into the lived experiences of the community. By combining compelling imagery with authentic local voices, the exhibition will foster greater understanding of social dynamics, local challenges, and grassroots efforts toward peace and development.



The **PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival**, a joint initiative of UNAOC and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), has selected outstanding media makers for its 2025 edition. An International Jury composed of renowned professionals reviewed 452 videos from 60 countries and selected the best youth-made short films on migration, diversity, and social inclusion.

The top videos will be unveiled at the PLURAL+ 2025 Ceremony, scheduled to take place in December during the 11th UNAOC Global Forum in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. International Jury Distinctions across three age categories and Special Recognitions for Combating Xenophobia and Discrimination, and Responsible Narratives on Migration will be conferred.

For more information about PLURAL+ visit <https://pluralplus.unaoc.org>



UNAOC and Fundación Mujeres por África hosted the 27th and 28th virtual mediation workshops of their joint **"Women's Alliance for Peace"** (WA4P) initiative.

The two sessions brought together women peacebuilders from Mali, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, reaffirming WA4P's commitment to promoting women's leadership in peace processes and mediation across regions affected by conflict.

In both workshops, participants exchanged updates from their respective countries and communities, sharing the challenges they face on the ground and contributing perspectives to help shape WA4P priorities and action areas for the year ahead. The discussions reaffirmed WA4P's role in connecting local initiatives to broader partnerships and resource mobilization opportunities. (July, August)





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