![United Nations Alliance of Civilizations logo]

Developing Inclusive Intercultural Societies through Media Literacy

A thematic platform within the Group of Friends (GoF)
of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

1.   The thematic platforms as a cooperation mechanism within the UNAOC

The approach of the United Nations High Representative for the UNAOC is to engage in practical, result-oriented activities and to focus on so-called "glocal deliverables", i.e. measures taken at the local level to achieve results at both local and the global levels. As a contribution to this goal, Switzerland and other GoF members supports the UNAOC proposal to create, within the GoF, thematic platforms, which focus on specific issues of relevance to achieving the goals of the UNAOC.

2.   Relevance of this platform to the achievement of the UNAoC objectives

The Report of the High-level Group[1] clearly identifies the need to support media literacy education (MLE) initiatives as a tool to help individuals to evaluate information sources and develop critical thinking skills resulting in the ability to separate fact from opinion and identify bias in media messages. Furthermore, the report also underlines the importance of promoting media awareness and the development of Internet literacy in order to combat misrepresentations, prejudices and hate speech. Educators and experts across the world understand MLE as a pedagogical strategy that promotes the ethical use/production of media; as well as see MLE as an innovative approach to civic education (across the society at large) that enhances the empowerment of citizens by facilitating access to a wide variety of media messages, encouraging critical analysis of media messages and supporting the production (and distribution) of media messages where individuals and communities self-represent themselves. Many see MLE as a fundamental path towards strengthening creative social change in democratic societies. Through MLE's analytical approach to the media representation of the "other" and its questioning of the embedded cultural stereotypes within media messages, most MLE initiatives encourage the development of inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding among individuals and societies. The fast growth of "new" media (recent market research indicate that 3/4 of the world population is connected via cellular phones) and the convergence of mobile technology, Internet and television, but further underlines the urgency of MLE initiatives. As societies hover between dialogue and culture shock, the role of the media in the presentation of events, which in turn affects the shaping of people's perceptions of those events, is fundamental. In the way they report, the media can create tensions by spreading stereotypes or incorrect information, or ease tensions by explaining carefully social and political events that may create misperceptions between and among communities. Joint efforts to improve this situation across the globe would have a positive effect, contributing to a dialogue among civilizations based on mutual acquaintance and respect.

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[1] November 2006, see: http://www.unaoc.org/content/view/64/94/lang,english/

3.   Possible avenues to be explored by this thematic platform

Taking into consideration that this platform should focus on practical and result-oriented activities, efforts should be made to avoid replicating or becoming an echo chamber of the dozens of MLE-related conferences and events that are organized in all regions of the world. The UNAOC encourages GoF members wishing to share with the group information on MLE-relevant events and resources to contact the Secretariat in order to ensure that they are included in the UNAOC MLE clearinghouse (aocmedialiteracy.org).

In addition, UNESCO and the UNAOC are creating UAC-MILID, a network of university Chairs focussing on "Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue". This network (for now including universities from Brazil, China, Egypt, Jamaica, Spain and the US, but open to new ones) could be a vehicle for research, distribution of resources as well as a *think tank*-type for the platform.

The joint action of the platform should cover the media in a broad scope, ie written media, TV, radio and Internet, and touch three different levels: (1) editorial boards, (2) journalists, and (3) receivers. Below are described possible avenues of joint action, according to the levels. There are indeed different levels and areas of collaboration and participation that GoF members could support and be active in this thematic platform, among them:

- Ensuring that MLE projects and initiatives are included within the UNAOC National and Regional Plans
- Organize MLE trainings for educators and media professionals:
    - How to foster non ideological / non partisan reporting on the "other's" reality?
    - What role for cartooning?
    - Training / exchange of journalists
    - Training to improve / foster media literacy
- Support the creation of an UNAOC MLE expert group who could collaborate on specific initiatives, from writing Op-Eds (from an MLE perspective) when crisis arise (cartoons, mis-information, media-hype, etc.) to participate at UAC-MILID's conferences, exchange of faculty and students, publications, etc.
- Facilitate the communication with media companies, broadcasters, and producers in their countries and regions and encourage them to:
    - o Become aware of MLE's approach to media responsibilities and opportunities when portraying cultural, religions, ethnic differences
    - o Exchange programming with educational broadcasters from other regions
    - o Create, inspired by UNICEF's *Children's Day of Broadcasting*, a UNAOC's *Multicultural Day of Broadcasting*
- Support and encourage the participation of youth in the creation and distribution of media messages, from PLURAL + (unaoc.org/pluralplus) to similar initiatives
- Support and encourage the distribution and production (and translation to native languages) of MLE resources and curricula
- Support the organization of platform-related meetings

4.   Next steps

Openly discuss this concept paper at the Focal Point meeting in Berlin.
Identify two priorities on which the platform could work.
Identify one or two GoF members who will, with the support of the Secretariat, coordinate the platform.