



**United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
Group of Friends
Annual High-Level Meeting**

*“Shaping a Better World:
Building Cohesive and Inclusive Societies
in a Challenging COVID-19 Environment”*

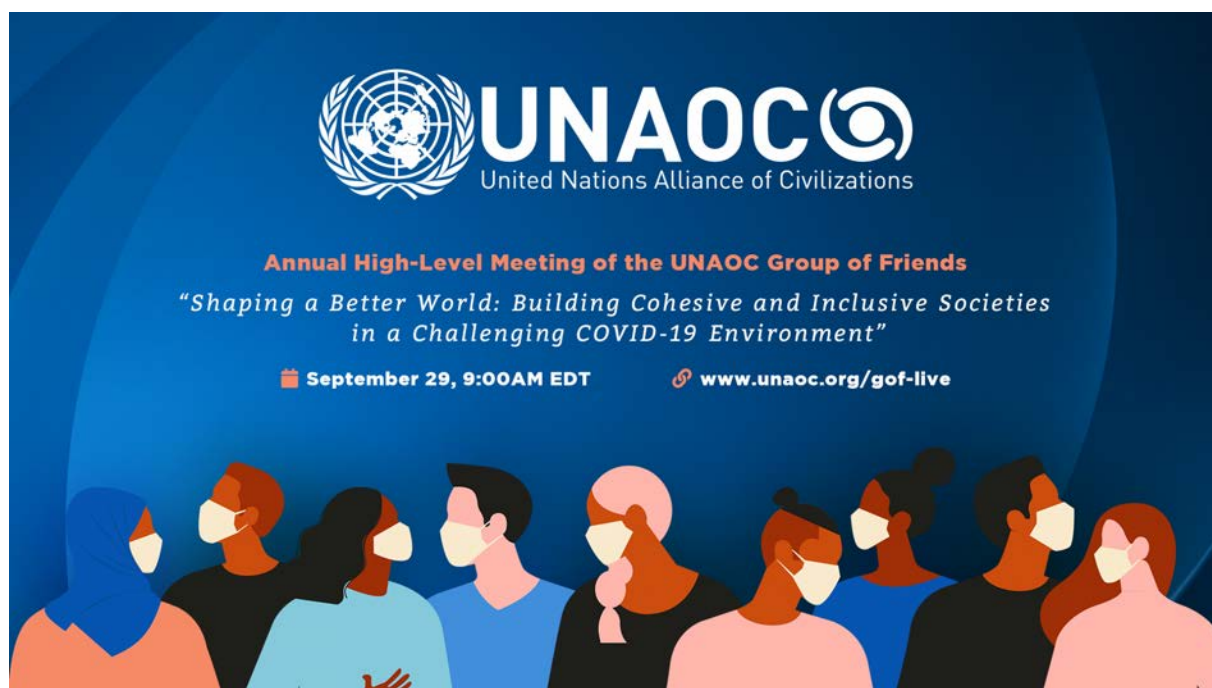
SUMMARY REPORT

New York, 29 September 2020

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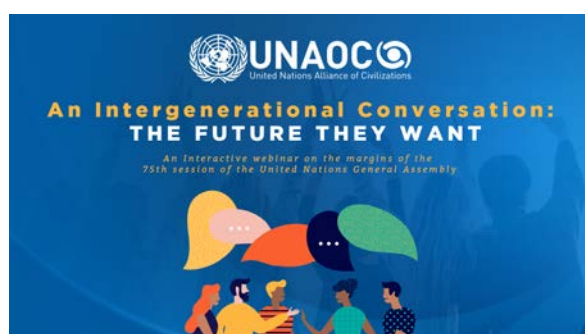
1. Introduction



On 29 September 2020, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held its Group of Friends annual high-level meeting under the theme *“Shaping a Better World: Building Cohesive and Inclusive Societies in a Challenging COVID-19 Environment”*.

The event served as an occasion to mark the 15th anniversary of UNAOC. It highlighted the accomplishments and the progress made by UNAOC since September 2019 across the different pillars, as well as new initiatives launched and actions taken to address challenges posed by the global pandemic of the coronavirus in 2020. Members of the Group of Friends have been afforded an opportunity to share their views and reflections on the UNAOC’s progress and to provide guidance and recommended course of action for the initiative moving forward.

