Plenary Session 1 "Platforms and Partnerships for the Prevention of Violent Extremism"

Background

Violent extremism presents grave challenges to peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, and humanitarian action. While the world has always had to deal with terrorism -- where both the perpetrators and victims are often narrowly circumscribed – today's rise in violent extremism has drawn larger groups of people into its orbit, both as agents and objects. Over the last few years, several UN programs and agencies,[1] governments, and non-governmental organizations have constructed plans to counter terrorism and violent extremism.

"Countering" violent extremism implies an immediate response to actions that have already occurred, while "preventing," or thwarting, violent extremism refers to efforts that prevent actions from occurring. This approach takes a longer-term view in addressing some of the conditions conducive to the emergence of violent extremism. These conditions include political instability and conflict, violations of human rights, discrimination and marginalization, and lack of economic opportunity. All of these issues are strongly linked to the UN pillars of peace and security, human rights, and development.

Therefore, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has led an effort to create a UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.[2] The approach emphasizes Pillars I and IV of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/60/288): "tackling conditions conducive to terrorism," and "ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law while countering terrorism." This implies good governance to foster inclusive societies based on the full respect of human rights. By addressing the conditions conducive to the multiple routes to violent extremism, the Plan of Action engages actors across sectors over the long term.

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) is an ideal convening platform and catalyst for discussions and good practices on preventing violent extremism for two major reasons. First, since its inception and particularly under High Representative Nassir Al-Nasser, UNAOC has focused on partnerships across the UN family and multiple sectors in society. Second, its four pillars of education, migration, media and youth are key areas in the prevention of violent extremism.

In keeping with the "One UN" approach advocated by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UNAOC has participated actively with UN offices involved with countering extremism and terrorism, and in particular the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) and the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED). In recent years, UNAOC has convened meetings involving multiple actors (such as religious leaders, political leaders, NGOs, media, and youth) to address the conditions

---

[1] For an overview of UN actions, key documents, and statements on countering terrorism and extremism, please consult http://www.un.org/en/terrorism/.
[2] The plan of action, in multiple languages, can be found at
http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/70/674

that are conducive to the rise of violent extremism. These conditions include clashes between - and among - cultures, and a lack of respect for human rights. However, these conditions do not just impinge on UNAOC's mission of bridging cultures and countering polarization. They are significant obstacles themselves to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

UNAOC projects in youth, education, migration and media can help inoculate societies against violent extremism. UNAOC has learned that a focus on youth as the critical target audience for all programming is essential – it is the next generation that must build positive values today that can translate into better policy development in the future. UNAOC youth projects - encouraging bridge-building, innovation and entrepreneurship -combine to provide youth with alternatives to conflict and economic stagnation. A focus on recognizing and empowering civil society ensures that project activity will have a multiplier effect, since civil society organizations have a deep and broad reach into societies and communities. UNAOC education projects encourage the creation of positive environments for respect and acceptance of the other by emphasizing learning across and about identity groups. The focus on migrant images and good practices in social inclusion can help prevent the polarization and marginalization that contributes to the rise of violent extremism. Media projects engage journalists and youth in using communications tools to resist polarization and encourage inclusion. They expose professional journalists and consumers of the media to best practices in the field by exploring means of curbing hate speech that can lead to incitement and violence.

This session's objective is to come up with concrete suggestions for strengthening UNAOC's work on preventing violent extremism.

Points of Discussion

• How can civil society and the private sector contribute to the prevention of violent extremism?
• What are the common denominators in successful projects in the prevention of violent extremism?
• What is the unique niche of UNAOC in the prevention of violent extremism?
• What are some concrete actions that UNAOC and its partners can take in contributing to the UN strategy for the prevention of violent extremism?