



7th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
Baku, Azerbaijan, 25-27 April, 2016

“Living Together In Inclusive Societies: A Challenge and A Goal”

CONCEPT NOTE

Theme

“Living Together In Inclusive Societies: A Challenge and A Goal,” will be the theme of the 7th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), to be held 25-27 April, 2016 in Baku, Azerbaijan. By stressing the “inclusive” aspect of “living together,” the UNAOC 7th Global Forum will harness the multiple perspectives of various sectors to meet the challenge of, and progress towards, inclusive living in today’s increasingly diverse societies.

Background

Azerbaijan, as the host country for this Forum, serves as a model of a country where people have been living inclusively together for centuries. The historical tolerance of Azerbaijan’s people, the political leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, and Azerbaijan’s location between Eastern Europe and Western Asia have combined to foster an environment where people of various religions and ethnicities have lived together in mutual respect and harmony for national development. Azerbaijan’s experience, despite challenges, is an example of a country moving forward to substantive progress through inclusion.

Living together in inclusive societies also converges with the three major pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, human rights, and development. Societies that provide avenues for political and economic inclusion reduce the rationale for violent approaches to seeking power and wealth. Beyond tolerance, respect for the human rights of minorities in inclusive societies helps minorities perceive themselves as full and equal members of their societies. In contrast, fault lines of distrust can erupt when individuals and communities are faced with increasing uncertainties over their safety and full participation in society. Generally, marginalization and discontent foster a sense of being lost. They can therefore fuel radicalization and push people, in particular youth, towards violent extremism.

UNAOC activities are focused specifically on migration, education, media and youth. The promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies requires overcoming challenges in the

areas of migration and education. Youth and media are particularly key actors in moving forward to the goal of an inclusive society.

As the High Representative for UNAOC has made clear on several occasions, the activities and programming of UNAOC are not merely focused on promoting dialogue between diverse cultures, but rather emphasize concrete action-oriented steps that enhance these pillars.

This will, in turn, support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As such, the mission of UNAOC is in line with the 2030 Development Agenda, and in particular goal 16, which clearly states the need to “*Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*”.

Over the course of the past few years, and particularly during 2014 and 2015, the world has witnessed a staggering rise in violent extremism, religious intolerance and radicalization. Extremist groups spread their perverted interpretations of the holy texts and their intolerant messages using real-time communications. They seek to undermine our shared values of peace, justice and human dignity. Furthermore, countries in many regions of the world are facing challenges to integrating migrants and refugees, at least partly due to the large numbers. The resultant nativist and xenophobic rhetoric are themselves potent drivers of polarization, extremism and marginalization.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has reiterated on several occasions that the international community is deeply troubled by the spread of extremism and radicalization and stressed the need to address the root causes in order to prevent extremism.

Accordingly, the Secretary-General released on 15 January, 2016 a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism with a focus on preventive steps to address the drivers of violent extremism. UNAOC participated in the United Nations ad hoc committee that contributed to this plan. Many of the recommendations envisaged include engagement with civil society, religious leaders and actions in education, media, youth, and migration. UNAOC activities, since its inception, have been emphasizing these areas in its mission of building bridges and countering polarization.

As an agile United Nations entity, UNAOC will utilize this forum to address these challenges by focusing on “Preventing Violent Extremism” and “Best Practices in Social Inclusion” in two plenaries. The Forum will provide a platform to discuss the way forward to build societies based on genuine respect for everyone’s rights including freedom of belief, equal opportunities, and good governance as well as an inclusive framework of tolerance and respect for diversity. These sub-themes have obvious resonance with UNAOC activities, which will be further explored in breakout sessions and networking sessions with current and potential partners.

Program Content Overview

The two **Plenary Sessions** will have a duration of two hours each, with 5 participants from various sectors and a moderator, followed by a Q & A session with the audience.

Breakout Sessions will last for 1.5 hours, and will have 6 panelists and a moderator. These breakout sessions will provide an opportunity for showcasing the impact and results of the projects of UNAOC and its partners, discussing best practices in various relevant areas, and strengthening existing partnerships and fostering new partnerships.

Consistent with its emphasis on youth, the UNAOC **Youth Event** will precede the Forum. The full-day event will provide youth participants the opportunity to shape the global narrative on social inclusion and offer suggestions on preventing violent extremism. Up to 150 youth from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds with track records in intercultural dialogue and youth work will be selected by UNAOC and the host government through a call for application process.

UNAOC Forums provide an environment for innovative and productive partnerships across the board. Several **Networking Sessions** will provide an opportunity for various entities to showcase their activities and seek new partners in relevant UNAOC areas.

Winners of the **UNAOC-BMW Intercultural Innovation Award** will be recognized in a special ceremony, and the host government will also host a dinner and cultural evening for Forum attendees.

Outcomes

Expected outcomes of the Forum include, but are not limited to:

- a) The global consolidation of UNAOC as a platform for the theme of Living Together in Inclusive Societies; the discussion of relevant best practices; and ways to overcome the challenge and goal of living inclusively together.
- b) A Baku Declaration where the UNAOC Group of Friends will issue a declaration on the imperative of Living Together in Inclusive Societies. A round of consultations will take place prior to the Forum on the suggested text.
- c) New partnerships between UNAOC and other entities.
- d) Launching the UNAOC Advisory Council.