



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

*New York, 3 April 2018*

### **Summary Report**

#### **Background**

On 3 April 2018, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held a Group of Friends meeting on the topic “***Preventing Violent Extremism and Sustaining 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 feed on a screen in the conference room to engage meeting participants. The live social media coverage benefited from the attention of Twitter accounts with large followings. The posts were delivered to 924,378 accounts and totaled 3,398,654 unique impressions. The official hashtag, #PVE4peace, trended as the 7<sup>th</sup> most discussed topic in New York within that period.

#### **Opening Session**

The **High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations** opened the meeting by emphasizing on the fact that the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council have placed the “sustaining peace” concept at the heart of the United Nations organization’s peacebuilding work. Preventing violent extremism and ensuring sustainable peace are complimentary and mutually reinforcing goals, achieving of which requires joint international efforts and creating opportunities and platforms for community engagement. The UNAOC project activities are designed to promote the underlying values that are crucial to preventing violent extremism and to advancing the goals of sustainable peace and security - tolerance, dialogue, inclusion and peaceful coexistence.

The Alliance continues to empower, mobilize, and support youth and youth-led organizations to counter the appeal of violent extremism. UNAOC provides seed-funding to youth-led organizations under its Youth Solidarity Fund (YSF); continues implementing the Fellowship Programme; identifies and empowers young filmmakers involved in addressing the topics of migration, diversity, social inclusion and the prevention of xenophobia under PLURAL+ video festival; and builds the capacity of youth to address stereotypes, prejudice and polarization in order to build resilience to violent extremism under its Young Peacebuilders Programme (YPB). All of these youth-based initiatives of UNAOC respond to the recommendations outlined in the progress study on Youth, Peace and Security, mandated by the Security Council pursuant to Resolution 2250, and the Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism.

The High Representative noted that violent extremists continue to propagate distorted narratives of religious intolerance and hate to justify violence. Against that backdrop, he represented the United Nations Secretary-General at the High-Level Meeting on Interreligious

Dialogue for Peace in Vienna, February 2018. Since 2013, UNAOC has organized or co-organized 30 events involving religious leaders, creating a global platform for inter-religious dialogue. It will continue to strengthen its collaboration with religious leaders to develop approaches to combat the rise of violent extremism and to promote social integration and cohesion.

Preventing the appeal of violent extremism and ensuring sustainable peace require a consistent, long-term and coordinated engagement. In this context, on 15 March 2018, UNAOC signed the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Compact and it will attend the sixth biannual review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (26-27 June), as well as the High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States (28-29 June 2018).

The High Representative thanked the Governments of Spain and Turkey for their continued political and financial support of UNAOC as co-sponsors. He has acknowledged an ongoing support of the Governments of Germany, Finland, Egypt, Morocco, Qatar, as well as the League of Arab States and IOM, which fund the UNAOC programming work.

**The Ambassador of Turkey** noted the significant progress achieved by the Alliance in the past years in terms of the scope of its activities, supporters and outreach, referring to it as one of the most prominent peace initiatives of our times. Violent extremism in all its forms is a source of concern on a global scale and it is important to broaden vision to make societies more resilient against it. A comprehensive strategy should involve a “whole-of-society”, as well as a “whole-of-government” approach. The Ambassador emphasized on the need to address the root causes of problems and recalled the review of the peacebuilding architecture, launched by the United Nations in 2015. Turkey is supportive of the growing understanding that the United Nations’ efforts should go beyond addressing the immediate needs of conflict-affected countries; the United Nations needs to do better in supporting countries to make peace sustainable. Strengthening the role of mediation in conflict prevention and resolution and in sustaining peace is a cost-effective tool for the United Nations. Turkey welcomes the Secretary-General's commitment to advance "surge in diplomacy for peace". UNAOC, through its successful projects in its four main pillars, promotes dialogue and understanding among societies. Along with Spain, Turkey will continue to extend its strong support to UNAOC as its co-sponsor.

