



**United Nations Alliance of Civilizations  
Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting**

*New York, 28 September 2018*

**Summary Report**

**Background**

On 28 September 2018, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held a Group of Friends meeting at the level of ministers of foreign affairs and heads of international organizations. The event focused on the theme “*Building Bridges: Using Soft Power to Promote a Culture of Peace*”. It was live streamed on UN Web TV and embedded on the UNAOC website. UNAOC covered interventions live on Twitter and Instagram, having displayed social media activity on a screen in the conference room to engage meeting participants. The posts were delivered to 642,913 accounts and totaled 2,481,523 unique impressions. In addition, the official hashtag for the meeting, “#Commit2Dialogue”, briefly trended at number 5 in New York, while “Group of Friends” trended at number 18. The live social media coverage benefited from the attention of several social media accounts of ministries and missions participating in the meeting, including @UfMSecretariat (Union for the Mediterranean), @MFAofArmenia, @AmbAlyaAlThani (PR of Qatar), and @EUatUN among others.

**Opening Session**

The **High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations** opened the meeting by greeting His Excellency, Mr. Fernando Martín Valenzuela Marzo, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Spain, and His Excellency, Mr. Sedat Önal, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, and official delegates. He recalled that each of us, within our own unique mandates and priorities, has committed to a culture of peace. Two out of every three major conflicts in our world have a cultural dimension. It is undeniable that special envoys, economic sanctions, and disarmament are an integral part of the peace and security architecture.

Since UNAOC founding in 2005, many countries around the world have become more multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious. Globalization has ushered in a new era of cultural exchanges. Migration has increased, with humanity on the move more than ever before. New technologies have revolutionized information and communication, creating unprecedented opportunities for exchange and cooperation, especially among young people.

Today, more than ever, identities are multiple and fluid, a by-product of our interconnected world. However, it is a truism that globalization and innovations in information and communication technologies have been accompanied by deepening divisions and conflicts - both within and between societies. In too many parts of the world, cultural diversity is increasingly perceived as a threat rather than an opportunity. Our shared vision of peace and harmony is being challenged by forces that seek to divide the world and advocate for divisiveness. The values of pluralism and inclusivity - prerequisites for achieving a culture of peace - have yet to be fully assimilated in many societies. In this context, soft power is a powerful, although quite often a neglected peacebuilding tool.

The High Representative defined UNAOC’s project activities as soft power tools to address the underlying issues that undermine social cohesion and make conflict and violence more likely, specifically:

- **First**, UNAOC executes its mission by engaging and empowering civil society to work for peace at the community level. Through the Young Peacebuilders Programme and Youth Solidarity Fund, it supports the growth of local networks of young peace-builders through trainings in peace education and conflict resolution. The intensified engagement on this front continues to produce tangible benefits. UNAOC also promotes media and information literacy to tackle hate speech and incitement to violence. As part of the #SpreadNoHate Initiative, UNAOC has convened hundreds of journalists to develop good practices and professional standards to counter negative stereotypes and xenophobia against minorities and migrant populations in the media. Soft Power as a form of cultural diplomacy is also significant in achieving a culture of peace. The Fellowship Programme seeks to foster cooperation between young professionals from different cultures and faiths. Over 200 young leaders from 43 countries have harnessed the power of intercultural dialogue and understanding in shaping lasting peace in their local communities.
- **Second**, UNAOC provides a platform for religious leaders from different faiths to work together toward a safer world. Since 2013, it has organized or co-organized more than 30 events involving religious leaders creating a global platform for dialogue. A notable achievement includes the adoption of the “Alicante Declaration”, inspired by the three Abrahamic faiths in 2016.
- **Third**, and perhaps one of the greatest soft power tools of the UNAOC toolkit, is the Global Forum. The Forums have proven to be the premier platform to advance the global conversation on building dialogue and understanding across cultures and religions.

At present, UNAOC is preparing for the 8<sup>th</sup> Global Forum to be held at the UNHQ on 19 and 20 November 2018. The High Representative invited all members of the Group of Friends to the discussion in November to renew a shared commitment to create more inclusive and peaceful societies. He thanked his country, Qatar, for the financial and moral support to the Forum 2018, and Spain and Turkey for their contributions over the years, which have enabled the Alliance to play a fundamental role in preventing violence and conflicts as well as sustaining peace.

