



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

**New York, 24 September 2010**

**Summary Report**

The UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Group of Friends (GoF) Ministerial Meeting took place on 24 September 2010 in New York. The High Representative, President Sampaio, chaired the debate on the main challenges confronting the Alliance in the pursuit of its goals and priorities, as set out in the revised 2<sup>nd</sup> Implementation Plan of the UNAOC (2009-2011).

Prior to the meeting an Annotated Agenda was circulated (document dated September 18, 2010) in which delegations were invited to focus their comments and proposals on the main following topics:

1. The Third Annual Report (June 2009 – July 2010) of the High Representative to the UN Secretary-General.
2. Priorities ahead within the revised Implementation Plan (2009-2011).
3. Enhancing the Group of Friends role – Ministerial segment.
4. Sustainability of the Alliance: a) Trust Fund and 2010 Budget, b) Proposal on a replenishment mechanism to consolidate the UNAOC Trust Fund, c) Proposal to enhance UNAOC's capacity of action worldwide.

**Opening Remarks:**

UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, highlighted how the continuing financial crisis is a global challenge and adds strain to growing tensions around a range of issues that lie at the heart of relations between cultures and religions. Building the conditions for greater understanding is more urgent than ever and the Alliance aims to do just that, he said, with its efforts paying out. They are a key component in peace-building and development. The Secretary-General stressed the need to include the promotion of intercultural dialogue in the sustainable development agenda. He further noted that in order to fulfill its promises, the Alliance needs support from a wider circle of countries, next to the sponsors. Reserve funds would enable it to adapt to rapidly changing situations.

In a message read out by his chef de cabinet, President of the General Assembly, Marcel Deiss, expressed his pleasure at the adoption November 2009 of a Resolution on the UN Alliance of Civilizations. He hoped this would help strengthen commitment to the Alliance and build on connections between cross-cultural projects in member states and the innovative programs of the Alliance.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the two sponsor countries briefly shared at the outset their satisfaction for the progress made and their concern for some of the challenges facing the Alliance. Minister Moratinos welcomed the steady growth of the Group of Friends, the tremendous involvement of civil society actors in the Rio de Janeiro Forum, the development of national initiatives and Regional



Strategies, the adoption of a GA Resolution in November 2009. Minister Davutoglu also pointed to the various indicators of success. Yet, he expressed concern with the insufficient level of funding and asked to which extent may the selfless and untiring work of the High Representative and the Secretariat compensate the inadequacy of the Alliance's resources.

The UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, President Jorge Sampaio highlighted the need for action to confront increased intolerance and discrimination. Warning of the costs of inaction, he stressed both the need for long term action at all levels (as expressed in National Plans and Regional Strategies for Intercultural Dialogue and cooperation covering education, youth, media and migration) and the need for appropriate management of intercultural crises. The inclusion of this item in the agenda of the Focal Points meeting in October will allow further thinking on the prospects of developing new crisis management mechanisms within the Alliance, complementary to the Rapid Response Media Mechanism.

The second part of President Sampaio's remarks was focused on the pressing issue of the sustainability of the UNAOC Secretariat both at human resources and financial level. Warning about the risk of going into liquidation unless the Trust Fund was provided with fresh contributions, the High Representative proposed to develop a periodic voluntary replenishment mechanism along the lines of the note distributed in advance. Finally, he pointed to the important timeline ahead: the first Regional Conference for the Mediterranean in Malta (November 8-9, 2010), the Focal Points' meeting in Berlin (October 25-27, 2010), the launch of the preparatory process of a Regional Strategy in Latin America (Peru, December 9-10, 2010) and the launch of the SEE Regional Action Plan (December 2010).

## **Highlights of the discussions:**

**Many Ministers or Heads of delegations contributed to the discussions. In the following short summary, positions expressed are not attributed to individual delegations, except under item 5, dealing with initiatives and achievements at national and regional levels.**

### **1. Third Annual Report (June 2009 – July 2010) of the High Representative to the Secretary-General:**

The report received positive feedback from those present at the Ministerial meeting. It was considered to be both a useful report on the work carried out by UNAOC so far and a constructive approach for suggesting how to face the challenges in today's globalized world. Delegates broadly agreed with the conclusions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual report, including the need to establish a mechanism for the approval of Regional Plans of Action by the GoF. The inspiring role of the High Representative was commended. The flexible activity of the Secretariat received praise. While many countries hailed the developments of Regional Strategies and Action Plans, one delegation warned against their multiplication and insisted that the Alliance's strength rather lies in its ability to include grassroots organizations.

