



United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends Meeting (Permanent Representatives' Level)

New York, 13 May 2013

Summary Report

At the invitation of the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, H. E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, UNAOC convened the Meeting of the AoC Group of Friends on May 13, 2013 (at the Heads of Missions and Delegations level). The Meeting was conducted in an open format which allowed the participation of Member States which are non-GoF members, as well as civil society, media and academia. Its agenda included the following items:

1. The outcomes and announcements of at the Fifth UNAOC Forum in Vienna, February 26-27, 2013;
2. Preliminary views of the High Representative on the prospects of the Alliance for 2013-2018;
3. Overview on the main programme activities and Strategic Plan for 2013-2018.

Opening remarks:

Having welcomed all participants the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, noted that it had been the first time that representatives of civil society had been invited to attend and follow the discussions of the member states and organizations at the UNAOC Group of Friends Meeting. He has highlighted the importance of building a platform for civil society, along continuing a globally recognized initiative to listen to the concerns, hopes and aspirations of people from different regions.

The Secretary-General has thanked all members of the UNAOC Group of Friends for their support in building the Alliance as a platform where civil society (youth in particular), governments and private sector could learn from each other and stand up for tolerance and inclusiveness, combat extremism and polarization.

The Secretary-General has welcomed the High Representative's initiative to conduct a Strategic Review of the UNAOC's past activities, enabling future planning of activities and programmes. He has reiterated his commitment to the mission and work of the Alliance, which has a role and potential to address issues around identity, religion, or ethnicity being exploited to exacerbate political conflicts, and called upon strengthening the initiative in its efforts to bridge among communities and bring peace around the world.

The new UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, President. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser has opened his statement with his sincere gratitude to the People and the Government of Austria for hosting the 5th Global Forum of the UNAOC in February 2013. He has thanked Indonesia for holding the 6th Global Forum, which he expected to take place in the second half of 2014.

The High Representative has pointed out the new vision that had emerged from the Vienna Forum, particularly by advancing the international community's priorities to live in a better world. To serve this purpose, the High Representative has requested the Director of UNAOC, Mr. Matthew Hodes, to conduct a Strategic Review process (2013-2018). He has envisioned an action-oriented strategy, to be implemented in an integrated manner and in coordination with the whole United Nations system, as well as with governments, civil society, media, academia, private sector and all other partners. The High

Representative has informed the Group of Friends' members that in the coming weeks a Strategic document will be shared for review and further engagement of the Group in its implementation.

The High Representative viewed the Alliance as an instrument of the United Nations that could prove that diverse actors on the international arena can become further aware of their shared responsibilities, and forge consensus on the global challenges. As an example, the UNAOC works with governments, universities and lead experts in the Asia-Pacific region aiming to set a new agenda for diversity and inclusivity in that part of the world. It continues to mobilize and strengthen youth-led efforts to build more peaceful communities at the local, national and regional levels. Finally, it works in the four priority areas—media, migration, youth, and education—set out in the original High Level Group Report, but in many cases it combines those areas within programmes, whenever appropriate. He has informed that new concepts and additional pillars of the Alliance are being currently considered.

In conclusion, the High Representative underlined the importance of increasing understanding among people and address polarization and tensions, along continuing to have the utmost support of the critical community for the UNAOC – members of the its Group of Friends.

The Permanent Representatives of the two co-sponsors – Spain and Turkey - welcomed the new High Representative to the UNAOC. They also welcomed the contribution of the Vienna Forum and looked forward to the next Forum, to be hosted by Indonesia in 2014. They both expressed their support for the Regional and National Plans for the UNAOC and emphasized the importance of ensuring a stable financial flow to the UNAOC's Trust Fund, encouraging other member states to contribute to it.

The Permanent Representative of Spain recalled the importance of economic development, along with achieving the Millennium Development Goals. He further commented the four pillars of the UNAOC, identified by the High Level Group, which are youth, education, media and migration.

The Permanent Representative of Turkey underlined the goal of building bridges and helping people move from conflict to collaboration and encouraged the Alliance to increase cooperation among countries on intercultural and interfaith dialogue. To further advance the Alliance's goals, he stressed that National Plans, as well as the Regional Plans, are of a vital importance. With regards to the Strategic Plan of the Alliance, they both expressed their commitments to help the Alliance to achieve the expected results.