**The United Nations Secretary-General** sent a message to the GoF , which the High Representative read out to the participants. He greeted the Group of Friends gathered for a new session of the United Nations General Assembly, noting that at a time when the world enjoys remarkable opportunities to advance common progress, with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals as blueprint. UNAOC, with its emphasis on building bridges, trust and understanding, has a crucial role to play in nurturing the productive cooperation among countries and peoples, essential in an era of growing global interconnectedness.

The Alliance’s mission is especially important in addressing racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of intolerance, which are increasing in many places, feeding each other and fomenting extremism. Minorities, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable communities face bias and abuse across the world. Discrimination against women remains pervasive. As the Secretary-General noted to world leaders in his address earlier in the week, this year marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the human rights agenda is losing ground and universal values are being eroded.

In his message, the UNSG thanked the Group of Friends for the commitment to address these complex challenges, promote a culture of peace and create opportunities for young people. The efforts undertaken can also help people recognize that, as societies become more multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious, there is a need for greater investments in social cohesion. Diversity is richness, not a threat.

The United Nations Secretary-General will join the UNAOC 8<sup>th</sup> Global Forum and the Group of Friends High Level segment, organized during the Forum.

**The State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Spain** thanked the High Representative of UNAOC for his important role in promoting international dialogue and mutual respect. He also thanked the United Nations Secretary-General and Turkey as co-sponsor. He stated that, in 2004, the Spanish government

appealed to the United Nations General Assembly to awaken the world of the risk of a clash of civilizations, and contributed to create UNAOC to overcome prejudice, polarization, and marginalization. He clearly said that it is better to build rather than destroy, as human dignity is fundamental. In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on a Culture of Peace, and it is important to link such culture to the promotion of human rights. To this end, UNAOC is considered a soft power tool for preventive diplomacy and it brings together more than 140 members. So far, UNAOC has organized seven Global Forums and remarkable achievements have been reached in the four priority areas: Education, Media, Youth, and Migration. But more can be done in terms of cooperation, media engagement, and dialogue among cultures and religions. It is necessary to prepare a guide on the good practices on the four pillars and promote them. Women have to be included more since they can contribute a lot in terms of cultural diversity, as the Security Council has recognized. In 2016, in Baku, there were discussions on peacemaking and peaceful and inclusive societies. Interreligious and intercultural dialogue were identified as fundamental tools for prevention. Another important initiative of UNAOC is the PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival, which promotes migrants and their positive integration within societies. Regarding media, the media and information literacy (MIL), the #SpreadNoHate, and the PEACEApp are successful initiatives. Yet, the State Secretary underlined the urgency to have a Communications Strategy, which can reach out to youth, arts, and sports actors. Concluding, Spain believes that organizing a Global Forum at the UNHQ, aligned with the United Nations Secretary-General's vision on prevention, is a good choice. There are challenges that require contributions and responsibilities from all, especially the necessity to build new partnerships and adopt new approaches engaging young people, universities, the private sector, and other stakeholders. Spain believes that the Alliance can destroy walls and gaps and work towards a better future, a better world.

**The Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey** thanked the High Representative for his important work and expressed appreciation of the Secretary-General's support to UNAOC and to all 146 states and international organizations that are members of the Group of Friends. He stated that building bridges of communication and understanding is becoming very important. The Alliance started with promoting social cohesion and preventing violence and conflict, and a lot has happened since its creation in 2005. Unfortunately it has not been covered as much ground as we hoped and there are still lots of ongoing conflicts, economic crisis, and displaced people. Racism, xenophobia, and intolerance are on the rise. In this framework, the mission of the Alliance has become more relevant. All the four priority areas are soft power tools to promote the culture of peace, diversity, tolerance, and understanding. The Vice Minister mentioned the important role traditional and social media play in shaping public opinions and perspectives. They can have a positive but also negative impact as they might be used for manipulation. It is fundamental to refrain from stigmatization of some religions and cultures, and disseminate messages that describe how migrants can enrich societies and help build bridges instead of threatening communities. He concluded by renewing the commitment of Turkey to the activities of the Alliance. The Vice Minister thanked the High Representative; the United Nations Secretary-General; Jorge Sampaio, previous High Representative of the Alliance; and Kofi Annan, previous United Nations Secretary-General and creator of the Alliance.