In the margins of the high-level meeting of the Group of Friends, select UNAOC programming alumni and partners, including United Nations senior officials, engaged in two thematic webinars: *“An Intergenerational Conversation: The Future They Want”* and *“Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination: The Tearing of Our Societies”*.



Over 190 participants took part in the meeting and interactive webinars, including over 120 delegates from 64 member states, representatives of 12 United Nations offices and entities, 13 international organizations, and 15 civil society organizations and media.

The event was streamed live on UN Web TV and embedded on the UNAOC website. UNAOC circulated a media advisory among its large network of journalists, media and United Nations entities, and other stakeholders. UNAOC covered the event live on social media. With the hashtag *#ShapingTomorrow*, the social media coverage reached a total of 6,673,853 accounts, with 20,971,017 impressions. On 29 September, close to 994 tweets were posted, totaling 327 contributors. Top contributors included the official Twitter accounts of ministries and missions participating in the meeting, as well as the accounts of the Spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary-General (@UN_Spokesperson: 672.5k impressions), the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (@ahmedshaheed: 659.8k impressions), the United Nations Population Fund (@UNFPA: 229.9k impressions), the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (@UN_OCT: 42.5k impressions), and the African Union Youth Envoy, Ms. Aya Chebbi (@aya_chebbi: 26.7k impressions), among many others.

2. Opening Segment



The **High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations**, H.E. Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos (chair of the meeting), welcomed and thanked all participants who gathered virtually and demonstrated their commitment to participate in the UNAOC event, despite the physical distance and different time zones. He underscored that the community of Group of Friends and its political and financial support, including the co-sponsors Turkey and Spain, have enabled UNAOC to achieve the progress done over the past fifteen years.

The UNAOC's mission is far from over and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the fragility and the fissures within our societies. Societies are divided across cultural, ethnic and religious lines, with the resurgence of Neo-Nazi organizations and anti-Semitism; manifestations of hate speech, racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and persecution of Christians. In this context, the High Representative called the membership to use interfaith and intercultural dialogue as a viable tool for conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Culture (in terms of diversity) and religion (in terms of spirituality) are crucial components that should be included in the future diplomatic toolbox. Mr. Moratinos reminded that there is no alternative to standing together in unity and solidarity in cohesive and equitable societies.

The pandemic has forced to apply a new modus operandi for the UNAOC work, including postponement of the 9th UNAOC Global Forum, initially scheduled for November 2020 in Fez, Morocco. Several programmes, temporarily, have been adapted from a “face-to-face” format to a virtual series of capacity-building activities.

In a video message the **United Nations Secretary-General**, H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, welcomed the fact that UNAOC has grown to become an important tool for conflict prevention through its work promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Its mission to build more peaceful, just and resilient societies based on human rights and dignity of all is particularly relevant today. The Secretary-General commended the UNAOC's partnership with and support for youth-led grassroots civil society organizations and the private sector, as well as its close collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism, complementing their work on preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism. He particularly encouraged the Alliance's engagement with religious leaders and faith-based organizations, since interfaith dialogue can provide paths for understanding and for people to celebrate their diversity based on common values. Engagement with religious leaders is a priority through initiatives such as the United

Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites. In conclusion, the Secretary-General called the Group of Friends to continue supporting the Alliance to enable it to fulfill its mission.

H.E.Mr. Volkan Bozkir, **President of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**, recalled that since 2005, UNAOC has worked to foster tolerance within and beyond communities around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted societies and economies in many ways, hence the President of General Assembly called for action to build back economies and create decent jobs, especially for youth, to reduce the risk of future disruptions. He noted that we cannot build peaceful societies if young people are vulnerable to radicalization, and proposed to put the needs of youth at the forefront. In this Decade of Action and Delivery for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, Mr. Bozkir urged participants to consider the wider societal ramifications of actions and to instill hope for a better future of young people. In closing, he expressed appreciation to Spain and Turkey for their strong support to UNAOC since its inception in 2005 and his certainty in UNAOC to continue advancing intercultural dialogue and building more peaceful and prosperous societies.

