

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends Meeting - Ministerial Level

New York, 26 September, 2014

SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held its Group of Friends Meeting (Ministerial Level) on 26 September, 2014 in the margins of the General Assembly High Level week. The Meeting's overarching theme was *'New and Emerging Ideological Threats to Global Peace & Co-Existence'*. It also addressed the main outcomes of the Sixth UNAOC Forum in Bali, Indonesia (August 2014) and proposed venue of the Seventh Forum in 2016.

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

On the occasion of the meeting, a short documentary 'A Cry for Peace' was screened and followed by engaging remarks by Ms. Denise De La Rue, Director of the documentary.

Opening Session

The High Representative opened the meeting by giving the floor to the **President of the United Nations General Assembly 69th Session**. Ambassador Kutesa paid tribute to the UNAOC's management and the Group of Friends for championing the Alliance's cause. He recalled that violent conflicts in the world (including Middle East, Africa, Far East), increased threats posed by terrorist activities, extremism and intolerance represent a grave threat and challenge for humanity. Extremism is no longer a domestic or regional issue and for that reason the priorities of the 69th Session of the General Assembly will be, among others, peaceful settlement of disputes and enhancing the role of the Alliance of Civilizations. President of the United Nations General Assembly suggested to approach threats of violence and extremism in a holistic manner through better understanding of their root causes and ideological underpinnings. He invited the Group of Friends and the international community at large to identify creative ways to deny space and platforms for hate propaganda, and to redouble efforts to bring safety and security to all people in the world.

In his welcoming remarks, **the United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations** started with reiterating his appreciation to the people and Government of Indonesia for hosting the Sixth Global Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations. The

Forum has provided a platform for learning and exchanges among states and non-state actors on fostering dialogue among different communities and cultures in order to eradicate radicalization and extremism. Various sessions of the Forum focused on education, social inclusion and promotion of shared values as important foundations for conflict resolution and peace. The High Representative invited members of the Group of Friends to implement one of the outcomes of the Forum – the Bali Declaration.

Recalling that the Alliance is a soft power preventive tool, he invited all participants to discuss how UNAOC can be more effective in implementing its mandate, and how it can contribute to building mutual understanding, to fulfil its mission and make it more realistic and responsive. He proposed to discuss circumstances, conducive to spreading terror, insecurity and savageness, to capacitate the Alliance with more ideas as to how to reach better results. While UNAOC is already conducting joint activities with DPA, CTITF, DESA, UNDP and UNESCO, it will enhance collaboration with civil society and count on expertise of researchers and academics in order to improve its work.

The High Representative committed to prepare a non-paper on '*New and Emerging Ideological Threats to Global Peace & Co-Existence*', and invited members of the Group of Friends to propose concrete suggestions and ideas that could be part of it. The non-paper will serve as a basis for UNAOC's future activities in the area of mediation and addressing radicalization and extremism.

The Minister for the European Union Affairs of **Turkey** reiterated his Government's commitment and responsibility to support the Alliance of Civilizations initiative. Current crises in Syria, Iraq and Gaza demonstrate prejudice, discrimination, racism and extreme polarization of ethnic, sectarian and religious differences, having negative repercussions in other parts of the world. The Alliance's goals must be reinforced and all members need to work together for the preservation of common values and promoting fundamental values, such as democracy, human rights and rule of law. Turkey welcomed growth of the UNAOC's Group of Friends to 140 members, which is an evidence of more and more international community actors supporting the principles and aims of UNAOC. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of **Spain** acknowledged with pride how UNAOC became more consolidated within the United Nations system. Now it is time for UNAOC to expand as an instrument of preventive diplomacy, to prevent extremism and violent radicalization. Recognizing a close link between democratic values and the values of the Alliance, Spain encouraged UNAOC to take a stronger role in the democratic reform sector to promote tolerance, basic freedoms and human rights. Both **Turkey** and **Spain** briefed membership on the effective implementation of their national programmes for UNAOC, coordination with national institutions, as well as joint initiatives with other countries under the umbrella of the regional strategies for the Alliance of Civilizations.

Executive Director of the **Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED)** reminded participants that often terrorism justifies crimes on the basis of faith or religion. This approach is completely baseless and absolutely unacceptable. In this regard, UNAOC is a precious resource to counter the messages of hatred, incitements and division. CTED and UNAOC already work together on engaging religious leaders in countering violent extremism. Both institutions will work on the adoption of a smart

strategy to cooperate in practical ways and achieve common vision in the field of countering extremism.

