



**United Nations Alliance of Civilizations  
Group of Friends Meeting (Ambassadors' level)**

*New York, 29 June 2016*

**Summary Report**

**Introduction**

On 29 June 2016, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held a Group of Friends meeting, the main focus of which was the 7<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum (Baku, Azerbaijan, 25-27 April 2016), its outcomes and way forward. In the context of the meeting, UNAOC made a call for consideration to host the 8<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum, to be tentatively scheduled in Fall 2017.

United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, chaired the meeting. It was open to civil society representatives, media, UNAOC partners and those member states that are not formal members of the Group of Friends.

**Opening Session**

The **United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations** opened the meeting by condemning the 28 June terrorist attack in Istanbul International Airport and reiterated his solidarity with the Government and people of Turkey in their efforts to combat all forms of terrorism and violent extremism. All participants took a minute of silence in honor of victims. Words of sympathy and condolences to Turkey and its people had been extended by all speakers, who took the floor during the meeting.

The High Representative thanked the Government of Azerbaijan for its generous financial support and commitment, which resulted in the very successful 7<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum. He reiterated appreciation to the members of the Group of Friends, which took part in the event, as well as to numerous partners of UNAOC that co-organized networking sessions in its context.

Plenary, breakout and networking sessions of the Forum resulted in a number of outcomes, which the High Representative summarized as follows:

- The Baku Declaration was endorsed by consensus during the Forum. Through the Declaration, members of the Group of Friends reaffirmed their support to UNAOC and expressed their conviction that the Alliance plays an important role as a global platform for sharing best practices for living together in inclusive societies, as well as solutions to challenges, which could be conducive to terrorism, in order to promote peace, universal human rights and sustainable development;
- In partnership with the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, UNAOC will organize an international event on “The role of youth in countering violent extremism” in Istanbul, October 2016;
- In September 2016, UNAOC will co-sponsor the Kyrgyz Republic Nomad Games for the promotion of diversity and culture;
- In Fall 2016, UNAOC and the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University, UK, will launch 2 full-time PhD scholarships, focusing on the role of intercultural relations and dialogue in forging social solidarity, trust and peaceful relations;

- UNAOC, in close collaboration with FAO and the Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue, will organize an event “Inter-faith celebration of cultural identity and diversity through food security”, first quarter of 2017;
- UNAOC signed memoranda of understanding with the International Centre for Sport Security, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Global Dialogue Foundation;
- UNAOC will contribute to the discussions at the United Nations General Assembly high-level meeting on refugees and migrants (19 September 2016);
- As part of its Hate Speech initiative, in the margins of the 71<sup>st</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, UNAOC will organize a side event on “Combating xenophobic language in the media and fostering inclusive integration of migrants and refugees”.

The 7<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum’s scope and visibility have been presented to the meeting participants by the Chief of Cabinet of the High Representative, who advised on the following: 1) over 4,300 people registered for the Forum and more than 2,000 volunteers were mobilized to help with its preparation; 2) over 700 articles, TV and radio appearances were produced to cover the event; 3) the hashtag #UNAOCBaku2016 was delivered to nearly 50 million users, reaching an audience of up to 15 million people. In addition, UNAOC social media activities benefited from the attention of main United Nations media accounts with millions of followers (e.g. UN News Center, UN Women, UN Youth, UN Radio, UNDESA-DSPD, UN Youth Envoy, etc.); 4) the main website of the Baku Forum had more than 250,000 visitors in April 2016. UNAOC continues to increase its digital outreach on its main website [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org) (nearly 4,6 million annual visitors) and in social media (currently it has over 100,000 followers across the globe).

Moving forward with organization of the 8<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum, the High Representative invited member states, which did not host the Forum in the past, to consider such a possibility in Fall 2017. Formal letters addressed to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs were sent in May 2016. A number of countries have already approached UNAOC with queries concerning responsibilities and logistical requirements. The High Representative invited hosts of 7 formerly held Forums to comment on their experience and value of having undertaken such a commitment.

