



UNAOC 
United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS (UNAOC)

Action Plan

2019-2023



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BACKGROUND

I. Background:

Since its establishment in 2005, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) has worked to explore the root causes of polarization within and between societies and recommend a programme of action to address the issue including building bridges of understanding through the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The initiative was co-sponsored by the former Prime Minister of Spain Jose Luis Zapatero and the then Prime Minister, currently the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in New York and the chain of terrorist attacks that followed in Bali, Madrid, London and İstanbul, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan launched the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) in 2005 at the recommendation of, and with support from, the Governments of Spain and Turkey. In 2006, a High-Level Group appointed by the Secretary-General produced a report that included a description of the key elements of the mandate foreseen for UNAOC.

UNAOC is a crucial soft power political tool for preventive diplomacy, which works to support the conflict prevention and conflict resolution agenda of the United Nations.

During its more than fourteen years of existence, UNAOC has pioneered a range of approaches and activities across its four priority areas namely, Youth, Education, Media and Migration. The impact of many of its projects on the ground has been significant and measurable particularly those implemented with civil society organizations (CSOs) and youth-led organizations.

Nonetheless, the context of the current global challenges is more complex than ever before. The multidimensional nature of the scope of today's conflicts requires a new approach to conflict resolution and conflict prevention. Around the world, there has been a rising wave of violent extremism conducive to terrorism, growing intolerance, hate speech, xenophobia and discrimination, posing a threat to international peace and security. These phenomena were further exacerbated thanks to the proliferation of new information and communications technologies (ICT).

The proposed Action Plan builds on and develops existing UNAOC programming activities and suggests new focus areas that would strengthen the Alliance' ability to fulfill its mandate in a more effective and measurable way. The Plan further suggests new approaches for institutional development and political advocacy that should provide a viable framework for the way we respond to the current global challenges. Institutionally, the plan re-affirms the important role played by all stakeholders, including state and non-state actors, in developing and implementing national plans and regional strategies to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue, the mainstay of the Alliance. The framework aims to expand and consolidate the global scope of the Alliance in Africa, Asia, Europe, MENA and Latin America

The following document puts forth recommendations on a course of action that is aligned with the overall mission and objectives of UNAOC. The recommendations reflect the new vision of the High Representative that aim at reinvigorating and consolidating the general guiding principles identified in the 2006 High-Level Group Report¹ and ensuring that the Alliance is better rooted in the United Nations system, serving and supporting its priorities.

II. Priorities of the High Representative:

The High Representative has, on several occasions since formally assuming office in January 2019, laid out his priorities for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations with the aim of augmenting the relevance of UNAOC to the United Nations overall agenda of peace and security. During his individual meetings and interventions, he has identified these priority areas:

- **Prevention**
- **Mediation**
- **Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE)**

¹ 2006 High-Level Group Report: https://www.unaoc.org/docs/AoC_HLG_REPORT_EN.pdf

PREVENTION

1. Prevention

The Secretary-General spelled out his vision on prevention as one of his priorities during his term in office. A surge in preventive diplomacy is key to prevent new conflicts from flaring up. In the 2006 report, the High-level Group identified preventive diplomacy as an essential tool in the work of UNAOC. This means identifying and responding to the early signs of tension using all tools available. Addressing the root causes of polarization and identity-based conflicts remains one of the core mandates of the work of UNAOC and the most effective tool for preventing the eruption or/and escalation of identity-based tensions.

Prevention is also a crucial component of the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites. UNAOC will actively engage with all key stakeholders in the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Plan in this regard.

1.A. Proposed New Actions Across UNAOC 4 Pillars: *Education, Youth, Media Migration.*

UNAOC project activity retained over the years the support of Member States of the Group of Friends. The project activity was increasingly linked to elements of the SDGs, particularly SDG 4, SDG 16 as well as SDG 17.

Noting progress made across UNAOC pillars of work, new actions are proposed to complement and consolidate existing UNAOC programming.

Education:

Education in its various forms – including music, sports, art, drama and film – can help build bridges between communities and people. Through its Education programmes, UNAOC enables citizens to acquire intercultural competencies and build critical thinking skills to help foster cross-cultural dialogue and overcome cultural stereotypes and intolerance.