**The Chief of Cabinet and Spokesperson for the High Representative**, Nihal Saad, thanked the High Representative, the United Nations Secretary-General, the two sponsors of the Alliance, Spain and Turkey, and all participants to the meeting. She provided an overview of the theme, format, and registration process of the 8<sup>th</sup> Global Forum.

*"#Commit2Dialogue: Partnerships for Prevention and Sustainability of Peace"* is the theme of the 8<sup>th</sup> Global Forum, decided after several consultations with the co-sponsors. The purpose is emphasizing the Secretary-General's vision on prevention, sharing good practices for possible replication and expansion, and building partnerships. All members of the Group of Friends have received an invitation package including the concept note, the programme, and the logistical note. The website (<https://8thglobalforum.unaoc.org/>) was launched on 18 September 2018 and it will be updated in due course with content, list of speakers, and other information. Ms. Saad encouraged logging in regularly to check the updates and the contact information for any inquiry.

The Opening Ceremony of the Forum will feature the United Nations Secretary-General, UNAOC High Representative, Spain and Turkey. Participants will convene in two Plenary Sessions (PSs) and six

Breakout Sessions (BSs). In addition, there will be the Youth Event, the PLURAL+ Awards Ceremony over a gala dinner. At present, 221 Official Delegations (193 Member States of the General Assembly, State of Palestine, Holy See, and 26 international organizations), over 550 participants and the President of General Assembly have been invited to the Forum.

The themes of the Plenary and Breakout Sessions will be the following:

- PS1: “Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue: A Tool for Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding”. The conversation will describe how interreligious and intercultural dialogue can be tools for prevention of violence and conflict, and sustainability of peace;
- PS2: “Words Matter: Demystifying the Role of Media in Shaping Public Perceptions of Migrants and Minorities”. The discussion will focus on the good practices of the media to have an objective coverage without any element of online hate speech and incitement to violence. It will contribute to the objective 16 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM);
- BS1: “Digital Diplomacy: Online Citizen Engagement and Social Media Platforms as Mechanisms for Prevention & Countering Online Hate Speech”. The purpose is to provide recommendations based on good practices. There will be a dynamic discussion with experts from social media platforms such as Google, Twitter, Facebook, and others;
- BS2: “Many Cultures, One Humanity: The Role & Responsibility of Religious Leaders & FBOs in Building Peaceful and Inclusive Societies”. Over the years, the Alliance has been creating a space for religious leaders and FBOs to exchange good practices on the promotion of a culture of peace;
- BS3: “Partnerships that Work: Leveraging the Private Sector & Civil Society in Peacebuilding Efforts”. The purpose is showcasing the partnership the Alliance has established with BMW with the hope to explore and build new ones;
- BS4: “Strengthening the Leadership, Inclusion and Visibility of Women in Sustaining Peace Processes”. As Spain mentioned, the Alliance wants to promote the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes following the Security Council resolution 1325;
- BS5: “Global Citizenship Education”. This session will address education at global, regional, and local levels;
- BS6: TBD.

The Youth Event, which has always been successful over the years, will give 100 young leaders the opportunity and space to share their good practices to promote a culture of peace. The selection of youth has been geographically and gender balanced. The dialogue with youth and among youth will be open, including a Q&A session. The Alliance has dedicated particular attention to this event and hopes to receive positive feedback from co-sponsors as well as from all other countries.

In conclusion, the Group of Friends was walked through the registration process by the Web and Multimedia Communications Specialist, Ms. Julie Ann Ladan. She has reminded that the deadline for the registration is on 5 November.

