



## **Remarks of H. E. Mr. Nassir Al Nasser The High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilizations Roundtable with CTED and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation**

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United Nations Headquarters  
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you at today's roundtable on the role of education in countering violent extremism, led by our partners at CTED and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation.

There are three critical points I wish to convey today.

First is the need to instill in young people, through our education systems, a resilient and broad global identity. When I use the word "resilient" what I mean is an individual or a community's cultivated ability to stick to its core purpose in the widest possible set of unforeseen scenarios. I believe resilience has a huge role to play in reducing the appeal of extremism. I call for a broad global identity, because I believe that makes our young people more competitive in a world of international markets that is economically interdependent, and also speaks to the challenges of tomorrow's generations—not least climate change.

Second, we need to make sure that we create alternative and effective channels of empowerment for young people through education and also through youth networks. In many countries, and especially in the region I come from, the Arab world, young people constitute the majority of the population but are outside of the margins of power. We need to find ways to include young people in social and political processes in a way where they feel the dividends of mechanisms of empowerment. So much of what our youth grant making programs at the Alliance are about—including the Youth Solidarity Fund that provides money to youth-led peacebuilding initiatives—is working toward this goal.

Third, critical thinking. We MUST instill critical thinking skills in our young, and to be frank, in our adults as well. Our modern Internet and satellite-television-fueled lives are characterized by a deluge of information, some of which is wholesome and representative of reality and some not at all. How do we enable ourselves to see the difference between the two? This is why critical thinking is necessary. This is why the Alliance's founding document, the High Level Group Report, clearly identifies Media Literacy as a key component in reducing polarization that often results in violence between individuals and groups from different backgrounds.

In fact, UNAOC has partnered with UNESCO and developed a global network of universities working on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue. We also launched a multi-lingual Internet clearinghouse focusing on providing resources relevant to Media Literacy to educators and policymakers.

Finally, I wanted to end on a positive note and say that, however slow it may be, real change is coming. As many of you know, the Alliance partners directly with civil society organizations in experimental projects around the world.

One of our previous partners, the Pakistan Peace and Education Foundation, is involved in curricular reform and teacher trainings at some 25,000 madaris, or religious schools, in Pakistan. While we have provided seed funding to the Peace and Education Foundation in the past, recently the Foundation received a major grant from the US State Department.

With this grant, the Foundation established five madrasa teacher training centers across Pakistan. Through these, teachers at religious schools are now being trained in modern pedagogy techniques. This is significant, because what actually happens inside classrooms, and how the teaching gets done, really matters. Not only this, the teacher training centers are also being made into dual-use spaces. Moving forward, in the evening, these spaces will also serve as vocational training centers for madrasa students, to give them market-friendly job training.

All of this is of course wonderful. But the key thing is we need our Member States to continue supporting such initiatives. This is why, for instance, I dedicated an entire meeting the Alliance's Group of Friends to this very topic.

In conclusion, let me assure you that under my leadership, the Alliance remains ready to continue to serve and ramp-up its activities in this area. And we look forward to working with you.

I thank you.



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