The Director of UNAOC, noted that following the Vienna Forum of February 2013, the UNAOC has already made a range of noteworthy achievements, such as 1) collaboration with Google and the Jordan Media Institute to provide a platform for young journalists in the Middle East to continue creating opportunities for media professionals; 2) the UNAOC Fellowship Program turned to its 4th year, with thanks to the Federal Republic of Germany. A fellowship alumni network is being established with support of the Government of Azerbaijan; 3) Youth Solidarity Fund continues to provide seed funding to outstanding youth-led initiatives (funded in 2013 by Finland, Spain and Australia). In the past editions of this project, over 140,000 individuals benefited from its activities and many more beneficiaries are expected this year.

The Director informed the Group of Friends of the strategic review and planning process. The team has completed the data collection phase and began drafting the document. It is expected that the latter is prepared by July 1, 2013. He further shared some apparent conclusions that the team has already reached: 1) Focus, coherence and consolidation: rebalance the structures and activities to with the High Representative's guidance to building on existing success while incorporating more work on conflict prevention and reconciliation; 2) Discipline: set stringent criteria for the UNAOC's engagement to avoid replicating the effective efforts of others; 3) Mainstreaming: work with UNESCO to better focus on education and increase the contacts with DESA to work on youth and the migration issues.

Highlights of the discussion:

Over 30 delegations of Member States and International Organizations contributed to the discussion, expressing their appreciation and gratitude for the work of the High Representative, the Vienna Forum, the civil society participation and the steady support of the co-sponsors of the UNAOC.

The following short summary includes key views and suggestions emerged from the statements made in reference to the agenda items of the Meeting. Some of the delegations recalled their specific involvement and achievements at the regional and national levels.

1. The outcomes and announcements of at the Fifth UNAOC Forum in Vienna, February 26-27, 2013

The 5th UNAOC Global Forum took place in Vienna on February 27 and 28, 2013. Entitled “Responsible Leadership in Diversity and Dialogue,” the Vienna Forum provided participants with a unique global platform for constructive and result-oriented dialogue to share lessons on best practices and develop joint initiatives and new partnerships. A number of delegations highlighted the importance of the Vienna Declaration and welcomed a focus on how responsible leadership can make a lasting difference.

Several delegations emphasized the importance of respect and understanding for cultural and religious diversity, and encouraging tolerance, respect, dialogue and cooperation among different cultures, civilizations and peoples. At the same time, the important contribution achieved by the youth must be recognized.

Moving forward to 2014, delegations welcomed the offer made by Indonesia to host the next Global Forum. A few delegations from the Asian region have encouraged partnerships and collaboration pursued by the UNAOC and expressed hope that the 6th UNAOC Forum will become a cornerstone for the whole region. They committed to provide even greater visibility for the UNAOC in their countries, in the run up to the 6th UNAOC Forum.

2. Preliminary views on the prospects of the Alliance for 2013-2018, shared by the UNAOC High Representative. Strategic Plan for 2013-2018

Many delegations have welcomed the strategic review process, led by the UNAOC leadership; they look forward to receive the document and engage in its implementation.

The UNAOC has been advised to actively engage civil society representatives into the strategic review process. It has been suggested that focusing on youth (which is the most vulnerable group to be exposed to extremism) and education remains a priority for the UNAOC, along with the other two pillars, e.g. media and migration. It has also been recommended that the Alliance should have more grassroots level activities and take a greater advantage from the use of modern technologies to promote tolerance and understanding. Any new projects and activities to be launched by the UNAOC need to be very concrete and practical.

A number of delegations have expressed their concern that the Alliance would transform itself into a new international agency. One delegation has expressed its concern that the Alliance would be competing with other United Nations agencies while, instead, it should focus primarily on conflict prevention, combating stereotypes and incitements to violence based on beliefs. Another delegation has reminded that the UNAOC could not be a platform for political discussions; it is rather a platform for dialogue with governments and civil society.

Some delegations have supported the Alliance as an inclusive platform for exchanging dialogues and welcomed the activities, such as the Fellowship Programme, Youth, Education and Media Programmes, and Dialogue Cafés.

At the occasion of the GoF Meeting, a number of member states, which provide their regular contributions to the UNAOC Trust Fund, have reiterated their commitment to replenish it. Some also have reported that they have appointed their Focal Points for the UNAOC matters in capitals; delegations looked forward to a greater engagement of the Focal Points in the work of the Alliance.