

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

Group of Friends Meeting - Ministerial Level *New York, 27 September, 2013*

SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) held its Group of Friends Meeting (Ministerial Level) on 27 September, 2013 in the margins of the General Assembly High Level week. The Meeting's overarching theme was *Global Harmony for Development and Prosperity* and it focused on the following agenda items: 1) endorsement of the UNAOC Strategy for 2013-2018 through an adoption of the Ministerial Declaration; 2) 6th UNAOC Forum in Indonesia, 2014; and 3) UNAOC's Annual Activity Report and 5th UNAOC Forum in Vienna Report.

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 partners and those member states and organizations, which are not formal members of the Group of Friends.

On the occasion of the annual Ministerial UNAOC Group of Friends meeting, UNAOC and the State Committee on Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan inaugurated a photo-exhibition showcasing tolerance and diversity of faith that included a series of photo reports on the Muslim, Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic Christian and Jewish communities of Azerbaijan, as an example of peaceful co-existence.

Opening Session

The High Representative opened the meeting by giving the floor to the Chief of Staff of the President of the UN General Assembly 68th Session, who spoke on behalf of the PGA. She reminded the participants of the UNAOC's relevance in view of growing sectarian strikes and terrorist attacks that target houses of worship and other religious or cultural symbols. She stressed that the Alliance remains one of the most important entities in the current world in the area of interreligious and cross-cultural dialogue, which has already made significant contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security. The General Assembly, under the newly appointed President of the 68th Session, Ambassador John W. Ashe, will prioritize the role of peaceful and stable societies as an important component of the new development agenda. The Alliance, through placing importance on culture, diversity and justice and through its programs, particularly in areas of education and

youth, is supporting a number of MDG pillars (peace and security, development and human rights) and can further contribute to the post-2015 development agenda.

In his welcoming remarks, **the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations** underlined a common aspiration, enshrined in the first article of the United Nation's Charter in fulfilling the development of friendly relations among nations and the necessity to resolve cultural tensions and dangerous fractures that intolerance can breed to achieve this common aspiration. He informed the Group of Friends members of the latest accomplishments of the initiative, including: 1) preparation of the Strategy for 2013-2018; 2) integration and mainstreaming of UNAOC into the United Nations system through coordination between the Alliance's staff and other agencies and departments (e.g. DPA, OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF); 3) support of 16 youth projects from 13 countries under the Youth Solidarity Fund; 4) advancement of the Fellowship Programme; 5) developing partnerships in the media sector and organizing capacity-building workshops for journalists; 6) conducting activities to improve the coverage of migration; 7) expanding activities to the Asia-Pacific region through development of a respective strategic plan, including senior level visits to Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

The High Representative noted a particularly important role of member states in supporting various activities of UNAOC and reiterated his commitment to maximize engagement among and with the Group of Friends members by reviewing the UNAOC's governing structure (role of Group of Friends, Partners Assembly, etc). He thanked all members of the Group for their review and approval of the Ministerial Declaration. He also noted with appreciation the United Nations Secretary-General's continued support for and attention paid to the Alliance since its establishment.

Group of Friends: Views on the UNAOC's Role and Activities

Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Heads of international organizations and Heads of Delegation to the UNAOC Group of Friends Meeting made a series of statements that may be summarized as follows:

- Delegations expressed their support to the Ministerial Declaration, endorsing the UNAOC's Strategy for 2013-2018 and the course of action put forth by the High Representative.
- A number of member states noted the great importance of development and implementation of the National and Regional Strategies for Intercultural Dialogue, welcoming those members, which adopted the second generation of the National Plans. Consideration could be given to create a database of national and regional documents adopted so far under the UNAOC's umbrella.
- The Alliance remains the leading platform to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue in the world and to contribute to preventing conflicts through engaging state and non-state actors in these processes (civil society, youth, academia, religious

leaders, media, etc). Time has come to consolidate the Alliance's activities and the Strategy for 2013-2018 appears to be very an effective way to do that.