The **Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey**, H.E. Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, noted the growth of the UNAOC Group of Friends as the international community marks the 15th anniversary of UNAOC, and welcomed Mauritania, Niger, Sri Lanka and Venezuela, which recently joined the Group. Turkey is alarmed by the rise in xenophobia and intolerance along with various forms and manifestations of racism, such as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. The Minister recalled that over the years, a strong body of national and international instruments has been developed, including UNAOC. He reiterated a call for the effective implementation of the UNAOC Action Plan for 2019-2023, which must remain a priority. The United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites should continue to guide efforts with a focus on tackling the pandemic. Turkey welcomed and encouraged UNAOC's collaboration with the wider United Nations system and joint initiatives. The Minister called for the international community to reiterate its commitment to the Alliance and its founding principles, and to strengthen multilateral cooperation.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Spain, H.E.Mrs. Cristina Gallach, introduced the video message of the Minister, H.E.Mrs. Maria Aránzazu González Laya. Using the occasion, Ms. Gallach underscored the role of the Group of Friends as an important and influential gathering to support a positive agenda of change at a global level. In her remarks, the **Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain** congratulated UNAOC with the 15th anniversary and noted that many results have been achieved. She emphasized the importance of our narrative of peace and tolerance and welcomed far-reaching initiatives of Mr. Moratinos, which Spain fully supports. The UNAOC Plan of Action 2019-2023 places UNAOC at the centre of the United Nations peace and security agenda. After 15 years, UNAOC solidly anchored in the United Nations system and became a great example of preventive diplomacy. The Group of Friends grew and became a large influential gathering, which shares common values and the aim to build a culture of peace. In closing, Ms. Laya informed that Spain will prepare new initiatives in the fields of mediation, conflict resolution and intercultural dialogue.

3. UNAOC Presentation: Highlights of October 2019-September 2020

Policy and Advocacy Initiatives:

- On 26 March, heeding the Secretary-General's repeated appeals for compassion and solidarity around the global pandemic, UNAOC, in collaboration with the office of the Special Advisor for Genocide Prevention, issued a **Joint Call for Unity, Solidarity and Compassion** and warning of the repercussions of hate speech, stigma and xenophobia while stressing the role of religious leaders in mobilizing their communities.
- On 18 April, as a co-chair of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development, UNAOC, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitated issuance of a **joint statement of the Task Force**, stressing the role of religious leaders and faith-based organizations in bringing people together around the common values of our shared humanity, and calling upon them to extend their support to promote and advocate with Member States and other stakeholders for the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19.
- On May 14, UNAOC and the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity co-organized a "**Prayer for Humanity**", in which His Holiness Pope Francis, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and the Secretary-General took part.
- On 28 May, UNAOC, the office of the Special Advisor for Genocide Prevention, and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights convened a meeting with religious leaders and faith-actors, representing more than 40 faith-based organizations, to discuss thematic areas, actions and initiatives for a Pledge for Action that could provide a result-oriented framework for collective action and enhanced collaboration between the United Nations and faith-based organizations. This consultation resulted in a **declaration by religious leaders and faith actors with assurances and commitments in response to COVID-19**, and a mapping of ongoing activities and possible areas of collaboration with the United Nations.
- UNAOC launched the "**One Humanity Campaign**" to operationalize its motto "Many Cultures. One Humanity" through new projects or tools. UNAOC forged new partnerships with entities, which embrace the motto and the UNAOC's values. Through microsite www.solidarity.unaoc.org, UNAOC published stories of solidarity and compassion.

United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites:

- As the focal point for the implementation of the Plan, UNAOC continued to work with all relevant stakeholders to explore ways for collaboration and to encourage them to implement the recommendations contained in the Plan to prevent, prepare and respond to attacks against religious sites. The High Representative **engaged with Member States** in New York (December 2019) and Geneva (November 2019); he presented the Plan to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (October 2019).

- UNAOC and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme develop a **workplan to start capturing the universality of religious sites** and contribute to fostering respect and understanding of their profound significance.
- In the context of the World Interfaith Harmony Week 2020, UNAOC convened an event to discuss and receive advice from the representatives of the Group of Friends on the main components of the **global communications campaign to promote the visibility of the Plan**. On 29 September, entitled **#forSafeWorship**, the campaign was launched. It invites youth and the global faith community to submit multimedia stories describing their connections to religious sites and their special significance. A microsite was developed for this purpose: safeguardreligioussites.unaoc.org.

Monitoring Anti-Semitism:

- In February 2020, against the backdrop of a growing wave of stigma, xenophobia and discrimination including anti-Semitism around the world, the Secretary-General designated the High Representative as the United Nations Focal Point to monitor anti-Semitism and enhance a system-wide response.
- Since the designation, the High Representative has been vocal on denouncing all manifestations of anti-Semitism, whether physical or verbal, underscoring that the United Nations is fully engaged in combating anti-Semitism, as well as all forms of discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief. During March-September, UNAOC liaised with major Jewish organizations and relevant bodies to forge a comprehensive action plan that will enhance a system-wide response. In December 2020, a broader consultation on a widely agreeable definition of anti-Semitism and good practices to address and respond to anti-Semitism is planned to take place.