**The Ambassador of Spain** thanked the High Representative for the UNAOC activities and for Turkey’s role as a co-sponsor. Recent increase of intolerance, hatred, extremism and radicalization has divided societies and created a wall of suspicion between various members of communities. Violent extremism affects all countries, including Spain. The Ambassador shared some examples of lessons learned from combatting or preventing it. Firstly, addressing violent extremism requires joint work by the international community and sharing best practices. Secondly, we need far more reaching strategies, based on prevention of violent extremism. Thirdly, all levels of government and all stakeholders in the society, including youth, women’s associations, religious leaders and teachers, bloggers, etc., are to be engaged. Women can and should have a critical role in preventing and resolving conflicts; expanding the platforms to engage religious leaders is very important as well. Finally, research is key - we need to learn more about the phenomenon of violent extremism and its prevention, as no one is born a terrorist and no one is radicalized overnight. Internet technologies represent a threat and an opportunity to spread and prevent extremism. Internet can and must be a tool to disseminate an alternative narrative that promotes tolerance, dialogue and respect for differences. Spain urged to transition from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention in countering violent extremism.

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

- During the general discussion, delegations widely shared an assessment that violent extremism and terrorism impacted many countries across the globe. One of the speakers noted, violent extremism has become a direct assault on the United Nations Charter. Ending its impact will require a concerted action at the global, regional and national levels, and through fulfilling obligations under the international law.
- One of the delegations noted that sustaining peace and preventing violent extremism traverse the three pillars of the United Nations and are supported through a well-calibrated approach to peace and security, development and human rights. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a sound basis for advancing the work on both issues. Meanwhile, there is also the need for caution so as not to conflate the two ideas as they are aimed at responding to different sets of drivers and challenges.
- Governments and international community will need to take actions to address the conditions conducive to violent extremism and terrorism. It is important to understand and address the root causes of the phenomenon of extremism, which drive many of the youth to the paths of radicalization. International community needs to seek innovation and be innovative in creating solutions for youth, in creating opportunities and prospects for the future.
- Resolutions on sustaining peace (General Assembly 70/262 and Security Council 2282/2016) provide the United Nations with the necessary strategic guidance to implement sustaining peace and member states are encouraged to continue and deepen consultations on the implementation of its concept.
- Several delegations recognized the commitment of the international community to prevention of violent extremism as the key. A number of governments support all the efforts in strengthening the United Nations' work on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. A strong focus on prevention in the upcoming review of the Global Counterterrorism Strategy is expected by many member states.
- Meanwhile, one of the member states expressed its disagreement with the UNAOC assessment that the prevention of violent extremism has become central to the United Nations' system response to terrorism. The delegate noted that the General Assembly and Security Council have never approved the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism of 2016.
- Another speaker has recommended that all member states support the development of a broader political plan for the conduct of military operations against extremist groups. In addition, it is important to strengthen the first-responder capacity of local governments in delivering essential public services and providing public safety.
- It has been repeatedly noted that one of the most effective ways in preventing violent extremism is enhancing the role of women to promote positive messages of peace, tolerance and social cohesion. The Women's Alliance for Security Leadership study has shown that typically women's group are among the first to warn on signs of rising violent extremism in communities. Women are part of terrorist groups (at least 20-30% of fighters are women) and such facts cannot be ignored, more research is required on this trend.
- The crucial importance of education in the fight against discrimination, xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, and in the promotion of a culture of tolerance, dialogue and diversity, can never be over-emphasized. In this framework, too, the role of the media, faith-based organizations and religious leaders is fundamental.
- The Internet is one of the tools for creation of all-inclusive societies, which, unfortunately, it is also often used to spread hatred and violent ideologies. While the governments and private sector must work hand in hand to tackle the terrorist use of it,

they also need to strongly support the voices of youth and civil society narrating their stories to prevent the spread of violence. Raising awareness of the threats, especially among young people, developing their media information literacy and critical thinking, and sharing best practices could be an advantage of UNAOC.