- The four main pillars of the UNAOC's activities – youth, media, migration and education – were recognized as the most important ways for UNAOC to meet its objectives. Delegations noted that the initiative must continue to focus on them, while also exploring other areas of interest, as prioritized by the High Representative. Many delegations welcomed the High Representative's objective to mainstream the Alliance into the post 2015 development planning agenda.
- Delegations saluted the Alliance's efforts in exploring further linkages with other United Nations agencies and departments, with a view to identify complementarities and avoid duplication of efforts.
- The Alliance was reminded of the importance to integrate gender issues in its work. Delegations noted with a great enthusiasm that UNAOC continues to further engage with civil society (youth groups in particular).
- Several delegations called for and welcomed the restructuring of the Alliance in order to remain cost efficient in its activity and saluted the assessment made in the pragmatic conclusion of the Strategic document.
- Maintaining close linkages with the Group of Friends members (Missions in New York and Focal Points based in capitals) was noted as a vital element of work. Such coordination allows the Alliance to be present on the national and local levels, as well as to better coordinate with the Group while developing various programmes and events.

Group of Friends: Support and Commitments

- The 6th UNAOC Forum will be held in Indonesia on August 29-30, 2014. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia referred to 'Unity in Diversity' as a motto of his country and suggested it as an overarching theme of the Forum. He welcomed proposals of Asian states to host preparatory meetings between now and August 2014 in the run up to the Forum. All delegations were invited to note the date and prepare to attend this event.
- A number of delegations reported on the existing and planned activities that have taken place in their countries or organizations, in particular those that develop intercultural and interfaith dialogue.
- Delegations expressed great appreciation to the Government of Austria for the 5th Global Forum organized in Vienna, February 2013, and reiterated their anticipation to take part in and contribute to the 6th UNAOC Forum in Indonesia.

- A number of member states indicated they had, or will, provide financial or in-kind contributions to UNAOC (Azerbaijan, Jordan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Turkey).
- The Inter-Parliamentary Union invited the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations to attend one of its assemblies in order to establish direct contact with the parliamentarians from over 160 states.
- IOM continues to support UNAOC's Plural + youth video festival.
- A protocol on cooperation between UNAOC and the State Committee For Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan was signed.
- A partnership agreement with UNESCO was updated and renewed.
- An Agreement on cooperation between UNAOC and the Organization of the American States was agreed upon.
- BMW Group – the partner of UNAOC Intercultural Innovations Award – has announced its pledge for 2014-2015 in support of the programme. The agreement between UNAOC and the BMW Group was reaffirmed.

Closing Session

Speaking during the Closing Session, the **United Nations Secretary-General** emphasized why he believed so strongly in the concept of the 'Alliance of Civilizations'. Referring to the events during the High Level week in the United Nations (September 23-27, 2013), the ongoing conflict in Syria and violence occurring in Kenya, Iraq and Pakistan, he noted that the issues dominating the current agenda of the General Assembly had strong links to the work of the Alliance. Drawing attention to the many organizations that already do outstanding work to advance cross-cultural understanding and to promote inter-religious harmony, the Secretary-General noted that the added value of UNAOC was not to form a large bureaucracy or a new agency, but, instead, to provide a platform and a space for engagement of governments, civil society and the United Nations system in order to learn from one another. In his view, supporting UNAOC is an investment in peace and harmony as it helps to uphold the shared values of the United Nations Charter.

The statement of the Secretary-General was followed by the remarks of Foreign Ministers of the co-sponsors, **Spain and Turkey**. The co-sponsors reiterated their commitment to advance the Alliance, particularly on the regional and global levels and the Forum in Indonesia will be a particular milestone event in this regard. Member states of the Group of Friends were encouraged to continue implementing and launching new Strategies for Intercultural



Dialogue. While the Alliance has made a notable progress as a platform, it must yet dedicate many efforts in securing its financial basis.

The **High Representative** for the Alliance of Civilizations thanked all participants for their statements and remarks delivered at the Meeting. He offered his appreciation to all members of the Group and particularly those which provide continued financial support to the Trust Fund and extend partnership agreements with the Alliance.

Annexes

1. **Ministerial Declaration, September 27, 2013**
2. **UNAOC Strategy 2013-2018**
3. **UNAOC Activity Report, July 2012-June 2013**