Engaging Cities and Municipalities:

- In March 2020, UNAOC launched the **LA Dialogues**, convening the mayors of the cities of Los Angeles, Rabat, Seville, Damietta, La Couneuve, Coventry and Tunis in Los Angeles, USA, to discuss how to create diverse and inclusive cities of belonging. UNAOC and mayors signed the LA Declaration.
- In December 2019, UNAOC signed an MOU with the mayor of **La Courneuve**, France, to promote multiculturalism and interreligious understanding at the community level. Starting January 2021, UNAOC will convene a **series of workshops and activities** aimed at helping young people living in La Courneuve deconstruct stereotypes affecting their communities and causing tensions.

Mediation:

- UNAOC engages in **mediation support** in view of developing interreligious and intercultural dialogue focused workshops targeting identity-based conflicts. Consultations with the DPPA and its Mediation Support Unit to develop a coordinated and coherent mediation strategy in the areas relevant to the UNAOC's mandate started.

- In November 2019, UNAOC participated in a week-long interreligious workshop in the Central African Republic along with a series of high-level meetings. UNAOC has engaged in ‘**Mapping of Central African Republic local leaders**’ project, conducted by The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and the KAICIID Dialogue Centre.

Women as Peace Mediators:

- In May 2020, UNAOC convened the 1st meeting of the **Advisory Council of the “Women’s Alliance for Peace”**, followed by a meeting with female Permanent Representatives of African Member States in New York.
- In November 2019, UNAOC and Women for Africa (NGO) constituted “Women’s Alliance for Peace” – partnership with an objective to advance the role of African women as peacemakers in conflicts with sociocultural and interreligious dimensions. A webinar on mediation training for women with special focus on the cultural and religious dimensions of conflicts will be convened shortly.

Sports for Peace Initiatives:

- UNAOC is partnering with UNOCT, UNICRI and ICSS in the “**Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events, and Promotion of Sport and Its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism**”, which was launched in February 2020.
- UNAOC forged partnerships with sports clubs and associations, such as Fundación Atlético de Madrid and La Liga, The Global Association of Sports Federations (GAISF), which have joined the UNAOC’s “One Humanity Campaign”.

New Programmes and Projects:

- **Intercultural Dialogue and Socio-Emotional Competencies for Peacebuilding Programme**, will be launched in October 2020, in partnership with UNOCT, UNESCO and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Peace and Sustainable Development. It will aim at supporting South-Asian youth aged 18-34 in exploring and co-designing game-based methodologies to develop competencies for intercultural dialogue and social and emotional learning to prevent violent extremism.
- **#YouthWagingPeace Phase II: The Whole Community Approach to Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education**, is implemented in partnership with UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Peace and Sustainable Development since February 2020. The programme aims at empowering South-Asian youth leaders aged 21-35 with skills and tools to implement “PVE through education” initiatives with the goal to gear their communities towards sustainable peace.
- **Peer-to-Peer Training of Young Religious Leaders and Young Media Makers** was developed with UNCCT/UNOCT and will be launched in November 2020. The programme’s objective is to engage young religious leaders and young media makers in peer-to-peer capacity building activities to use religion and interfaith dialogue on social media to defuse sectarian tensions, counter terrorist narratives and promote social cohesion.

Ongoing Programmes and Projects:

- **Young Peacebuilders Programme:** hybrid-learning model adapted in 2020 due to COVID-19. Every edition, the programme impacts youth-led projects reaching approximately 2,000 direct and 10,000 indirect beneficiaries.
- **Intercultural Innovation Award:** series of online trainings and mentoring support were implemented during the pandemic. As of January 2020, 6 editions of IIA supported 61 initiatives across the world, impacting over 3.5MLN people in 112 countries.
- **Fellowship Programme 2020:** an on-line edition will be launched in October 2020 under the theme “Building peace in the age of new media”. As of January 2020, 250 fellows from 53 countries took part in the programme.
- **PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival:** annual PLURAL+ Awards Ceremony will be convened on 4 December 2020. UNAOC introduced 2 new PLURAL+ Awards categories: #forSafeWorship and “The Future We Want”.
- **Youth Solidarity Fund:** to date, UNAOC has launched eight editions; 68 projects have been funded, reaching more than 10,000 direct beneficiaries in more than 40 countries. Currently, YSF supports projects in Kenya, the Kingdom of Eswatini, Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Uganda. The new YSF edition will be launched by the end of 2020.