- UNAOC was invited to contribute to further evidence-based work on identifying the possible areas of interface between sustaining peace and preventing violent extremism. Such interface in the context of the forthcoming High-level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace in April, and the Sixth Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in June 2018 will be useful.
- A few delegations have noted a particular relevance of UNAOC programmes targeting young people on the ground, fostering interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a tool for preventing conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding. UNAOC's continued work with alumni of its programmes has been called one of its greatest achievements. UNAOC was encouraged to maintain its outreach to civil society as the core element of its strategy.
- One of the members of the Group welcomed the regular organisation of the UNAOC Global Forums, as one of the strengths of UNAOC is its convening power of dialogue partners and its skill to build dialogue spaces. The UNAOC Global Forums provide an important opportunity for government representatives and civil society to share information, form new partnerships and build literacy on questions of religion and belief.
- Many members of the Group of Friends recognized that the “raison d'être” of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative is closely linked to prevention and sustaining peace agenda. It continues to be one of the most prominent peace initiatives of the current times, particularly through its specific projects in the four main pillars. UNAOC achievements have been duly noted in the General Assembly resolutions. The Group looks forward to seeing further successful UNAOC projects contribute to preventing violent extremism, countering-terrorism and advancing the goals of sustainable peace and security, tolerance, dialogue, inclusion and coexistence.

### **UNAOC Forum and 2018 Activities**

The High Representative advised the Group of Friends that negotiations on the UNAOC Forum 2018 are ongoing. A number of countries have formally advised that they are unable to host the Forum in view of the financial requirements of the event. Others noted that they had prior commitments to host global events during 2018. The High Representative will finalize the decision about the venue and the date of the next Forum by April 30 after consulting with the co-sponsors and the UNSG's office.

In Fall 2017, Spain and Turkey have submitted a draft Action Plan for UNAOC. UNAOC has provided comments to the draft document and is waiting for the co-sponsors' feedback.

The UNAOC Chief of Cabinet updated the Group of Friends on the forthcoming UNAOC activities:

- In April 2018, UNAOC will join the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre to lead several **pilot training workshops** in Trinidad and Tobago for government officials and civil society representatives on **developing strategic communications to counter violent extremist narratives**.
- The **Fellowship Programme** will be implemented starting from 29 August 2018, by bringing fellows from North America and Europe to Morocco, Egypt and Qatar. The fellows from MENA region will conduct visits to Germany, Spain and the USA during

September-October 2018. In December 2017, fellows of 2017 edition were taking part in the **alumni event** hosted with the German Mission to the United Nations and UNAOC envisions the 2018 alumni event to take place by end of 2018 as well.

- UNAOC is currently implementing the **YPB-MENA chapter**, which will end in June 2018. Following that, participants of the programme will convene at a symposium, sharing results of their work with policy-makers, media, practitioners and the general public.
- On 15-20 April 2018, UNAOC and BMW Group will co-host a workshop in Munich for **Intercultural Innovation Award 2017** recipients on strategic communications, planning and implementation. The training is part of a one-year long ongoing capacity-building support extended by UNAOC to IIA recipients.
- In March 2018, the call for applications under **YSF** closed and UNAOC is currently selecting top applicants. Between May and November 2018, recipients of the YSF seed-funding will implement youth-led projects on the ground, supported by UNAOC throughout the project cycle in the form of mentorship and capacity-building activities for young people.
- In December 2017, the **SpreadNoHate** symposium took place in Egypt, having received strong support from local participants and the media. In Fall 2018, UNAOC will publish and widely circulate the report on a series of symposia tackling hate speech against migrants and refugees in the media. It will also introduce **training and capacity building opportunities on prevention of violent extremism** to media organizations and journalists.
- The call for applications under **PLURAL+** youth video festival is open till 3 June 2018. In November, the 2018 award ceremony will take place in New York, hosted by UNAOC and IOM. One of the top videos will be awarded in the category “Prevention of Xenophobia”.
- UNAOC and the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan to the United Nations will co-organize an **Arria-formula meeting on the Role of Religious Leaders for a Safe World** in New York, 24 April 2018.
- On 28 June 2018, UNAOC and CTED, on behalf of the UN DPI (chair of the UN CTITF Working Group on Communications) will host a **side-event** at the margins of the High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States. The event will focus on **countering and preventing violent extremism through communications and empowerment strategies involving youth**.
- UNAOC will participate as a speaker in the **Global Forum on Migration and Development**, Rabat, 18-19 April 2018. UNAOC enjoys an observer status in GFMD.

## **Annex: List of Speakers**

High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

Turkey

Spain

Indonesia, on behalf of MIKTA

Sweden

Philippines

Hungary

African Union

Malaysia

UNESCO

Jordan

Kyrgyzstan

Iraq

Oman

Bangladesh

Canada

Germany

Russian Federation

Kazakhstan

Estonia

Austria

Pakistan

Argentina

Egypt

Morocco

India