The **Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan**, who was also the Chair of the National Organizing Committee of the 7<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum, thanked UNAOC and members of the Group of Friends for coming to Baku in April and for their active participation in that important event. By hosting the UNAOC Global Forum, the Republic of Azerbaijan reaffirmed that one of the main focuses of its foreign policy is to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, mutual understanding and respect between cultures and civilizations on international level. The Forum brought together various stakeholders. In particular, 150 international youth, selected from nearly 6,000 applicants via an open call, came to the Forum and shared their views on how to build inclusive societies. Over 3,000 delegates from 147 countries took part in the Forum, including heads of states and governments, ministers and other senior officials from state and non-state sectors. The event was widely covered by 117 foreign and local media representatives. During his statement, the Minister made a particular emphasis of how important it is to engage with business sector representatives and referred to a Business Symposium organized in the context of the Forum. He thanked members of the Group of Friends for adopting the Baku Declaration that serves as a roadmap for finding best ways to address nowadays challenges of living together in inclusive societies. Last but not least, the Intercultural Innovation Award ceremony and the “Musical Alliance of Civilizations” performance provided a special value to the event’s success. In conclusion, the Minister reiterated his Government’s determination to continue its policy of promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue in cooperation with international organizations, other countries and partners. He announced the 4<sup>th</sup> World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue to be held in Baku, in April 2017, under the umbrella of the Baku Process.

The **Director General for Multilateral Political Affairs of Turkey** expressed his heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the words of solidarity for Turkey in the context of the 28 June terrorist attack. He invited members of the international community to stand united against that scourge transcending borders, protect societies and common universal values.

Referring to the 7<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum, the Turkish representative recalled how instrumental were the discussions held at the event, particularly for raising awareness of youth, civil society and private

sector representatives. He noted that it is time to capitalize on the growing interest to UNAOC from various stakeholders and formulate concrete projects in promoting its specific targets. One of the greatest challenges ahead of us for living together in inclusive societies is mass movement of people and negative discourse about migrants, who increasingly become the primary target of rising xenophobia, Islamophobia, intolerance and discrimination, not to mention hate speech and hate crime.

Turkey strongly encouraged members of the Group of Friends to consider hosting the 8<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum, which will constitute one of the milestones for UNAOC. As the former host (2<sup>nd</sup> Forum in Istanbul, April 2009), Turkey helped complete the institutionalization process of UNAOC. During the 2009 Forum, several UNAOC projects have been launched and continued since then, including the Fellowship Programme and PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival. Hosting the primary event of a United Nations initiative is an honour in itself and an excellent means for a member state to contribute to its work with its own perspective and promote its culture and values.

Turkey called for a timely implementation of the national plans and regional strategies and invited members of the Group of Friends to work together to find ways on how to increase the visibility of and attention to UNAOC valuable projects.

The **Ambassador at Large for the Alliance of Civilizations and for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue of Spain** noted the quality and high-level nature of the various sessions organized by UNAOC in the framework of its 7<sup>th</sup> Global Forum. The Ambassador reiterated the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain proposals that have been put forward at the Forum. Those included: 1) establishment of a Committee for Tolerance and Positive Messages on the Internet, so that the voices of tolerance and respect are heard louder in digital media. The committee could include major internet companies (Google, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, etc.) and assist UNAOC to spread messages of tolerance; 2) development of a UNAOC Communication Strategy that would include agreements with leaders and opinion makers and bring in relevant public figures and sectors that are closer to young people, such as sports and the arts; 3) establishment of “Platforms of Religious Leaders for Peace” in conflict areas and a United Nations Secretary-General Task Force of religious leaders for crisis situations. Spain proposed to set up a team of expert mediators in intercultural and interfaith issues, and involve gender experts in United Nations peacekeeping operations; 4) providing women with a greater role in conflict prevention and resolution, in accordance with the Security Council Resolution 2242; 5) development of a "Guide to Good Practices in Education and Diversity for Social Integration" in order to make known those practices that have proven to be useful in promoting inclusion in different countries. The Government of Spain finds current UNAOC programmes encouraging and called for their further expansion, as well as creation of the new ones, so that UNAOC could become a useful instrument to address new challenges. Spain is currently conducting consultations with member countries of the Group of Friends and, this process, provides support and enhances the visibility of UNAOC actions and projects, highlighting those that have proven to be most effective. In conclusion, the Ambassador of Spain supported the call made by the UNAOC High Representative, inviting other member states to host the 8<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum.