### **Group of Friends: General Discussion**

Reflecting on the main theme of the event and referencing the UNAOC’s mandate and its activities, the following key points and recommendations have been made by the delegations:

#### ***Key points:***

- Member States commended the important role of the Alliance as soft power tool for diplomacy and in promoting a culture of peace through its four areas of work: Education, Media, Youth, and Migration. In addition, they outlined the accomplishments since 2005, year of the creation of UNAOC.
- Regarding education, most of countries have stated the importance of promoting innovative and creative methodologies in order to teach children and youth the values of tolerance, respect, and inclusiveness, necessary to develop a peaceful mindset. Some countries have mentioned their collaboration with UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNDP. Others have suggested focusing on minorities and vulnerable groups which cannot access quality education;

- Regarding youth, concrete activities have been shared as good practices. Specifically: the USD 50 million of the Government of Kazakhstan to train and educate Afghan students in Kazak universities; the Positive Agenda for the Youth 2015 of the Western Balkans; three projects of Slovenia – (1) on mediation for children to raise awareness of peaceful and constructive resolutions of conflicts, (2) on fostering intercultural dialogue and science diplomacy to bring diverse societies, people, and ideas together, and (3) “Our Rights” that has already enabled education for 200,000 children in 26 countries; the Parliament of Youth created by Iraq; the Forum of Youth which Egypt will organize in November 2018 in Sharm El Sheik; and the Armenian TUMO Center for Creative Technologies and the Smart Center in the Lori region for rural youth. Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has been mentioned as a good example of leader who has positively engaged youth around the world;
- Most of participants have expressed their willingness to build regional and national capacity, implement or strengthen early warning and monitoring systems, promote spiritual enhancement and social cohesion, create public private partnerships, embrace innovation, and deliver results;
- The collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders, from the public and private sector, on the four pillars of the Alliance, have been recognized as fundamental to advance a culture of peace and its link to human rights. It is necessary to adopt a holistic approach to violence and conflict, as well as build bridges, especially where there is a lack of trust and reciprocity;
- Some Member States have mentioned the diversity-poverty-prevention nexus underling the correlation between peace and sustainable development promoted by the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and recalled the importance of aligning the Group of Friends’ work to that of the Security Council;
- The necessity to undertake action to end the politicization of religion for the benefits of a few and the disaster of many has been prioritized. Such action should be initiated and coordinated by an international body and regulated by the international law to reinforce international sovereignty;
- Parliamentary diplomacy is rounded on soft power and the UN System plays a fundamental role in advancing dialogue and promoting peace in the Mediterranean region, Israel and Palestinian territories, and in Libya. To this end, UNAOC’s work has never been more relevant to prevent hate, violence, and conflict, as well as foster collaboration and innovation. For example, the cooperation with Imams in Morocco has proven successful in fighting terrorism in the entire region;
- In Europe, new types of security challenges are to be addressed, such as: (1) massive migrations from the Middle East and Africa and tensions among communities which undermine the potential of development and paralyze socio-economic growth; (2) conflicts among different religious groups and religious extremism; and (3) interventions which have not been successful in integrating migrants and minorities. The Christian community is under threat: 215 million of Christians suffer from atrocities and 255 are killed every month. Christianophobia would be the last accepted discrimination of religion and it should not be. However, protecting the Christian community does not seem being a priority for many governments.

### ***Recommendations:***

- Leverage the opportunity offered by the UNAOC 8<sup>th</sup> Global Forum taking place at the UNHQ in New York on 19-20 November 2018 to showcase the UNAOC work, exchange good practices for possible replication and expansion, and build trust and capacity across countries;
- Promote the use of forums, congresses, and conferences globally to share good practices and disseminate positive messages for prevention and sustainability of peace. In this regards, upcoming events have been mentioned: the VI Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions planned in October 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan; the 17<sup>th</sup> Summit of La Francophonie entitled “Vivre Ensemble” organized in October 2018 in Yerevan, Armenia; and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Forum against the Crime of Genocide to be held on 9 December 2018 in Armenia;
- Position the Alliance as focal point within the UN System in promoting a culture of peace through dialogue and collaboration, and as catalyst for the stakeholders actively involved in addressing prevention of violence and conflict. The Alliance is perceived as the entity capable of developing global and ad hoc interventions to address the new security challenges;
- Promote innovation for peace designing and implementing effective policies, building new partnerships, and adopting new approaches aimed to advance interreligious and intercultural

dialogue, mutual respect, and human rights. Some countries have suggested focusing on popular culture and its expressions: music, movies, and idols as instruments for peace. Music and movies can inspire and leave long lasting impression in our minds. Likewise, when an idol speaks or posts on his or her Instagram, million followers listen;