### **2. Priorities ahead within the revised Implementation Plan (2009-2011):**

The future priorities identified within the revised Implementation Plan were seen as a welcome submission and received broad support with delegates feeling they should remain the top goals for UNAOC's work.



Members were happy to see that the components of the ‘culture of peace’ agenda were very much incorporated in the revised 2<sup>nd</sup> Implementation Plan of UNAOC. Further, it was felt that it was crucial for each State to push ahead with specific activities, particularly through the creation of National and Regional Plans for Cross-Cultural Dialogue as emphasized in the revised Implementation Plan.

### **3. Enhancing the Group of Friends (GoF) role – Ministerial segment:**

Suggestions for enhancing the GoF’s role included the need to consolidate and expand UNAOC’s main ongoing projects, whilst also developing the ‘people to people’ approach in an attempt to continue strengthening on-the-ground efforts and cooperation with a view to sowing the seeds of reconciliation and understanding. In this respect it was felt that members should aim to enhance good governance, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue among and between states. Related to this is the call for more intensive engagement in regional settings – having project-oriented Regional Strategies under the umbrella of two or more lead countries, for example, in Latin America.

Additionally, emphasis was placed on the need to elaborate individual National Plans as such efforts were felt to be imperative for further bolstering the UNAOC. To enable this, assistance will be needed in following up and assessing the National Plans prepared by member states and then modifying them according to latest developments.

It was also felt that the role of the ministerial segment of the GoF could be enhanced by diversifying the nature of debates that take place during meetings, and that both top-down and bottom-up approaches should be taken to achieve the goals of the UNAOC. Given the number of new members in the GoF in recent years, it is important to have clear monitoring of meetings and forums, to ensure effective coordination for the development of successful National and Regional Strategy Plans, based on a comprehensive and integrated action. One delegation suggested that, as an interim measure pending a review of the decision-making process, a small Group of Friends be selected as coordinators for each region or an international organization.

The vital role of the GoF and the activation of relationships among them through permanent communication were stressed and it was felt that quantitative reports could be produced to complement the qualitative ones produced by the Alliance, which would also help members by providing them with concrete data upon which to base their actions.

### **4. Sustainability of the Alliance:**

#### **a) Trust Fund and 2010 budget**

It was highlighted that the meeting of the GoF should serve as a forum to exchange views on the operations and effectiveness of the UNAOC Trust Fund. The financial aspect should not be neglected and it is crucial to ensure appropriate funding for initiatives if the Alliance is to be able to follow through on projects.

There was awareness of the problem of financial sustainability faced by UNAOC and broad consensus on the need for the GoF to ensure sustainability at the financial level to enable it to become an effective UN tool. The Alliance will not be able to deliver if it is not endowed with sufficient personnel and finances.



At the same time, importance is attached to securing the distinct character of the Alliance: its light structure, flexibility and creativity.

The need for financial resources has grown as the expansion of UNAOC's work has necessitated more sustained and predictable financial support. It was suggested that it should be explored whether the UN could provide a minimum budget for UNAOC to operate and voluntary contributions would be used as an additional source of financing.

**b) Proposal on a replenishment mechanism to consolidate the UNAOC Trust Fund:**

There was support for the proposal of a UNAOC Trust Fund replenishment mechanism, which would greatly contribute to the sustainability of the Alliance by creating a source of predictable funding. It was felt that such a mechanism would not only raise funds, but also diversify the UNAOC's financial resources, which is necessary for maintaining and consolidating projects. It was also felt that having such a mechanism would speed up the movement of UNAOC towards being able to implement more projects submitted within existing Regional Strategies.