Partnerships:

- Between 1 October 2019 and 29 September 2020, UNAOC signed partnership agreements and MOU with the following entities and organizations: local governments of La Courneuve (France) and Los Angeles City (USA); Beach Soccer Foundation; Atletico de Madrid; LA LIGA, Global Association of International Sports Federation; Global Council for Tolerance; Fundación Mujeres por África; Nazarbayev Center for Development of Interfaith and Intercivilizational Dialogue; Turkish Airlines.
- UNAOC has an ongoing collaboration with the **Higher Committee for Human Fraternity**. In the pipeline are MOUs with Council of Europe, KAICIID, ALIPH, Grupo Ciudades Patrimonio de la Humanidad España, Muslim World League and United Religions Initiative.

Group of Friends:

- Since 1 October 2019, 5 members joined the Group: **Sri Lanka, Mauritania, Niger, Venezuela and Muslim World League**. Total number of membership: 153.

Donors and Trust Fund:

- Since 2005, the UNAOC’s operation and programming work are entirely funded by the voluntary contributions with no allocations from the United Nations regular budget. **Less than 10% of the Group of Friends members are donors of the UNAOC Trust Fund.**

- In financial year 2019, UNAOC raised US\$3,679,139 and spent US\$3,930,696. The 2019 donors were: AEXCID, Azerbaijan, BMW Group, Caucasus Muslim Board, Finland, Germany, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Portugal, Qatar, Spain, Sweden, Thailand and Turkey. UNAOC received an in-kind support from AEXCID, Morocco, League of Arab States, Qatar and Spain.
- In January-September 2020, the following donors contributed to the UNAOC Trust Fund: BMW Group, Equatorial Guinea, Kazakhstan, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Thailand, Turkey and UNOCT. Pledges have been made by Finland, Germany, Sweden and Turkish Airlines.

Social Media Outreach and Media Coverage:

- From 2019 to 2020, UNAOC has an increase of followers (141,652 followers across all social media platforms).
- UNAOC was featured in leading publications around the world about its programmes and activities. **Coverage spans print, radio and television:** *El Mundo, La Vanguardia, EFE, Al-Ahram, Egypt Today, Mediapart, TV5 Monde, UN News, UN Radio, UN Web TV, Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, TRT World, ANSA, Xinhua, The New York Times, Fox News, Le Magazine de l'Afrique, El Universal, Expansion, and i24 News, Jerusalem Post, Haaretz, Al Sharq Al Awsat, CBC Extra News, Anatolia News Agency, L'orient le Jour.*

4. Plenary Segment



The plenary segment of the meeting provided the Group of Friends membership with the space to express their views on UNAOC and to reflect on the following questions: *What future do we want for our societies, and how do we get there? What can the UNAOC Group of Friends do to support UNAOC in its endeavors?* Delegations shared the following key views and recommendations:

Mandate: all participants expressed congratulations and appreciation of the work done by UNAOC since 2005. Delegates underscored that UNAOC has grown to become an important tool for conflict prevention through its work promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Its mission to build more peaceful, just and resilient societies based on human rights and dignity of all is particularly relevant today. UNAOC has developed a solid expertise in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. It plays a critical role in establishing bridges across cultural and religious differences and contributes to peace and stability in the world.

The motto of UNAOC - “Many Cultures. One Humanity” - has been referred to by many delegations in their statements, reflecting on how values of solidarity, religious tolerance, leaving no one behind and inclusivity, contribute to more peaceful societies, examples of which can be found in many countries around the globe. They reaffirmed their commitment to the values, ideals and principles of UNAOC.

Pandemic and response to it: Member States shared concerns over the pandemic’s negative impact on economies and societies, including growth of misinformation, hate speech, rise of xenophobia and intolerance. Several delegations recalled that, as lessons from previous crises tell us, inclusion, partnership and diversity are critical for recovery and resilience. They

called to reinforce social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, which are contributing to preventing social tensions.