- Train and empower youth leaders with the skills and tools to create and implement community-wide PVE-E (prevention of violent extremism through education) activities, mobilize their respective communities to affect pro-social behaviour change and gear their communities towards sustainable peace. UNESCO has been giving special attention to youth as agents of change and carrying out a number of activities together with the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace & Sustainable Development (MGIEP).
- Co-design and co-develop innovative pedagogical tools (such as video-games, gamified apps, etc.) to foster intercultural and social-emotional competencies. UNAOC and UNESCO as vice-chairs of the working group on Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism are working on a proposal to be submitted to UNOCT on Intercultural Dialogue and socio-emotional competencies for peacebuilding.

- Implement and design non-formal peace education initiatives that support young people in gaining skills that can enhance their positive role in issues of peace and security and in preventing violent conflict.
- Develop MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) on Global Citizenship Education fostering a culture of peace, where people of different identities, faiths and cultures can identify as citizens belonging to a common humanity and where values of pluralism and diversity are viewed as enriching rather than a threat.
- Provide interactive and intercultural teaching resources on MIL (Media Information Literacy) for use in formal and non-formal educational settings.
- Strengthen and further universities' network to integrate cultural diversity, respect for religious pluralism and MIL in academic curricula, research and management.

Youth:

Young people are critical agents for social change, economic growth, development and technological innovation. It is crucial to recognize youth not only as a source of mobilization, but as autonomous actors and partners. They are our most important pool of talent, ideas, energy and passion. Through education, training and many other opportunities for innovation and creativity, UNAOC empowers youth globally and recognize them as powerful agents for social change.

- Take on initiatives to encourage the engagement of youth in the work of UNAOC and to strengthen their contribution to the process of this Action Plan.
- Provide scholarships, which encourage youth to study and compile, from both current and historical perspective, good practices of peaceful co-existence within their communities.
- Map out best initiatives developed by NGOs in addressing religious and culturally-based discrimination, hate speech and extremism.
- Strengthening fellowship initiatives which promote intercultural and interfaith understanding by engaging young leaders with the aim of challenging perceptions, deconstructing stereotypes, developing opportunities for intercultural collaboration, and exchange ideas and good practices on how to address current global challenges.
- Promote and compile good practices of youth on the use of sport as a tool to prevent violent extremism to support Member States capacity to develop comprehensive strategies integrating sports and its values as a tool to prevent violent extremism conducive to terrorism and counter radicalization among youth. UNAOC is partnering with UNOCT under the Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events, and Promotion of Sport and its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism conducive to terrorism.

- Provide funding and capacity-building support to youth-led organizations implementing projects with innovative and effective approaches to intercultural and interfaith dialogue, particularly in priority areas affected by identity-based conflict.
- Support young people as they take up the causes of cultural and religious pluralism, peace, and mutual respect by establishing small grant funding mechanism for youth to develop their own ideas on strengthening community resilience against violent extremism conducive to terrorism.
- Support and build the capacity of young religious leaders to enable them to promote moderation and provide a counter-narrative to violent extremism. A new proposal is being discussed with various partners.

Migration:

Virtually every state is both a country of origin and destination for migrants. In a world of porous borders, rapidly evolving modes of transportation and communications, and globalized economies, diverse populations are destined to interact. This phenomenon presents new challenges that need to be addressed, but also opportunities that need to be harnessed. Within its Migration pillar, UNAOC addresses the many facets of migration with the goal of fostering inclusive societies that respect the human rights of all.

- Continue to reinforce synergies with international organizations that work for the integration of migrant communities.
- Develop projects that communicate positive narratives about migrants, correct misperceptions and address issues of concern.
- Promote the positive contribution of migrants to the development of host countries through story-telling of success stories.
- Participate actively in the implementation of the Global Compact on Migration, including through the United Nations Network on Migration, with a focus on combatting xenophobia, racism and discrimination.
- Expand the migration portfolio beyond the cross-cutting pillar of Media. As a member of the United Nations Migration Network and an Observer in the GFMD, UNAOC will initiate new projects/activities that aim at the integration of migrants and changing the perception about migrants.
- Establish a Rapid Response Task Force Mechanism for socio-cultural intervention in areas where there are indicators that an identity-based tension is imminent. A pool of consultants would be formed to be called upon to facilitate intercultural and interreligious dialogue processes.
- Continue developing new, updated versions of the Media-Friendly Glossary on Migration, in collaboration with relevant United Nations entities and international organizations.