**c) Proposal to enhance the Alliance's capacity of action worldwide:**

Considering the growth of the Alliance and the shifting paradigm of preventative diplomacy, it was suggested that UNAOC should become a horizontal soft power tool within the framework of the United Nations. Further, it was considered important to consolidate the network, strengthen its sense of ownership by the members, improve decision-making procedures, and identify its role, function and mandate clearly to all stakeholders.

A necessary future step was considered to be a strategy that would follow up the current Action Plan with priorities for the years 2011-2013; the aim is to ensure the UNAOC members have clear goals and can jointly deliver real added value through projects.

**5. Announcement of Initiatives and achievements:**

**In the course of the debate, many delegations referred to initiatives taken at national and regional levels to support the goals of the Alliance. Some recalled their specific involvement in Alliance programs and projects. These comments may be summarized as follows:**

- Albania has set up an inter-ministerial committee for the UNAOC and has appointed the Former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania as the National Coordinator.
- The African Union, which recently joined the Alliance, stressed the strong will of African countries stop being marginalized and welcomed this opportunity for inclusion.
- The League of Arab States is working together with the UNAOC and UNESCO to revitalize intercultural dialogue in the area of education and culture and is developing educational school-based programs. It will cooperate with the State of Qatar in preparing for the Doha Forum.
- Austria is proud to organize the fifth annual Forum of the Alliance. It welcomed the idea of thematic platforms brought forward by Switzerland, presented the Danube Strategy and flagged the organization in November of the first Arab-European Young Leaders Forum.
- Bangladesh has taken a number of affirmative actions at the constitutional and state level to guarantee the enjoyment of all faiths, religions and values on an equal footing. Under regional



initiatives such as SAARC as well as through civil society, Bangladesh has been active in organizing national awareness seminars to disseminate these values.

- Bulgaria has commenced implementing a series of projects, shaping its Plan of Action for advancing the Alliance's objectives. References were made to a "Re-inventing the Balkans" project and to another initiative on "Olympic Games in Human Rights and Tolerance". Bulgaria suggested that an NGO-led project on "Building tolerance community islands in the Mediterranean" should be part of the Mediterranean Action Plan. Further updates were given on the cross-regional initiative jointly developed by Indonesia and Bulgaria.
- Canada illustrated the cross-benefits of the Canadian experience in building a multicultural society and of some of the work of the Alliance, in addressing complex cultural situations.
- The Council of Europe, represented by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Chair of the Committee of Ministers) underlined its intended contributions to the Regional Strategies for SEE and for the Mediterranean, with specific references to History Teaching, Intercultural Cities, the South East Europe Youth Gathering, the Youth Peace Camps, the third CoE Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. The privileged relationship between the North-South Centre of the CoE and the Alliance was hailed.
- Croatia referred to its recently presented National Action Plan and confirmed its readiness to support any practical action within the UNAOC, which is directed towards enhancing understanding amongst cultures.
- Denmark is celebrating a historic anniversary of scientific and cultural relations with a number of Muslim countries: the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Royal Danish scientific expedition to the Near East. The country is actively involved in strengthening its dialogue with those countries.
- Egypt has prepared a National Plan for achieving the Alliance objectives for 2007-2011.
- Ethiopia wished to take the opportunity to reiterate that the Ethiopian Government had requested to hold the annual summit of the Alliance in 2011 where they will be the first African country to act as host for the annual meeting. The country is in the process of finalizing its National Action Plan and will submit it in due course.
- The European Union underlined the strong support provided to the development of the Rapid Response Media Mechanism and its strengthening in the Mediterranean, in cooperation with the Anna Lindh Foundation. It will soon discuss with the Alliance the follow up to the first Action Plan.
- Germany announced the organization of the Focal Points meeting in Berlin at the end of October, preceded by a Conference organized by Qantara on the role of media in intercultural dialogue.
- Italy reiterated the importance of freedom of religion and highlighted that together with Spain they have proposed to involve, on the occasion of the Fourth Annual Forum of the Alliance that will be held in Doha in 2011, representatives of governments and of civil society in a thematic session devoted to freedom of religion.
- Indonesia highlighted the need for a multilaterally negotiated instrument containing normative standards that can help diffuse religious radicalism. The country strongly supports the Rapid Response Media Mechanism.
- Hungary has decided to set up the Tom Lantos Institute in Budapest as a hub to promoting human rights, minority rights and tolerance.