Delegations welcomed the Joint Call for Solidarity, Compassion and Unity launched by UNAOC and the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide. They underscored that the UNAOC's five pillars – education, media, youth, migration and women as peacemakers - provide an essential foundation for a just, peaceful and harmonious world. Delegations encouraged UNAOC to forge new and innovative partnerships in pursuit of peace, justice and human dignity as countries recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the delegates urged UNAOC to address the digital divide and help improve access, infrastructure and capacities in developing countries.

UNAOC Plan of Action 2019-2023 and the new mandate: delegates expressed support and called for an implementation of the UNAOC Action Plan for 2019-2023, including advocacy, policy and communications strategies of the Plan. They commended Mr. Moratinos for bringing a new impetus to UNAOC since his appointment in 2019 and for launching new initiatives in line with the Plan of Action.

A number of delegates welcomed the appointment of the High Representative as a monitor of anti-Semitism.

The 9th UNAOC Global Forum: due to the pandemic, Morocco postponed the UNAOC Global Forum in Fez, which was initially scheduled to take place in November 2020. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Morocco reiterated the Government's unwavering commitment to convene the Forum; new dates will be identified in due course.

Partnerships: delegates welcomed the UNAOC's ongoing cooperation and joint activities implemented with the United Nations system entities (including, UNOCT and UNESCO), as well as its partnership with civil society and young people. UNAOC has also been commended for partnering and building strong relations with parliamentarians.

UNAOC was encouraged to continue deepening its engagement with religious leaders and faith-based organizations, including in the framework of implementing the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites. Delegates welcomed the UNAOC's co-chairing role in the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development. Several delegates recommended that UNAOC build synergies with more international and regional organizations, including UN-Women, ILO and ASEAN.

Financial support: a number of delegations stressed the importance to ensure adequate and sustainable funding of UNAOC. Several member states reiterated their commitment to continue providing financial support to the UNAOC Trust Fund.

International and national initiatives: a number of speakers highlighted the following upcoming events and initiatives, which will be convened in the near time:

- The State of Qatar will host the conference on inclusive peace operations for youth in May 2021;
- Colombia will host the First Hemispheric Forum on Freedom of Religion or Belief, 22-23 October 2020;

- Sweden will host the Malmo International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Anti-Semitism in October 2021;
- The international conference of heads of states, parliamentarians and representatives of the world religions on Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue for the Benefit of Peace and Mankind, will be held in Russian Federation in May 2022 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union under the aegis of the United Nations;
- In European Union, the Youth Exchange Platform will convene in 6 different global venues, virtual meet-ups and preparatory discussions. “A Union of Equality: EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025”, adopted on 18 September 2020 by the European Commission, will endeavor a series of activities and change of legislation in the coming years.

List of Speakers of the Opening and Plenary Segments

(Reflecting the order of taking the floor)

- High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
- United Nations Secretary-General
- President of the United Nations General Assembly, 75th Session
- Turkey
- Spain
- Netherlands
- Costa Rica
- Morocco
- Qatar
- Bangladesh
- Colombia
- Sweden
- Estonia
- Algeria
- State of Palestine
- Islamic World Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Kazakhstan
- Saudi Arabia
- Egypt
- Thailand
- Malta
- Armenia
- Peru
- The International Dialogue Center (KAICIID)
- Italy
- Lebanon
- Argentina
- Azerbaijan
- Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA)
- Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

- League of Arab States (LAS)
- Philippines
- Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
- Guyana
- Indonesia
- Uruguay
- Russian Federation
- United Arab Emirates
- European Union
- United States of America
- Holy See (Observer to the Group of Friends)
- China
- Portugal
- Madagascar (Observer to the Group of Friends)
- India
- Pakistan
- Venezuela
- Union for the Mediterranean (UFM)
- Muslim World League (MWL)
- Brazil
- France

Delegations that could not take the floor in the virtual event due to technical issues and which submitted statements electronically:

- Chile
- Senegal

All recorded statements can be accessed on the UNAOC's website:
<https://www.unaoc.org/2020/09/annual-high-level-meeting-of-the-unaoc-group-of-friends/>.

5. Webinar “An Intergenerational Conversation: The Future They Want”



The UNAOC High Representative, H.E. Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos, noted in his introductory remarks the importance of listening to the voices of the young generation as we chart the course for rebuilding a better world. He underlined that “Youth” is a core pillar of the Alliance’s work since its inception, and the work of young UNAOC alumni has been key in engaging with communities to help in building peaceful and resilient society.