- Include women in prevention and security activities as they can contribute a lot in terms of cultural diversity. Educate young men to respect gender equality and diversity;
- Conceptualize and launch initiatives on matters such as social cohesion, grassroots movements, and Goal 4 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda: “Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All”;
- Include youth in decision-making and peacebuilding processes as they play a critical role in advancing interreligious and intercultural dialogue and sharing good practices given their proactive use of social media;
- Promote a culture of peace through traditional and social media and work with them to shape positive perspectives and opinions of migrants and minorities to end racism, xenophobia, and polarization;
- Prepare and disseminate a guide on the good practices in the four UNAOC priority areas of work (Education, Media, Youth, and Migration) for various stakeholders to use;
- Prepare a Communications Strategy targeted to youth, arts, and sports to contribute to the UNAOC mission;
- Develop a unique methodology to (1) facilitate understanding of politics and dialogue related issues as well as build bridges; (2) create effective knowledge management and engagement platforms for youth, NGOs, CSOs, the private sector, and other key stakeholders; and (3) increase awareness and understanding of women’s empowerment and gender equality as women are agents of positive change and facilitators of dialogue.

During the discussion, several delegations referred to specific resolutions, declarations, and initiatives. Specifically:

- 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Goal 4 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda on “Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All”
- Goal 16 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda on “Promote Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies”
- Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)
- UNAOC Global Forums organized since 2005
- UNAOC 8<sup>th</sup> Global Forum to be held at the UNHQ in New York on 19-20 November 2018
- UNAOC 7<sup>th</sup> Global Forum on “Living Together in Inclusive Societies: A Challenge and A Goal” held on 25-27 April 2016 in Baku, Azerbaijan
- UNAOC Youth Solidarity Fund
- Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security adopted on 31 October 2000
- Security Council resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security adopted on 9 December 2015
- United Nations General Assembly resolution on the “Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace” adopted on 10 December 2015
- United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Culture of Peace adopted on 13 September 1999
- ASEAN Declaration on the “Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society” mentioned during the 31<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Summit on 13 November 2017 in Manila, Philippines
- Conference “Astana: The City of Peace” held on 5 June 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan
- 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions that will take place on 10-11 October 2018 in Kazakhstan
- Triennial Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, Astana, Kazakhstan
- First International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, March 2019, Helsinki, Finland
- Summit of the Heads of States of the Turkic Council on “Youth and Sports” held in Kyrgyzstan in September 2018

- Bangsamoro Organic Law which outlines the new peace and development roadmap for the Bangsamoro Peace Process of the Philippines
- Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers with a secretariat at the Finn Church Aid
- President Nazarbayev's new programme of spiritual modernization of the Kazakh society "Rukhani Zhangyru", Kazakhstan.

### **Closing Session**

The **High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations** thanked everyone for the attendance and participation in the meeting. The annual report of UNAOC on 2017 activities has been approved by the United Nations Secretary-General and will be circulated by the General Assembly through the regular channels, as well as posted on [www.un.org/en/documents](http://www.un.org/en/documents) and UNAOC websites.

### **Annex: List of Speakers**

High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations  
 United Nations Secretary-General  
 Spain  
 Turkey  
 Chief of Cabinet and Spokesperson of the High Representative, UNAOC  
 Web and Multimedia Communications Specialist, UNAOC  
 Malaysia  
 Kazakhstan  
 Qatar  
 Montenegro  
 Union for the Mediterranean (UFM)  
 Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM)  
 Hungary  
 League of Arab States (LAS)  
 Armenia  
 Finland  
 Philippines  
 Sweden  
 Bangladesh  
 Brazil  
 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)  
 Azerbaijan  
 Thailand  
 Belgium  
 Slovenia  
 Estonia  
 Burkina Faso  
 Pakistan  
 European Union  
 Libya  
 Egypt  
 Morocco  
 Iraq  
 Sudan  
 Turkic Council (Observer to the Group of Friends)