



## **The High Representative addresses the Foundation Alliance of Civilizations in Skopje on Global Challenges and the Role of UNAOC**

June 8, 2016 » Filed Under: Featured, High Representative's Statements



### **Remarks of the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations At A Panel Discussion On Global Challenges and the Role of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Organized by Foundation Alliance of Civilizations Conference Skopje – June 8, 2016**

Let me start by expressing my deep appreciation and gratitude to His Excellency, Mr. Gjorge Ivanov, and the Members of the Foundation Alliance of Civilizations for organizing this conference. I am truly happy to be here in the beautiful city of Skopje.

I welcome the Foundation Alliance of Civilizations' commitment towards intercultural dialogue and its willingness to contribute in the global mission of UNAOC to bridge divides and, promote peace and harmony among people and nations. I also laud your country's work in promoting intercultural dialogue since 2003.

In the past few years, I have had the privilege to promote multiculturalism and tolerance. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is a soft power tool established to contribute to a more

peaceful world by countering radicalization and polarization, by encouraging greater intercultural understanding and engaging in projects and programs that advance these goals.

Our meeting today is a good opportunity to remember the context in which the Alliance was created, at a time when polarization between cultures and terrorist attacks were threatening our world. Sadly, things did not change today and the mission of the Alliance of Civilizations remains more relevant than it was 10 years ago.

Years ago, we were thinking that only heavy-handed approaches would put an end to violent extremism. Therefore, the international community often adopted single-minded focus on security measures to combat terrorism. Today, we realize that if we want to stop the horrors of terrorism and prevent violent extremism, we need to come with totally different approaches, focusing on education and youth, communication strategies and media.

Now more than ever, we understand the importance of the 4 pillars of UNAOC, namely education, youth, media, and migration. More than ever, we understand that peace and security will not be achieved without social inclusion and sustainable development for all.

Today, it is crucial to address inequalities, not only as a development problem, but also as a threat to global security. Frustration, marginalization and exclusion that are stemming from social inequities and lack of opportunities will impede the achievement of peace and security. This is why we need to ensure the implementation of the new sustainable development agenda 2030, by including all people, especially young men and women, and embracing cultural diversity and religious differences. All of us, Member States, international organizations, private businesses, civil society, faith based organizations need to join our efforts in facing these global challenges.

All these challenges are interlinked and need to be tackled through a global action and international coordination. The threat is complex and our responses need to be as well. Violent extremism and terror make people willing to leave their homes and their countries of origins for better prospects, as it is the case in Syria or Libya. These people are not benefiting from any positive media coverage, and we all know how migrants and refugees are perceived by hosting communities, and how this impacts their integration.

The ongoing refugees crisis , placed your country among other European countries in center stage with thousands of refugees passing on the Balkan Route through the country from the borders. We saw the reactions and fears of many countries and people towards the refugees. This was the result of ignorance. Ignorance emphasized by media sensationalism through stereotypes and narratives of mistrust and hatred.

We need to restore faith and trust among communities. Proliferation of xenophobia and exclusion through negative narratives and media platforms has become a priority for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. Therefore, I decided to launch on December 2015 in New York our new initiative on Hate Speech, the Hash-tag Spread No Hate initiative, which aims at countering xenophobia and addressing the treatment of migrants in the media in order to promote their social inclusion and integration within host societies. The social media campaign with the hashtag #Spread No Hate was followed by 95,000 people on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google, and already reached millions of people globally.

Recently, the UN Security Council acknowledged the importance of countering hatred propaganda and negative narratives by organizing an open debate on the matter. We want to heighten people's awareness on the necessity to counter hate speech and promote respect and tolerance for all, in order to build peaceful and inclusive societies.

This is the reason why our 7th Global Forum held in Baku last April was conducted under the theme: "leaving together in inclusive societies: a challenge and a goal". To reach the targets defined under the 17 goals of the sustainable development agenda 2030, we need to reinforce

dialogue across civilizations and religions. We need to strengthen the culture of peace and work towards achieving the ultimate goal of living together in harmonious, inclusive and peaceful societies.

This agenda of a world where peace and freedom prevail is at the core of the creation of the United Nations, and all our efforts are put in place to make it happen. This month, we are focusing on reviewing the UN Global Strategy to Counter terrorism, as well as the Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. These processes will result on concrete outcomes and recommendations and will enable us to progress further in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism.

Distinguished Guests,

Over time, UNAOC project activities have had a positive impact on the issues that contribute to the prevention of violent extremism and have changed the lives of those who participated in them. Last year, the Alliance celebrated its 10th anniversary and Member States of the United Nations, through the adoption by consensus of a new General Assembly Resolution, acknowledged the importance of its work as a United Nations platform that can help address the need for Better education, Responsible media, Empowered Youth, and better understanding of Migration flows.

The impact of UNAOC project activity cannot be measured solely by the number of people exposed to training, capacity building, intercultural exchange and educational programming. The real benefit is measured by the numbers of people affected by the activities of those young civil society leaders and their programs at the community, regional and national level when they go back home.

By that measure, UNAOC programming has had a positive impact on hundreds of thousands of people, many young people, who have been provided positive messages of tolerance, understanding and mutual respect. Young people, with their hopes, their energy and creativity are key agents for social change and key partners to achieve inclusive and peaceful societies. I have made it one of my priorities to support them and empower them through our programming. And I look forward to discussing with the alumni of the School for Young Leaders later today.

The vision of the Alliance was shaped by the awareness that promoting understanding between nations and communities across cultural and religious divides were fundamental for preventing conflicts and violent extremism. We developed our strategy and programming in view of channelling our efforts on high impact and cost efficient projects to support the goals of the SDGs.

Let me illustrate our work by mentioning few of our current initiatives. Through 6 consecutive Summer Schools, the Alliance brought together 473 youth participants from 119 countries to address pressing global challenges in the context of cultural diversity, and promote global citizenship.

The Youth Solidarity Fund provided seed funding to outstanding youth-led initiatives that promote long-term constructive relationships between people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds in 30 countries. 45 projects linking small scale and local work to larger movements for social and global change were completed and impacted more than 8000 people.

Since 2010, 14 groups of young people have traveled with the Fellowship Program across the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and the US. We have followed up on this effort by establishing the Fellowship Alumni network. This group has involved 160 Alumni from 39 different countries, including 81 female participants, in a wide spectrum of activities such as arts, civil society, counter terrorism, education, governance, international law, migration, peace-building. Last year, for the first time since the Fellowship Program was launched, both groups had the chance to meet for two days in Sarajevo, a city shaped by multiple religious communities and a historical crossroad influenced both by Western and Muslim heritage.

PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival, a joint initiative of UNAOC and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), supports the global distribution of youth-produced media through 170 videos awarded, on the 1,200 entries received from over 110 countries, with almost 1million views on YouTube and other digital platforms.

I could keep going – you know about the range of our project activity. We have worked on projects dealing with social entrepreneurship through Entrepreneurs for Social Change, intercultural innovation award through the BMW-IIA award, and improving the ability of people to better understand the content of media through our Media Literacy projects, but the list is too long and I don't want to monopolize all the time here.

Allow me to conclude by saying that Sustainable development, peace, stability, security will only be achieved if we join our efforts and adjust our responses to the complexity of today's global challenges. The future of generations to come depends on our decisions and actions. Let us all remember that we are all partners in this effort.

I thank you and I look forward to our discussions throughout the forum.