The panel was designed as an interactive conversation with several UNAOC young alumni and senior officials. In their initial interventions the panelists highlighted the following issues:

Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General, UNOCT, underlined that while we are not yet able to fully assess the long-term socio-economic and political impact of this unprecedented human crisis caused by the pandemic, it has a real potential to fuel conditions conducive to terrorism. The United Nations system, working through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, and that has UNAOC as one of the most prominent members, is committed to working with all generations to ensure a future without terrorism.

Ms. Diene Keita, Deputy Executive Director and Assistant-Secretary-General, UNFPA, stressed the importance that the successful achievement of the SDGs depends on the ability to carefully listen to youth and work with them. For the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, which UNFPA leads with PBSO, thousands of young people around the world have been consulted and the overall message is clear: young people want to be included in the process to ensure peaceful, just and inclusive society. Therefore, it is imperative to prioritize their participation in the process, in line with the recently adopted United Nations Security Council Resolution 2535, which represents an important milestone in this direction.

H.E. Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the United Nations, emphasized how young are the human capital and beacon of hope in the face of the threat of peace. Five major points were underlined: i) the crucial role young people play during uncertain time; ii) the important role played by youth in conflict prevention and peacebuilding and the need to support their endeavors; iii) the leading role youth play in protecting the environment; iv) the importance for policy makers to facilitate youth participation in all areas of development and human rights; and v) the role of social media and the necessity to promote a positive use of these tools to promote a culture of peace.

Ms. Corinne Momal-Vanian, Executive Director, Kofi Annan Foundation, underlined the key role young people have played during the pandemic, praising their agility to quickly adapt to the new circumstances through innovative approaches. At the same time, young people have been dramatically impacted with the education system put on hold and through massive layoff impacting their social and economic life. The pandemic also stressed the stark contrast between the leadership young people have displayed and their limited inclusion in the peace and security agenda. Notwithstanding process have been made, particularly through normative processes, little has happened in practice, particularly at national levels.

Ms. Aya Chebbi, Youth Envoy, African Union, underlined how it will be difficult to really achieve “the future young people want” without generational collaboration, healing and accountability and further work to build trust between generations. Six inter-generational dialogues have just been concluded as part of the “Youth Silencing the Gun” campaign, which reached over 7MLN young people in Africa. The African Union and the United Nations should keep facilitating platform of these kinds and should support youth to drive the agenda on the ground.

The session continued with an interactive conversation around four main topics of discussion:

In the first cluster, focused on “Youth, Peace and Security”, three UNAOC alumni, Ms. Farah El Alami from Jordan, Ms. Afaf Lamkoutar from Morocco and Mr. Tomas Horvath from Slovakia, discussed their work and the important role youth are playing in the peace and security agenda, as well as the challenges to fully implement UNSCR 2250 and 2535. Engaging in the inter-generational conversation, Ms. Keita reflected on how the United Nations entities leverage and mobilize the power of youth and ensure their full, effective, and meaningful participation in building peaceful, inclusive and resilient societies as we chart a new course for reshaping a better world.

In the second cluster, focused on “The Impact of COVID-19 On Youth” two UNAOC alumni, Ms. Theresa Saade from Lebanon and Ms. Magdalen Amony from Uganda, shared their experiences on how youth have been in the forefront in providing support to the communities they live in, particularly during these past months. Engaging in the inter-generational discussion, Mr. Voronkov, reflected on the challenges in broadening and strengthening assistance to victims of terrorism and violent extremism post COVID-19, while Ms. Momal-Vanian commented on the importance to capitalize on youth-led activism.

In the third cluster, focused on “Hate Speech and Xenophobia”, three UNAOC alumni, Ms. Louise Kanda from the Democratic Republic of Congo/South Africa, Ms. Sivatharsini Raveendran from Sri Lanka, and Mr. Mohammed Ghanem from Egypt, shared their insights on the impact of growing rise of stigma, racism and xenophobia in their work and activities and how this has impacted their work and activities. Ambassador Bahous engaged in the conversation reflecting on ways national governments can combat hate speech and xenophobia while protecting freedom of expression and international human rights law.

Finally, in the fourth cluster, focused on “Prevention of Violent Extremism”, three UNAOC alumni, Ms. Sif Heide-Ottosen from Denmark, Mr. Syed Ali Abbas from Pakistan and Ms. Ahlem Nasraoui from Tunisia, shared their experiences focused on the importance to involve young people as partners in developing and implementing policies that effectively counter the growth of extremism and how their work has contributed to PCVE efforts in their respective communities. Engaging in the conversation, Mr. Voronkov, reflected on the importance for the United Nations to strengthen its collaboration with youth and leverage their role as real partners in prevention.

