

**UNAOC Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting
20 November 2018**

Summary of Discussion
*Assessment of United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)
Implementation of Strategic Plan (2013-2018)*

I. Introduction

During the UNAOC Group of Friends ministerial meeting at the 8th UNAOC Global Forum on 20 November 2018, the Group of Friends and the United Nations Secretary-General assessed the five-year period of the implementation of UNAOC's Strategic Plan, 2013-2018. The present document includes a summary of the discussions on UNAOC progress and achievements, and main recommendations regarding its future work and direction.

II. Vision

Members of the Group of Friends commended the work of the High Representative for UNAOC, H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, who led the initiative during 2013-2018. Delegations highlighted that Mr. Al-Nasser, inter alia, expanded membership of the Group; broadened partnerships and UNAOC's engagement within the United Nations system; and promoted its objectives and goals internationally.

Delegations thanked the co-sponsors, the Governments of Spain and Turkey, for their continuous efforts in supporting the Alliance's mandate. Recalling the founding years of UNAOC from 2005 to 2007, many delegations paid tribute to the late Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan, for his visionary and innovative approach in establishing a global platform for nurturing a culture of peace.

The Group of Friends welcomed the summary report of the implementation of UNAOC's Strategic Plan covering the period 2013-2018, and noted progress made across the Alliance's four pillars of work – youth, education, media and migration. The importance of UNAOC programmes and initiatives in promoting greater respect among civilizations, cultures, religions and beliefs could not be overstated.

It was underscored that UNAOC's efforts in addressing prejudices, negative stereotypes, and polarization remain as relevant today as in 2005. That Group of Friends consisted of 146 members was a clear reflection of the importance and credibility of the vision and mission of the Alliance. Delegations renewed their commitment to maintaining an inclusive and effective approach in carrying out UNAOCs work, including by supporting national and regional strategies in order to ensure greater coherence and impact on the ground.

A review of the recommendations and ideas expressed in the report of the High Level Group of eminent persons, which drafted a report on UNAOC in 2006, could be undertaken to further refine and develop the concept of the Alliance in addressing complex contemporary challenges of international peace and security. Strengthening the partnership between UNAOC and the Security Council on issues of peace and security, including in the context of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, could be a future touchstone of UNAOC's work.

A. Interreligious and intercultural dialogue

Delegations expressed appreciation for UNAOC's efforts in advancing the role of intercultural and interreligious dialogue on the international agenda. Against the backdrop of an increase in religious intolerance worldwide, it was noted that UNAOC provides a valued platform for religious leaders from different faiths and denominations to work together towards a safer world. A number of delegations offered to share their national experiences in the use of interreligious and intercultural dialogue as tools for conflict prevention and sustaining peace as well as post-conflict reconciliation. A delegation supported the proposal for a Council of Religions under the auspices of the United Nations to strengthen engagement with faith leaders and to share lessons-learned and good practices in the context of conflict prevention.

B. UNAOC Project Activity

Several delegations underscored that the greatest added value of UNAOC lies in its capacity-building projects and initiatives. Members of the Group of Friends commended the High Representative's efforts in the fields of youth, education, media and migration.

The work of UNAOC in support of youth and youth-focused organizations was particularly praised. The Youth Solidarity Fund, Summer Schools, Young Peacebuilders, Fellowship Programme, PLURAL+ and the Intercultural Innovation Award were cited as noteworthy initiatives to replicate and scale. It was recalled that peace couldn't be achieved or sustained without the active participation of youth. In this respect, delegations recommended that UNAOC continue to work with young people, including by strengthening their inclusion in formal and informal peace-building processes and in post-conflict reconciliation.

Delegations also noted with appreciation the work and programmes of the Alliance in countering hate speech in traditional and new media. In particular, the #SpreadNoHate initiative was cited as a positive example in promoting positive narratives on migrants and migration. With the rise in xenophobic rhetoric and hate speech, particularly against persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, delegations encouraged UNAOC to further develop its #SpreadNoHate initiative. A delegation recommended that UNAOC enhance its engagement towards strengthening the role of media and young peacebuilders in Myanmar. Other delegations noted that PEACEApp, which features workshops targeting young refugees and youth from different cultural and religious background, should also be further developed and promoted.

Many delegations echoed the importance of UNAOC's work in the field of education, given its crucial role in preventing xenophobia, discrimination and radicalization to violence. A delegation emphasized the importance of leveraging the networks of education experts and proposed a guide of good practices in education towards social integration. Another delegation proposed that UNAOC develop databanks that would provide opportunities for members of the Group of Friends to share good practices and lessons-learned.