- IOM called attention to how global migration dynamics underscore the importance of the UN Alliance of Civilizations.
- IPU, in cooperation with other partners, is currently implementing a multi-tier project aimed at identifying good practices and promoting the effective representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliaments and in political life in general.
- Jordan is about to submit to the UN General Assembly a Resolution which calls for interfaith harmony and proclaims an annual week to celebrate interfaith harmony and tolerance. Jordan is eager to support initiatives that promote dialogue and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians and welcomes the High Representative's informal consultations towards an international cooperation platform in that sense. The country has set up a ministerial steering committee that will adopt a national plan for UNAOC. Jordan will contribute to the Regional Action Plan for the Mediterranean.
- Kazakhstan recalled a number of initiatives taken within the United Nations. It stressed in particular action within the CICA and within OSCE, in the context of its current Chairmanship.
- Korea is drawing up its National Action Plan, to be submitted later this year. It is particularly supportive of UNAOC initiatives in the field of Youth.
- Kuwait has prepared a project to participate in respecting the holiness of religious symbols. A first step is the global conference next November titled "Towards global understanding to respect religious symbols and holy Places", in cooperation with the Swedish government and the League of Islamic World.
- Lebanon recalled that, in its capacity as president of the Security Council in May 2010, it had organized its thematic debate on the dialogue between civilizations and security.
- Morocco affirmed its desire to host the Sixth Forum of UNAOC in 2013 and felt its combined African and Arab heritage would be a good platform for encouraging dialogue among Civilizations. The role of HM King Mohamed VI in promoting peace in the Middle East and preserving the identity of the city of Al Qods Asharif was further stressed.
- Mexico had presented its National Action Plan in Mexico. Dialogue on migration was seen as a priority.
- The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) referred to the MoU with the Alliance and welcomed in particular the organization of the Roundtable on Islam-phobia in Rio de Janeiro, though regrets were expressed about the lack of headway.
- Palestine underlined its firm belief that the end of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and putting an end to the Arab-Israel violence would help strengthen the Alliance even further.
- Peru is strongly involved in the Plural+ project and is a contributor to Global Expert Finder. The country is proud to host the first regional meeting of Focal Points in December. It is also looking forward to strengthening its relationship with the Arab world, and will host the Third Summit of Arab and South American Heads of State and Government, which will take place in Lima from 13-15 February 2011.
- Portugal referred to its National Action Plan, which includes a significant amount of projects by public institutions and civil society, including specific common initiatives by the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries.
- Qatar is working to integrate the issues tackled by UNAOC in its education curricula. The State also implements a number of initiatives, including the Education Development Initiative, the





Silatech Foundation, the Young Entrepreneurs in Islamic countries Network, and the Annual Conference on Interfaith Dialogue. It will host the fourth Forum of the Alliance in December 2011.

- Spain announced the creation in Barcelona of the United Nations University International Institute for the Alliance of Civilizations, which looks to greatly contribute to the work of UNAOC. Following the recent Cordoba conference on Religious Freedom in Democratic Societies organized as part of the Spanish Presidency of the EU, under the auspices of the UNAOC, Spain is working with Italy on a seminar in 2011 to look at the issue of Christian minorities. Other members are welcome to join the exercise. The broader question of religious diversity will be proposed for inclusion in the agenda of the Doha Forum.
- Serbia illustrated its contribution to the work towards the SEE and Mediterranean Regional Strategies.
- Switzerland announced the holding of the Annual Conference of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) in Bern, with the theme “When religion and world views meet”.
- Tunisia stressed in particular its contribution to better cultural understanding between the African and Mediterranean and Arab-Speaking world.
- Turkey recalled its strong backing for and involvement in the SEE and Mediterranean Regional Strategies’ processes.
- UNESCO underscored the creation by the Director General of the High Level Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures, in order to build a new paradigm for peace in the twenty-first century. The High Representative will be invited to the next meeting in early 2011. More work is needed to illustrate the power of cultural diversity and dialogue in building peace, as clearly established in the course of the Year of the Rapprochement of Cultures.