6. Webinar “Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination: The Tearing of Our Societies”



As the UNAOC High Representative, H.E. Mr. Miguel Angel Moratinos, noted in his introductory remarks, the webinar offered the opportunity to address the fragmentation of our societies following the exacerbation of racism, xenophobia and discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, identify challenges to forge a whole-of-society approach, and explore actions and responses that can strengthen respect, trust and mutual understanding. The panel was designed as an interactive dialogue in which each panelist made an initial presentation followed by a discussion moderated by the High Representative.

In their presentations, panelists highlighted the following issues:

Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Acting Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, noted that the current unprecedented crisis requires a global response, which addresses the needs of the most vulnerable. The rise of discrimination, xenophobia and racism affects all regions in the world and the pandemic has exacerbated marginalization and division. Economic inequality and the fraying of social cohesion have the potential of triggering social unrest and violence in a larger scale. Member States have the primary responsibility to fight against hate speech and discrimination and need to act now. They need to condemn racism and xenophobia, strengthen education, counter hate speech and hold accountable those responsible. Their actions have to be complemented by civil society, social media platforms and other relevant actors. Building back better needs to be underpinned by the respect of human rights.

Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, expressed concern about the upsurge of hate speech as a result of the pandemic. Freedom of expression is not the culprit of hate speech. On the contrary, the inability to exercise freedom of speech can trigger a vicious cycle, in which divisions are exacerbated. Hate speech translates

into increasing marginalization of vulnerable groups. A whole-of-society approach is necessary to address xenophobia and racism. Careful and contextual analysis and ensuring the respect of human rights are necessary to fight against hate speech. Law enforcement and peer-to-peer knowledge, as well as more accountability of online platforms, are also key elements of an effective strategy to fight against hate speech.

Mr. Jason Isaacson, Chief Policy and Political Affairs Officer, American Jewish Committee, stressed the alarming increase of Jewish conspiracy theories in the context of COVID-19 and the toxic and murderous scapegoating. Inclusive leadership, education, an independent press, respect for science and social media platforms, which police bigotry and conspiracy theories, are some of the key elements of an effective strategy in this regard. The United Nations, governments and credible institutions may play their role to remind the world to act and repair the fraying social fabric.

Ms. Nayeli Chavez-Geller, New York Correspondent, Primer Impacto, Univisión, focused her presentation on the vulnerability of Latino communities in New York at the height of the pandemic. COVID-19 has exacerbated economic inequality, social injustice and discrimination, and all these factors stoke racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

Ms. Alexandria Walden, Google's Global Head of Human Rights, noted that every Google product prohibits incitement to violence and that Google policies are more stringent than what is required by law. In response to COVID-19, Google is working with global and health authorities to remove misleading content and content tying COVID-19 to a specific person or group. Google's policy is based on four "Rs": remove, rate, reduce and reward. Google is deeply troubled by the dissemination of hatred online and wants to be part of the conversation with governments and other relevant actors.

During the webinar, participants discussed recommendations for a whole-of-society approach; strengthening social cohesion while upholding international human rights law; and actions that social media providers can take to improve accountability. The exchange of views highlighted the following issues:

- The international community has tools to respond to discrimination, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, including the United Nations policy framework and the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech in particular.
- A holistic approach for the implementation of all these policies is needed including multilateral institutions, governments, civil society and social media platforms.
- Parliaments have an important role to play and the bipartisan task force of the US Congress to combat anti-Semitism is a good example.
- Regarding social media online platforms, the participation of human rights experts in the content moderation is important, as well as ensuring transparency in the removal of content. There is space for civil society and governments to work closer with social media online platforms.

- Diversity and pluralism are strengths that should underpin the reconstruction of societies after the pandemic with human rights at the center.
- Addressing the root causes of discrimination and hate speech is crucial.
- Concern remains about the financial repercussions of the pandemic in funding initiatives related to the fight against discrimination, xenophobia and racism.
- The Christchurch Call and Plan of Action contain commitments for online service providers to increase transparency and accountability. The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) is an independent organization, which sustains and deepens collaboration among digital platforms, while incorporating the advice of key civil society and government stakeholders.