As a response to the statement delivered by the Ambassador of Spain, the **High Representative** thanked Spain for having recently hosted a brainstorming session with a number of member states to discuss issues related to the future of UNAOC. It was an important exercise of self-reflection. Increasing the visibility of UNAOC activities among members of the UNAOC Group of Friends should be a priority and the High Representative always looks for ways to expand an outreach to them. UNAOC has already made changes on its website and initiated issuance of its regular newsletter (<http://www.unaoc.org/newsletter/>). Since there are always ways to improve methods of informing the Group of Friends of UNAOC activities, the High Representative invited all members to put forth suggestions on how to enhance the UNAOC visibility even further.

He welcomed the programme proposals submitted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain and noted that, in some cases, their elements are already present in the ongoing projects of UNAOC. Several other ideas merit UNAOC consideration with due respect for the substantive leadership role that may lie elsewhere in the United Nations system. The UNAOC Secretariat is studying all proposals to see how best to incorporate them into the work of the Alliance.

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

- **Brazil** was among the first countries, which joined UNAOC at its inception, and it was no coincidence that it hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> UNAOC Global Forum in Rio de Janeiro, in May 2010. The Rio Forum was a unique opportunity to engage governments, youth representatives and the media in a dialogue. It managed to mobilize the international community and national stakeholders, which sent a strong institutional and political message of dialogue, mutual respect within diversity and the promotion of peace, development and human rights. Brazil strongly encouraged other countries to envisage hosting the 8<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum.
- **Qatar** has also shared its key considerations leading to hosting the 4<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum in December 2011, in Doha. Nearly 450 youth from various countries of the world took part in the event, including its main sessions. The Forum was an opportunity for Qatar to highlight the achievements of Arab cultures in the area of inclusion and openness to other countries. It was an event through which Qatar showed its commitment to the message and mandate of UNAOC, combatting hatred at all levels. Since the Doha Forum, Qatar served as a venue for many more international events on peaceful coexistence and tolerance. Many national initiatives were launched since 2010 and continue to operate in Qatar.
- **Austria** recalled its experience of hosting the 5<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum in Vienna, February 2013, entitled ‘Promoting responsible leadership in diversity and dialogue’. Austria was able to shape the agenda of the Forum around its own priorities and the Forum outcomes proved to be useful in the national follow-up. The Vienna Forum focused on the regional dimension of UNAOC as integral to its mission since it aims to translate general prescriptions into local, regional settings and different cultures. The final political outcome of the Forum was represented in the Vienna Declaration that underlined the importance of political support for the improvement of cultural understanding and provided guidance to the strategic orientation of UNAOC. A number of practices and outcomes of the Forum were incorporated by Austria on the national level.
- **Indonesia** hosted the 6<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum in Bali, August 2014, under the theme “Unity in diversity: celebrating diversity for common and shared values”. It was a rewarding experience for the host country because, on one hand, Indonesia has a lot to share with the international community, while, on the other hand, through the Forum, Indonesian people also learned a lot from the experiences of other nations in overcoming their unique challenges in building inclusive societies and working together to achieve common goals. The level of attention from stakeholders, including youth organizations, religious organizations and other stakeholders, was really encouraging.