Director of the **Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF)** echoed previous speakers, supporting the UNAOC's work in promoting conflict prevention, strengthening inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue processes, engaging civil society, building bridges across diverse people, cultures and religions – all of which are tried and tested CVE measures that effectively address radicalization and extremism (Pillar 1 of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy). UNAOC is a member of CTITF's network of entities working on CVE. Together with Counter-Terrorism Center, UNAOC strengthens the anti-radicalization capacities of online media professionals among the Somali diaspora. This, and many more similar activities, must be replicated on a much larger scale. CTITF called members of the UNAOC Group of Friends to support these efforts, enabling greater learning and knowledge sharing, building networks and combining resources in order to impact violent extremism and terrorism.

Group of Friends: Views on the UNAOC's Role, Support and Recommendations

Ministers, heads of international organizations and heads of delegations to the UNAOC Group of Friends Meeting made a series of statements that may be summarized as follows:

- Delegations expressed great **appreciation to the Government of Indonesia** for hosting the Sixth UNAOC Forum in Bali, Indonesia, August 2014, acknowledging, in particular the value of the Bali Forum Declaration.
- A number of speakers emphasized the importance of **examining the root causes** of mistrust and intolerance that trigger growth of extremism and terrorism. In particular, new regional groups (such as ISIS) are exploiting the background of sectarian tensions and violence, and are abusing the values of religion. Therefore, UNAOC can be a **platform** for confronting various emerging ideological threats to global peace and co-existence. It should increase its impact and focus more on **prevention** of conflicts, radicalization and religious extremism.
- Further to the need to do a mapping of roots and causes of radicalization, UNAOC and members of the Group of Friends need to **hold consultations** and learn more about the specific approaches to be used by UNAOC.
- UNAOC could create a **network of religious and traditional peacemakers**, who have a strong potential to help in mediation efforts and conflict prevention.
- UNAOC was advised to establish more close **linkages with parliaments** of the world, not only with governments and international organizations that currently comprise its Group of Friends.
- UNAOC could establish a **team of expert mediators** in intercultural and interfaith issues to help deployment of the United Nations envoys, peacekeeping operations, political missions and the Security Council mandate.
- A few delegations encouraged UNAOC to establish **more joint programmes** with international **institutions** relevant in the field (for example, Anna Lindh Foundation and UNESCO).
- Several speakers reminded of the need to use soft powers in countering radicalization and general prevention of conflict – education and awareness

raising, particularly working with **young people** and benefiting from a tremendous potential of **women** in peace-building processes.

- Combatting extremism through military interventions is not enough and its countering must be addressed at social, political and economic levels. In this regard, as an example, UNAOC can play a great role in the fields of **media and education** to highlight importance of citizenship. It could seek new approaches in addressing stereotypes, biases and misperceptions about **migrants**.
- As a platform, UNAOC could **spread positive messages** of solidarity and understanding among all people who suffer from acts of terrorism in the name of religion (either by terrorist groups and non-state actors or by authoritarian regimes). In this context, annual **Forums** of the Alliance make valuable contributions and recommendations for the attention of states, international organizations and non-state actors, unifying efforts to pave the way towards achieving UNAOC's goals.
- Members of the Group of Friends applauded UNAOC's successful efforts of **engaging the private sector** in its work, which has noticeably grown very recently. At the same time, it got reminded that closer engagement with the private sector requires greater **transparency** over UNAOC's programming. There is a need to preserve a steady **balance** between UNAOC's corporate and state donors.
- Several speakers briefed participants on a range of **planned activities** to be organized in 2015 and 2016, and extended an invitation to UNAOC to contribute to their substantive preparation. In particular, one of the offers was made by Azerbaijan to host the Seventh UNAOC Forum in Baku in 2016.
- A number of delegations reiterated their commitment to continue **funding** UNAOC's core and programmes activities (Indonesia, Qatar, Finland).

Closing Session

Speaking during the Closing Session, the **United Nations Deputy Secretary-General** recalled how important it is to provide young people with an understanding of common humanity and destiny, preventing devising trends along religious, ethnic, tribal or sectarian lines. He welcomed the UNAOC's efforts to mobilize positive voices of community and religious leaders while reaching out to young people and engaging them in policymaking (in particular, in the context of UNAOC Summer Schools and Youth Solidarity Fund). Furthermore, the Deputy Secretary-General welcomed the Alliance's work with the DPA and its offices in specific geographic locations to intensify future cooperation. He thanked all UNAOC's donors for their continued support and contributions to the Trust Fund.

In conclusion, the **United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations** opened the floor to the members of the Group of Friends concerning the offer made by Azerbaijan to host the Seventh UNAOC Forum. Wrapping up the meeting, the High Representative reiterated his plan to convene experts-level thematic debates relevant to the UNAOC's mandate, including CVE and mediation. He informed the members of the conclusion of an Agreement with the United Nations Foundation – a tool which will enable UNAOC to enhance cooperation with the private sector. He thanked the Government of Azerbaijan for the generous offer to host the Seventh Forum, which will be organized in Baku in 2016.