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## Al-Nasser Closing Remarks at the 7th UNAOC Global Forum in Baku

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Closing Remarks

By

The UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations

At the 7th UNAOC Forum in Baku

27 April 2016

Your Excellency, Mr. Abulfas Garayev, Minister of Culture and Tourism  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come to the conclusion of the 7th Global Forum. I think we can all agree that this has been a tremendous success.

First, I would like to say that I am very proud of our partnership with the Government of Azerbaijan in co-organizing the 7th UNAOC Global Forum and I want to sincerely thank all of you for contributing to its success.

I particularly thank the Co-Sponsors of Alliance of Civilizations, Spain and Turkey, as well as all of the Members of the Group of Friends, for their continuous support and political commitment to the Alliance of Civilizations.

I would also like to commend their efforts in the adoption, by consensus, of the Baku Declaration.

Through the Baku Declaration, the Group of Friends reaffirmed its support to UNAOC and expressed its conviction that UNAOC plays an important role as a global platform for sharing good practices for living together in Inclusive Societies.

The Forum provided an excellent platform for exchanging ideas, engaging with existing and potential partners, and re-affirming the commitment of various stakeholders representing governments, civil society, religious leaders and academia.

Our theme this year, “Living together in inclusive societies: a challenge and a goal” converges with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Inclusivity is addressed directly in SDG 16. This was done because we know that inclusive societies guarantee social and human rights, access to employment, and by reducing disparities, frustration and exclusion, contribute to addressing the roots of violent extremism.

In plenary 1, the panelists examined the various drivers of violent extremism and recommended concrete and effective measures to prevent it, such as the adoption of global initiatives, including regional growth strategies, the strengthening of States to implement them, and the creation of platforms where religious leaders can exchange their experience and where the media would promote a positive image of religions.

This session is of great importance to the Alliance of civilizations, particularly as UNAOC will contribute to the implementation of his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

Plenary 2 provided us with the opportunity to look into models of social inclusion, and envision a unique platform to share good practices of inclusion that exist at local and national levels, in UNAOC areas. We understood through the discussions that building inclusive societies requires overcoming many challenges in the areas of dialogue and integration, education, youth, cultural diversity, migration, media and communication. We heard from the first lady of Azerbaijan H.E. Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva about the work her foundation and country is doing in the area of social inclusion.

Through its four pillars, namely education, youth, media, and migration, UNAOC programming has always been designed to counter polarization, radicalism, and violent extremism. At the same time, our mandate has also traditionally addressed the need to promote social inclusivity. Over the last two days, we have seen the role and impact of education and youth, religious leaders, civil society, media literacy, and migration, in promoting inclusivity and preventing violent terrorism.

We saw the treatment of the massive migration crisis in Europe by the media and the effects that hate speech had on the way in which migrants were received in many countries. What we witnessed was a classic case of social exclusion, with all the negative implications that come with that term.

The fear of terrorism, perpetuated in some instances by false or misleading stories in media, fosters the rise of stereotyping and stigmatization that can lead to hatred, exclusion, polarization, and xenophobia – all of which can contribute to radicalization. This is why the Alliance of Civilizations launched its new initiative No Hate Speech, to counter these narratives of hatred and mistrust.

Extremism and terrorism threaten peace and security when human rights are violated and aspirations for inclusion ignored; sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security.

It is not by chance that we kicked off this Forum with a Youth event. We need to make a special effort to reach out to young people and recognize their potential as partners and leaders. We need to support their dreams of a better life and a positive vision of the future.

Their voices need to be heard in political processes and decision-making. I hope you heard their “Narratives of the Future” that plans their vision of the future. A future made of inclusive societies with young ministers of empowerment and where youth is not only considered as actors of the future but as valuable partners for creating change today. As you heard throughout the Forum, Youth’s participation is key in building inclusive societies that can resist the threat of violent extremism.

These 2 Plenary sessions were further explored in Breakout sessions and Networking sessions.

Sixteen breakout sessions provided 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.

Seven networking sessions have been organized in collaboration with highly valuable partners of UNAOC, namely the Baku International Multiculturalism Center, Education Above All (EAA), the Research Center for Islamic History, Art and culture (IRCICA), The National Coordination Council of the Alliance of civilizations of Turkey, the International Organization for Migration in collaboration with Plural+, the Government of Italy and last but not least Association Nexox-Alianza presented: “The New Silk Road: A route for Peace”.

And lets’ not forget the 10 Winners of the UNAOC-BMW Intercultural Innovation Award who have been recognized in a beautiful ceremony.

For my final address to this Forum, I don’t want to just talk about what can be done. I want to focus on our future and announce great and innovative ideas.

In this regard, I wish to announce the official launch of my Advisory Council. This group, composed of leaders from politics, religion, civil society and academia, will provide guidance and recommendations to me and to the Alliance.

For the first time since the Alliance announced Sport as a priority in its programming, we devoted a substantive session to what we see as a real tool for promoting respect and tolerance around the world. The Alliance believes in the contribution of Sport to achieve inclusive development , diversity and peace.

Think about the impact of sports on people and societies. Think of how it brings people together and of the positive influence athletes have on youth. Sport is an important vector for social cohesion and inclusion. In that spirit, I have already agreed with the Government of Kyrgyzstan and the Turkic Council to support the upcoming Kyrgyz Republic Nomad Games for the promotion of diversity and culture in September.

Food is an important element of our lives and cultures. And sometimes, we forget that it also offers a way to connect, and promote understanding and respect between people and communities. Food safety brings stability of mind and peace.

It is in this spirit that UNAOC, in close collaboration with the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue (IID), will organize the “Inter-Faith Celebration of Cultural Identity and Diversity through Food Security” in November.

I also just signed Memoranda of Understanding with the International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and the Global Dialogue Foundation (GDF)

And I am pleased to announce the launch of a special fully funded scholarship programme with the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University in the UK, which will start in September 2016.

In the youth area, we dedicated a full day for the youth event .My message to youth participants was, “Keep pushing yourselves and remember: the magic always happens outside your comfort zone”.

This is what we do at the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. We push ourselves. We push boundaries to make things happen.

The future we want is made of opportunities and security for everyone. And we can have it. But it will only happen if we work together, as we did through constructive debates over the last two days.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We live in a world of extraordinary change. Change that’s reshaping the way we live and the way we think. Let’s make sure we change for the better.

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism we have made progress. But we need to make more.

Our unique strengths as an international community are our diversity, our commitment, and our optimism.

Let’s use these strengths to ensure social inclusion and security for generations to come.

Thank you.