A number of other delegations took the floor, key points of which could be summarized as follows:

- Delegations, which participated in the 7<sup>th</sup> UNAOC Global Forum, expressed words of appreciation to the Government of Azerbaijan for having hosted the event in Baku. They also thanked the High Representative for making sure that the Forum recommendations are integrated into the work of UNAOC beyond the event duration. New focus areas, such as sports, food security, or launch of an Advisory Council, have been noted.
- The delegation of Armenia noted that it did not support the Baku Declaration and reiterated the position it took before the Forum that the document could not be considered a consensus document. In response, the High Representative reminded the participants of the efforts taken to accommodate the concerns of Armenia prior to the Forum. He further reminded the participants that 1) objections expressed by Armenia to specific paragraphs had been duly noted and announced at the Group of Friends meeting in Baku; 2) As he specifically noted during the Group of Friends meeting in Baku, for ten years the Group of Friends has never followed a process that would permit one member to exercise a veto over declarations of support for UNAOC. Unanimity has not been and will not be the standard, by which the Group functions. By any common sense standard, the Group of Friends, as announced by the co-chairs, reached consensus on the Declaration. That was the High Representative’s message in Baku and it remains the same to date.
- Several countries reiterated the need to fight the negative narratives regarding pluralism, particularly in the context of ongoing challenges related to Syrian refugees and misperceptions and biases towards them. The UNAOC Group of Friends could serve as a platform for an open discussion and sharing practical experiences and lessons learned on shaping positive narratives.

- One of the delegations made an emphasis on a useful contribution that UNAOC can make in countering terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism. This is particularly timely now during the review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In this context, UNAOC was called to continue its work with young people by building their capacity and raising awareness on pluralism, diversity, tolerance and critical thinking, media and information literacy, as well as developing innovative products and contexts to counter narrative that are being propagated by terrorists and violent extremists. In addition, UNAOC can play a useful role in combating intolerance, racism and xenophobia and in promoting the relevant international human rights and humanitarian principles to ensure protection of various vulnerable groups.
- Several delegations highlighted their most recent initiatives, including, 1) UNWTO partnership platforms, particularly in the Mediterranean region, that promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue under the heading “Connecting people, religions and cultures through tourism”; 2) a Marian Trail “In the footsteps of Mary: Queen of Peace”, which promotes religious tourism, economic opportunity and intercultural and interfaith understanding under the UNWTO umbrella; 3) “Bethlehem Christmas Destination” project, designed to celebrate the birth of “The Prince of Peace” and to revitalize religious tourism, boost economic prosperity and create job opportunities in Bethlehem; 4) the United Nations General Assembly high-level conversation on “Religions for peace”, organized by Kazakhstan in May 2016; 5) international forum on “Religions against terrorism” hosted this year in Astana on 31 May; 6) Kazakhstan’s proposal to adopt a global strategic plan to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations as a sequel to Agenda 2030.
- FAO invited all delegations to an inter-faith event which aims to highlight the role of food in bridging cultural differences and to emphasize the potential benefit of including food, food security and nutrition in a wider dialogue among nations and cultures to reach global peace. It is being co-organized with UNAOC and is planned in the beginning of 2017 in Rome, FAO headquarters.

### **Closing Session**

The **United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations** thanked everyone for attendance and participation in the meeting. He closed the event by reminding all members of the upcoming ministerial meeting of the UNAOC Group of Friends, which will be organized in September 2016 during the high-level debate of the United Nations General Assembly. Invitations to each delegation will follow during Summer 2016.

### **Annex 1: List of Speakers**

*(Reflecting the order of taking the floor)*

United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations  
 Minister of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan  
 Turkey  
 Spain  
 Brazil  
 Austria  
 Indonesia  
 Qatar  
 Sudan  
 Armenia  
 Canada  
 Kyrgyzstan  
 Bangladesh  
 UNWTO  
 Kazakhstan  
 Azerbaijan  
 FAO (written statement)