



Remarks by

H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser

**United Nations High Representative for
the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations**

Launch of Unity in Diversity – World Civil Society

Global Dialogue Foundation & Shahani Group India

DELIVERED BY HANIFA MEZOU, PHD

SENIOR ADVISOR, HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRES ANS CIVIL SOCIETY

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Excellency,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Friends and Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Maya, Dear Peter,

It is a great pleasure for me to send you this message, participate in spirit and to join the forces of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to the Launch of: **Unity in Diversity-World Civil Society**, India. This Initiative of the **Global Dialogue Foundation** in partnership with **Thadomal Shahani Center for Management Group India**, could not find a better place than Mumbai. City that does not stop **"Building Bridges and Developing Cultures of Peace and Respect."**

We All would like to see a world where the **UNITY in Diversity** of mankind can be celebrated. Here in India it's taking another dimension. In expanding this initiative to Mumbai, the programme will strengthen the role to civil society organizations, facilitate networking and promote intercultural dialogue, diversity and inclusion at the grassroots level in all India. This arrangement is in harmony with the four pillars of the Alliance: Education, Media, Youth and Migration. As an institution committed to fostering the cross-cultural relations, we at the UNAOC appreciate your resourcefulness.

The **Global Dialogue Foundation and the Shahani Group India** have perfectly understood the power of partnership. That is why I would like to command the leadership of both: Mr. Peter Gorgievski, Chief Executive Officer and Ms. Maya Shahani, Vice Chairperson of the "Global Dialogue Foundation, Unity in Diversity". It is always a remarkable opportunity to join forces with key partners, who invest their resources, time and human capital to meet the vital objective of fostering inclusive societies.

We are happy to work with Global Dialogue Foundation because you have developed a clear strategy. You have invested into an **Action Plan** with the creation of NINETEEN partnering organizations, known

as chapters, from **19 countries**. This investment shows that you understand the authority of “communities” to **educate, engage and empower**.

I am proud to have collaborated on multiple occasions with the Global Dialogue Foundation on the specific task to create a world in which each member of society has the capacity to realize his or her full potential. That is a commitment of the international community of all and for all.

The international community is often thought of as a gathering of states and high-level political figures. In reality, it comprises a set of relevant and vital actors. They include the individuals at the heart of civil society organizations. Civil society organizations are the lungs of our societies. They are the channels through which we are able to implement and successfully monitor both challenges and progresses that touch every aspects of human life. Above all, they are central to our contemporary discourse on sustainability, peace, respect and security.

Just take a look at the achievements we were able to secure in 2015!

Civil society actors played a pivotal role in setting the framework for the creation of strong transformative agendas for sustainability and development. I have in mind the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Addis Ababa Plan of Action to Finance for Development and the COP 21 on Climate Change. Representatives of civil society organizations were present at every stage of these key agreements. They were the ones reviewing the language and organizing side events. They flew to New York, Paris and Ethiopia to have their voices heard!

Two years ago, when we met at UNAOC 6th Global Forum in Bali, we focused on two main concerns: “**promoting intercultural dialogue and recognizing the unity of people in diversity**”. At the time, we were able to promote a great sense of cultural and religious inclusivity

at all levels of society. We knew that our world could find peace in communicating the values of tolerance and understanding.

But today, a myriad of challenges have changed our perspective. Our world is experiencing one of the worst human refugee crises since World War Two. Millions of men, women and children are being displaced, due to political, civil and armed conflicts. In the midst of these challenges, multiple cultural and religious groups are being violently targeted due to their religious beliefs. Others carry acts of violent extremism and terrorism in the name of misunderstood or politically driven ideologies.

The victims and tormentors are men and women, who come from diverse cultural, religious and national denominations. They are members of communities who live peacefully or on the fringe of social and economic exclusion.

At the turn of the twenty-first century we had invested great hope in creating inclusive societies, in which all men and women would be united by the humanistic values of access to opportunities, diversity, tolerance and understanding. The United Nations launched the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 with the full support of Civil Society. This commitment was anew 15 years later with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Technological and scientific innovations have also helped in setting a positive tone for the human family. But tensions have built up on every corner in a dramatic way. It is difficult to understand where and when it will end. However, we can capitalize on reinforcing bridges and on making cultures and religious values not the center of our tensions, but the driver of our commonalities.

Because the world has changed, our dialogue must change as well. We must go from a shared commitment of intercultural dialogue to **collaborative action and results**, so we can bridge the gaps and erase the tensions among cultures.

This new vision is at the essence of the UN Secretary-General "**Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism.**" Here, again, civil society organizations are offered the power to promote peace and respect to prevent religious and cultural tensions from escalating to conflicts and armed violence.

Civil society organizations promoting cross-cultural and religious dialogue have understood that **differences do not necessarily mean conflicts or violence.** Cultures can serve as amazing stepping-stones to deconstruct the definition of identity based on a binary system of "us" versus "them." Moving forward, if we want to secure peace and respect, we should implement collective thinking.

Mumbai is the right place.

As I see that you have included in your program a preparation for Baku, with a Roundtable Discussion titled: "**Business and Civil Society working together to build Unity in Diversity**", which echo the one in our own breakout session.

So you have to know that, at UNAOC we continue our efforts to invest in building bridges alongside civil society, and we expect welcoming numerous of your representatives to our 7th Global Forum in Baku, Azerbaijan.

END OF MESSAGE

Thank you