- Encourage and create opportunities for multi-sectoral collaboration with the goal of developing and fostering innovative storytelling on migration, including through the organization of hackathons with the participation of professionals with diverse expertise (journalists, coders, designers, academics, etc.).

Media:

Traditional and new media play a crucial role in influencing public perception, narratives, and attitudes and therefore hold the potential to bridge cultural divides. With the advent of the Web and a plethora of new news sources, social media, blogs, and other websites run by citizen journalists, UNAOC media projects focus on building the critical media literacy skills required to receive the ever-increasing speed and volume of information, and on training journalists so they can do their work to the best of their abilities.

- Develop a publication or report with the best practices implemented by the members of the Group of Friends at the national level to prevent and combat hate speech.
- Promote constructive dialogue on preventing and combatting hate speech among media professionals, academia and NGOs, and contribute to sharing best practices on ways to prevent and counter hate speech in the media.
- Develop workshops with media experts to explore means of disseminating alternative narratives to prevent and counter hate speech.
- Develop media and social media trainings for young journalists, citizen journalists, young religious leaders and other relevant end-users.
- Continue exploring ways to provide journalists with easy access to accurate information and expertise particularly to identity-based conflict settings.
- Develop and implement joint projects with United Nations entities, including members of the working group of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech as well as the stakeholders - sponsors of the Christchurch Call to Action.
- Support the global distribution of youth-produced media, recognizing youth as powerful agents of positive social change in a world often characterized by intolerance and cultural divisions.

1.B. Proposed New Pillar:

Women:

To make prevention effective, dialogue towards peace needs to be comprehensive. Integral to prevention efforts is the inclusion and empowerment of women. Women should be at the table at all levels.

In this context, “Women” is a proposed fifth pillar to be added to the existing four pillars of UNAOC with the aim to provide a space and a voice for women as peace-makers and socio-cultural mediators/negotiators. Priority areas will include dialogue with political, traditional and religious leaders; mediation with a focus of integrating gender perspectives in mediation efforts; UNAOC will work on the establishment of a ‘Women’s Alliance for Peace’ together with representatives of civil society. This collaboration will provide space for UNAOC and women-led grassroots to support women as peace mediators. This collaboration will translate into the implementation of projects in the field that will contribute to enhancing the role of women in mediation and peacemakers.

1.C. Proposed New Action Areas:

Sports:

- Sport has the power to convey essential human values, such as respect, discipline, inclusion, solidarity, courage and ethics. These values seem more critical today than ever—particularly in the resolution of significant global issues. To that end, UNAOC will develop partnerships with sport organizations and create initiatives in which sport is used as a tool to foster social inclusion and cohesion, understanding and diversity. Sport can be a vehicle for positive change and development. It unifies those of all faiths, cultures and languages.
- Use as a tool for diversity and inclusiveness through implementing joint projects with United Nations and non-UN entities with a knack for sports.
- Engaging with famous sports clubs.

Film, Music and Arts:

Engaging with professionals in the arts, film and music to promote the arts as universal tools for promoting multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion.

MEDIATION

2. Mediation

United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/72/488² concluded that targeted and sustained efforts to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue support conflict prevention and peacebuilding and contribute to creating conditions for a peaceful and lasting settlement of disputes. Facilitated intercultural and interreligious dialogue will serve as an essential tool for conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

A Rapid Task Force composed of a pool of cultural and religious advocates/advisors will be called upon to facilitate dialogue in identity-based conflict settings.

UNAOC will ensure that it compliments the efforts of and is coordinated with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Department of Crisis Prevention and Recovery, as well as the Secretary-General's High-level Advisory Group on Mediation and Peace-building Commission to further enhance mediation efforts. This process will be done in consultation with local, regional and international stakeholders. To that end, interacting with the Co-chairs of the United Nations Group of Friends of Mediation (Turkey & Finland) and following up the results of the Istanbul Conference on Mediation, and of the Alicante and Las Palmas International Conferences on Preventive Diplomacy in the Mediterranean and in Africa would be recommended.

² Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace - <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/293/17/pdf/N1729317.pdf?OpenElement>

COUNTERING AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM CONDUCTIVE TO TERRORISM

3. Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism

The Secretary-General presented his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/70/674-A/70/675) to the General Assembly in January 2016. The Plan of Action emphasizes the need to take an “All-of-UN” approach across the four core areas of work of the United Nations, namely peace and security, sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian action – since violent extremism impacts all of them. In order to operationalize the “All-of-UN” approach on Preventing Violent Extremism conducive to terrorism, the Secretary-General tasked the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force Inter-Agency Working Group on Preventing Violent Extremism (CTITF) to develop six concrete deliverables in support of the work of the High Level PVE Action Group. The Secretary-General designated the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) to act as Secretariat to his High-Level PVE Action Group. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations had actively participated in the CTITF working groups providing input to the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism³. The High Representative for UNAOC was designated as a member of the Secretary-General’s High-Level PVE Action Group. The Action Group is comprised of 22 relevant principals of UN Secretariat Departments, Agencies, Funds and Programs and provides leadership and strategic direction on the Prevention of Violent Extremism agenda, including implementation of the Plan of Action across all four pillars of United Nations work at United Nations Headquarters and in the field.

Consequently, the issues covered by UNAOC mandate received increased attention. This was mostly reflected in the input provided by UNAOC to the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism⁴. UNAOC was also reflected in the references made to the project activities in the matrix of activities developed by UNOCT with a particular focus on activities relevant to Pillar I (Addressing the root causes of violent extremism) of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Moreover, under the recommendations on preventing violent extremism, reference was made to the outcome of the High-level Thematic Debate convened by the office of the Secretary-General, the Office of the President of the General Assembly and The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in April 2015 under the theme “Promoting tolerance & reconciliation : fostering peaceful and inclusive societies and countering violent extremism”.

³ Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674

⁴ Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674

Furthermore, the High Representative was among the signatories of the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact in March 2018. The Global Compact is an agreed framework between the Secretary-General and the 38 principals of the United Nations CTITF.

Since January 2019, UNAOC had been actively engaged with UNOCT's working group on Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism (PCVE) as Vice-Chair of the group with UNESCO and UNDP. There are a number of joint project proposals that are being discussed to be implemented under the umbrella of UNOCT and UNCCT. Furthermore, UNAOC consulted with and received input from UNOCT and the Counter-Terrorism Executive Committee (CTED) during the process of developing the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites. This collaboration will be further strengthened in the implementation phase of the Plan.

UNITED NATIONS PLAN OF ACTION TO SAFEGUARD RELIGIOUS SITES

III. United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites:

The United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites⁵ was officially launched by the United Nations Secretary-General on 12 September 2019.

UNAOC will lead in the implementation of the Plan of Action, in collaboration with other relevant United Nations entities. It will submit a report on progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action at the end of 2020.

UNAOC will work closely with all relevant United Nations entities in the development of a global communications campaign to foster mutual respect and understanding, which will contribute to enhancing media awareness.

UNAOC will work with relevant United Nations entities and other stakeholders in the mapping of religious sites around the world. The mapping is intended to provide an online interactive tool that will serve as a reminder of the universality of religious sites and contribute to fostering respect and understand of their profound significance.

UNAOC will actively engage with all relevant stakeholders in the organization of a global conference in 2020 involving United Nations entities, Member States, political figures, religious leaders, faith-based organizations, media and civil society.

UNAOC will continue to engage with relevant stakeholders to assist, as appropriate, in the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Plan of Action.

⁵ United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites: In Unity and Solidarity for Safe and Peaceful Worship - <https://www.unaoc.org/resource/united-nations-plan-of-action-to-safeguard-religious-sites/>

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

IV. Institutional Development:

UNAOC should continue to build on the support of Member States demonstrated in the adoption of General Assembly Resolution A/RES/69/312⁶ by strengthening its ability to remain an active, pragmatic and outcomes-focused initiative. This will also support the High Representative's new approach and vision on advocacy and project activities.