C. Strengthening links between UNAOC and Sustaining Peace Agenda

The Group of Friends commended UNAOC for mainstreaming its work in the Secretary-General's conflict prevention and sustaining peace agenda. It was noted that both initiatives shared the same set of fundamental goals and aspirations – promotion and enablement of peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding and social inclusion as drivers for a more peaceful and stable world. Further, UNAOC played an important role in championing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the concept of Sustaining Peace, as outlined in Security Council resolution 2282 (2016) and General Assembly resolution 70/262. Delegations encouraged UNAOC to further advance the links with the Secretary-General's prevention strategy in order to support prevention and peace-building efforts at the national, regional and global levels.

D. Preventing Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism

It was recalled that increasing manifestations of violent extremism and terrorism remained a persistent and evolving threat. The abuse of information and communication technologies to spread hatred and other forms of intolerance were of particular concern. Since its inception, UNAOC has played an important role in promoting a whole-of-society approach to preventing violent extremism. A delegation informed that, in the context of preventing violent extremism, it was important to regularly revisit the threat given the changing nature of the phenomenon. The Group of Friends underscored that UNAOC's continued contribution to promoting a culture of peace could have a meaningful impact on addressing root causes of conflict and terrorism across diverse context.

E. Gender Mainstreaming

It was also recalled that the sustaining peace approach reasserts the indispensable role of women in peace-building and recognizes the substantial link between women's full and meaningful involvement in efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, and those efforts' effectiveness and long-term sustainability. A number of delegations encouraged UNAOC to strengthen efforts to integrate the gender dimension in its programming.

F. Enhancing and Broadening Partnerships

The Group of Friends commended UNAOC for adopting innovative approaches to bridge civilizational divides, drawing on existing efforts and bringing together a wide range of stakeholders – amongst them governments, local authorities, civil society, the private sector and youth. Delegations also welcomed the work of UNAOC in broadening and deepening its engagement with civil society and encouraged further cooperation with civil society in the coming years. At the same time, UNAOC was advised to preserve a balance in its work with civil society and governments, by ensuring that the involvement of governments and their national focal points is not reduced.

Delegations looked forward to discussing possible fields of future engagement, in particular in advancing youth involvement in peace-building processes. By initiating new projects, the Group of Friends looked forward to receiving timely and more effective distribution of relevant project information in order to promote the work of UNAOC at the national and regional levels, and to identify additional opportunities for future cooperation.

Many members of the Group of Friends recalled previous UNAOC Forums and reiterated the importance for the secretariat to continue convening such forums in the future; the Forums provide a platform for state and non-state actors, high-level officials, private sector representatives, youth and civil society to convene every two years to collectively explore good practices and innovative ideas on fostering mutual understanding and social cohesion among diverse peoples and cultures.

III. Structure

The United Nations Secretary-General and the Group of Friends recalled the High Representative's efforts over the past 6 years in actively mainstreaming UNAOC activities into the United Nations Secretariat and in raising the Alliance's visibility. Further, delegations expressed appreciation for strengthening UN-wide joint programming and initiatives in partnership with various United Nations departments and agencies in order to ensure greater coordination and coherence, referencing UNAOC's signing of the global counter-terrorism coordination compact as a recent example.

The Group of Friends encouraged UNAOC to further strengthen its partnerships within and outside of the United Nations system, particularly with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. The Alliance's participation in the Secretary-General's High-Level Prevention of Violent Extremism Action Group was commended.

In the context of the implementation of the Secretary-General's reforms of the United Nations, a delegation advised that UNAOC identify and promote clearer its strength and added-value within the United Nations system in order to ensure that its programming remains relevant and impactful.

Another delegation recommended that UNAOC strengthen its presence at the country level with national chapters to help promote the Alliance's mandate. Enhancing the role of national focal points in carrying out the work of the Alliance was also suggested.

IV. Budgetary and Administrative Issues

Noting the completion of the UNAOC 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, several delegations suggested that UNAOC should be provided with new tools and more stable financial resources. Acknowledging the challenging fiscal position of UNAOC, members of the Group of Friends called for greater and more predictable financial contributions to the Trust Fund. They agreed to the need for restructuring including appointment of additional permanent posts in the professional category. Several Member States pledged to make financial contributions to support UNAOC programmes and initiatives. It was noted that the success of the work of UNAOC will depend on reliable and adequate funding and that this should be viewed as a shared responsibility of all.