



# **Welcome Remarks by H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdul Aziz Al-Nasser, The UN High Representative for The Alliance Of Civilizations at UNAOC Informal Meeting: Unity in Diversity – World Civil Society**

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Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society,  
Dear Friends and Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the United Nations Alliance Of Civilizations informal meeting “Unity in Diversity- World Civil Society”. I am pleased to explore the ways in which civil society can contribute to finding innovative pathways for integrating the vision of the UNAOC into the implementation framework of the UN’s Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Our world is currently divided by disputes, disparities, disagreements and discrimination. We, within our respective capacities as humanitarians, advocates, representatives and professionals, work to diminish these inequities in all ranks of society.

Exclusion, at the social, political and economic levels, is a pressing issue in many nations. We are in a state of constant societal evolution, further confounded by globalization, technology, revival of religions and significant migration currents. The traditional dynamics of society are constantly shifting, increasing diversity and in turn, the division of peoples.

Both the UNAOC and the UN family at large see an increasing need for a more active NGO role in addressing issues related to religious and cultural conflict, international peace, development, the protection of human rights, violence and equality—issues which both the UNAOC and your organizations are dealing with.

Uniting our efforts to deal with situations of concern to the global community would mobilize support for nations and regions in need.

As we approach 2015 and the Millennium Development Goals meet their deadline, the UNAOC is particularly interested in how NGOs can intensify their involvement in the implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. In particular, we would like to understand how NGOs could assist in providing support to developing countries with slower growth rates.

Today's conversation provides an opportunity to discuss the role of civil society and how to engage them in our goals and activities. This will help provide an environment conducive for successful agenda implementation. I am confident that we can achieve a common understanding that will benefit both our missions and visions for the future.

As you know, the UNAOC promotes cross-cultural dialogue between diverse nations and communities. Our initiative is unique within the UN entity, as it is an initiative serving as a tool for mediation, reconciliation and forgiveness.

Our mission is similar to the theme I selected for the 66th session of the General Assembly, during my presidency: "the role of mediation in the settlement of dispute by peaceful means." This is a theme that I would like to integrate into our collaborative efforts for increasing intercultural dialogue, within my mandate.

We have taken the time to understand the dynamics and social processes which drive intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, thereby encouraging peaceful coexistence. Inclusion is vital for achieving the objectives of the Post-2015 Development Agenda: including fostering sustainable development and eradicating all forms of extreme poverty.

In addition to these two fundamental concerns, we are facing a global myriad of challenges—however the impact of those difficulties is not confined to any borders, nations, or peoples.

In recognition of this, the UNAOC believes in giving every group—no matter its race, religion or ethnicity—an equal chance, an equal voice in relevant dialogue. The changes implemented in these agendas affect EVERYONE, indicating that each individual should have a voice to be heard.

Civil society will provide a platform for overcoming these challenges. Each organization, within its capacity, can promote intercultural dialogue, diversity and inclusion at the grassroots level. Launching a worldwide constituency will connect you to the UNAOC via its mission, programs and wide network of partners.

As a UN soft power tool, the UNAOC has the required mandates to enable reconciliation, negotiate peace and prevent violence and conflict. This will be a useful tool for you in achieving your respective goals.

As the High Representative of the UNAOC, I will continue activities within the four priority areas of youth, media, education and migration, and in order to encourage harmony between people, I have added sports, music and entertainment to this list of pillars beside Arts.

In light of this, we welcome all organizations with the capacity to promote intercultural dialogue, working across these various areas of priority, including: international volunteer programs, faith or spiritual groups, youth groups, community organizations, cultural and ethnic groups, multicultural organizations, diaspora organizations, arts and music groups, social and sports clubs, socially

responsible businesses, congress bodies, councils, as well as individuals with an interest in intercultural understanding.

The ultimate influence of NGOs like yours will not lie only in what each organization can do alone, but what all of the NGOs here today can do cooperatively. Creating a network of NGOs will create a diverse, coherent flow of resources, information, knowledge and ideas.

Together, you will facilitate the exchange of information and ideal practices to build synergy between local civil society organizations and the UNAOC and its partners. All of these efforts will not only promote cross-cultural understanding and cooperation among local and global communities, but also provide a sound example of those principles.

I am confident that your support in strengthening the role of the UNAOC and furthering its mission will be a mutually fruitful relationship. Through our partnership, you will gain access to our global network of partners, connect with local and international organizations working in the field of intercultural understanding, explore partnership opportunities for joint, local and international projects and receive access to joint fundraising efforts.

You will be in direct contact with community leaders representing different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, raise the profile and visibility of innovative local policy and practices to the global scene, and have valuable opportunities to attend relevant UNAOC events.

I am eager to hear how your organizations plan to encourage intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, to combat the stereotypes and intolerance that are all too apparent in our world today.

Now that I have laid out some of our key issues, I would like to hear about YOUR priorities and concerns, and how civil society groups like yours might be able to help address them.

I look forward to pursuing our partnership and investing in the influential position of NGOs to find new, innovative strategies for reaching our shared objectives.

With that in mind, I welcome you all once again and thank you for contributing with your ideas today. Let us begin!

Thank you.