The following actions are proposed:

- Mainstream this document with the priorities of the Secretary-General, particularly in the context of supporting his vision on conflict prevention and conflict resolution by mapping United Nations entities and working groups with relevant mandates to that of the Alliance. This approach had a head-start in the past 2 years, but needs to be further consolidated through concrete projects and joint initiatives. As such, earnest collaboration is to be strengthened with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), Counter-Terrorism Executive Committee (CTED), UNESCO, Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide and OHCHR.
- Strengthen strategic partnerships with DPPA, especially the Policy and Mediation Division.
- Engage with Security Council members to reference the role of UNAOC in relevant UNSC resolutions. Propose briefing on peace and security and conflict prevention issues.
- UNAOC would strengthen its collaboration with IOM beyond the joint PLURAL+ project through its full engagement with the network's working groups.
- Reviving the national and regional strategies in coordination with UNAOC focal points. More attention would be placed on working with officials at the national / local level in developing action plans that promote cultural diversity and social inclusion. Members of the Group of Friends demonstrate their commitment to the mission and objectives of the Alliance by voluntarily producing and submitting National Strategies. The strategies provide a mechanism to share lessons learned and challenges in addressing identity-based tensions and in bridging cultural divides. The strategies can help, inform and guide the development of UNAOC programmes and initiatives based on reported needs at the community levels. It is also recommended to expand and consolidate the global scope of the Alliance in Africa, Asia, Europe, MENA and Latin America.

⁶ General Assembly Resolution A/RES/69/312: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/69/312>

- Municipalities are often at the frontlines in addressing challenges linked to intercultural and interreligious tensions that may erupt within diverse communities. In our globalized world, cities are home to more than half of the population and have become melting-pots where people with cultural and religious backgrounds from all over the world live together and interact every day. As efforts are gearing up for the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, mayors and cities from around the world contributed to the development of the GCM and remain committed to fully cooperate and engage with all relevant actors to advance the prompt and efficient implementation of the GCM.

As a member of the United Nations Migration Network, UNAOC will engage with municipalities and mayors to develop activities that foster intercultural and interreligious understanding and social cohesion at a community level. In this context, two projects will soon be launched a) La Courneuve and b) LA Dialogues. La Courneuve will offer workshops and capacity-building activities to young people (15-25 years old) coming from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds in La Courneuve to help them deconstruct stereotypes affecting their communities and causing tensions, learn to address and recognize fake news and racist vocabulary. The LA Dialogues, planned to kick-off in 2020 in Los Angeles, USA, will be a series of dialogues hosted in cities around the world demonstrating good practices of inclusion, citizenship rights and living together peacefully.

- Liaise with the Group of Friends at the leadership level on a regular basis. Capitalize on the UNAOC Group of Friends ministerial meeting to meet with members with invested interest in UNAOC, as well as with those who could be potential partners. The latter will support the High Representative's efforts in resource mobilization.
- Mapping of the events and activities undertaken by the Group of Friends with direct relevance to UNAOC mandate.
- Increase the number of the Group of Friends' membership.
- Strengthen UNAOC engagement with faith-actors and religious leaders and expand the space for intra and inter faith dialogue

Partnerships, the Private Sector and Civil Society:

Develop new approaches to forge new partnerships and potential donors from the private sector, Intergovernmental Organizations, non-profit organizations, as well as academic institutions to replenish the UNAOC Voluntary Trust Fund.

ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATIONS

V. Advocacy:

- Designate Goodwill Ambassadors from the fields of art, sports, entertainment.
- Create a Council of Advisors to advise the High Representative on best practices in conflict prevention and conflict resolution.
- Organize events to mark the fifteenth anniversary of UNAOC in 2020.
- Convene UNAOC Global Forums in 2020 and 2022.
- Establish a closer network for Focal Points in order to timely disseminate reports and information on all stages of UNAOC programmes.
- Designate eminent political figures to advise the High Representative on regional approaches.
- Convene meetings focusing on UNAOC Regional Strategies and reinforcing cooperation with regional organizations, for the implementation of actions within their scopes.
- Compile guidelines of best practices across the four main pillars of the Alliance and disseminate at a large scale.

VI. Communications Strategy:

- Engage on regular basis with the media based at the United Nations.
- Authoring a monthly op-ed on current affairs to be published and circulated in several languages.
- Amplify Public appearances in non-UN public events with relevance to the mandate such as TED Talk, IPI, NYTimes Talk, Council of Foreign Relations, Think Tanks and universities
- Continue to author and produce monthly and quarterly publications to inform about UNAOC activities.
- Produce innovative showreels of the UNAOC work.

Procedure:

Circulate to the Group of Friends of UNAOC.
