

## The United Nations Alliance of Civilisations and Global Justice

### Abstract

The United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) was established in 2005 by the then United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. The UNAOC was founded primarily to enhance relations between the West and the Muslim world by improving inter-civilisational dialogue. To do this, the UNAOC recognised that it was also necessary to improve global justice. Its perceived lack was believed to be a significant factor in declining relations between the West and the Muslim world, with many Muslims feeling that the global order was emphatically skewed in the West's favour. This article (1) examines what the UNAOC was created to achieve and how it would go about doing it, (2) the concept of global justice from Western and Islamic perspectives, and (3) the UNAOC's achievements over time.

The Alliance sought to progress its goals via a focus on Education, Youth, Migration and Media. The UNAOC's strategy was to encourage governments, international organisations and civil society organisations to work collectively. This goal was however undermined by two factors: (1) a lack of sufficient and consistent financial support, and (2) failure to establish a workable regime involving both state and non-state actors. After a decade, the UNAOC is an institutionalised presence at the UN. On the other hand, the Alliance – poorly and inconsistently funded and lacking sustained and wide-ranging capacity – may become 'just' another UN 'talking shop', to the fatal detriment of the achievement of its ambitious goals.

**Keywords:** United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, inter-civilisational dialogue, global justice, the West, the Muslim world.

### Introduction: The origins of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations

The United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) is recognised by the United Nations (UN) as a key component of international attempts to improve 'inter-civilisational' relations between the West and the Muslim world.<sup>1</sup> In this article, 'the West' refers to the following regions and countries: Europe, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. The term is used to refer to any country and/or geographical region whose culture is 'western', that is, historically and culturally heavily influenced by western European culture. The 'Muslim world' is in the article synonymous with the notion of a transnational community of believers, the *ummah*, suggesting shared cultural and civilisational characteristics.

To improve relations between the West and the Muslim world, the UNAOC works towards improved global justice. This objective derives from the findings of a definitive report written by the UNAOC's founding 'High Level Group' (HLG), comprising 20 'eminent persons'. Appointed by the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, the HLG began its work in November 2005, reporting back to Annan a year later. The main task was to look into causes of worsening of relations between the West and the Muslim world and suggest remedies. The HLG published its report in November 2006, identifying and analysing what its members saw as causes of civilisational disharmony and suggesting how to improve things. HLG members agreed that 'mutual fear, suspicion, and ignorance across cultures has spread beyond the level

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<sup>1</sup> The author acknowledges financial support for this research from the John Templeton Foundation via the 'Enhancing Life Project'. Details of the latter at <http://enhancinglife.uchicago.edu/>

of political leadership into the hearts and minds of populations – so much so that the notion that there are essential and irreconcilable differences between cultures and religions now arises regularly as an explanation for a range of cultural and political conflicts’ (HLG Report 2006: 25).<sup>2</sup>

The HLG identified a lack of global justice as a key reason for increased friction and conflict between the West and the Muslim world: ‘Ours is a world of great inequalities and paradoxes: a world where the income of the planet’s three richest people is greater than the combined income of the world’s least developed countries’ (HLG Report 2006: 3). To address both global injustices and the wider issues of relations between the West and the Muslim world the Report advised urgent action in relation to four areas: Education, Youth, Migration, and Media. Each was seen as crucial areas where misunderstandings and a lack of knowledge could be addressed by concerted efforts.

The proximate cause of UNAOC’s founding was unprecedented extremist Islamist assaults on Western targets in the early 2000s. Among these were: the 11 September 2001 (‘9/11’) attacks by al Qaeda on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia, which killed 2,977 people. This was followed by others, including an al Qaeda-inspired bomb attack on Madrid on 11 March 2004 (‘3/11’), which caused 191 deaths, and an al Qaeda-influenced attack on London on 7 July 2005 (‘7/7’), leading to 52 fatalities and over 700 injured. Collectively, these attacks stimulated the government of Spain, in partnership with its Turkish counterpart, to call urgently for the UN to undertake efforts to improve ‘inter-civilisational’ relations between the West and the Muslim world. Kofi Annan, who strongly supported the appeal of Spain and Turkey, appointed the HLG. Following publication of the HLG’s report in November 2006, Annan’s successor, Ban Ki-moon, formally created the UNAOC. In March 2007, Ban chose a former president of Portugal, Jorge Sampaio, to head the UNAOC, the first UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilisations. Sampaio stayed in the post for nearly six years until, in February 2013, he was replaced by Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, a former representative of Qatar to the UN and previous head of the UN General Assembly.

During the tenures of both Sampaio and Al-Nasser, the UNAOC’s remit has been to improve civilisational dialogue in order to enhance relations between the West and the Muslim world. But why does the Alliance’s name explicitly to a term that is not in regularly use in international relations: *civilisation*?<sup>3</sup> For the Alliance, use of the term ‘civilisation’ is an explicit reference to the influential ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis of Samuel Huntington (1993, 1997) (Interviews with HLG member, Karen Armstrong, and UNAOC staff member, Thomas Uthup). After the Cold War, Huntington saw an impending ‘clash of civilisations’ between the West and the Muslim world, based on a clash of values, with the West championing individualism and the Muslim world highlighting the importance of the collective. Unlike Huntington, however, the former UNAOC High Representative, Jorge Sampaio, does not believe that civilisational differences between the West and the Muslim world are insurmountable, and can be overcome by ‘promoting good governance of cultural diversity at large, a gap that was urgent to bridge because of the growing rifts amidst communities, the rise of extremism, polarisation of attitudes and perception of the world, intolerance, xenophobia and racism’ (Interview with Jorge Sampaio, former High

<sup>2</sup> Membership of the HLG and its 2006 Report are available at <http://www.unaoc.org/repository/report.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Many scholars have grappled directly with the concept of civilisation. See, for example, Bottici and Challand, 2010; Katzenstein, 2009; Michael and Petito, 2009; O’Hagan, 1995; Sargent, 2007; and Todorov, 2010.

Representative, UNAOC).

In its 2006 report, the High Level Group identified growing tensions between the West and the Muslim world as a key source of international instability. The HLG believed this state of affairs had been developing since Iran's 1979 revolution. The subsequent radical Islamist government sought to 'export' its revolution to Muslim countries friendly to the West (Takeyh, 2009). In 1998, the then president of Iran, Seyed Mohammad Khatami, sought to address the issue of continuing tensions between the West and Iran – and by extension the Muslim world more generally – by calling for regular dialogue under UN auspices. Addressing the UN General Assembly in September 1998, Khatami called for the international community to make sustained attempt to reduce tensions between the West and the Muslim world. Following Khatami's intervention, the General Assembly designated 2001 as the 'Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations'. However, before Khatami's initiative could develop, his efforts were summarily derailed by 9/11 and its consequences: the US-led invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). These actions, undertaken in the name of combatting 'Islamist terrorism', were however perceived by many in the Muslim world as reflecting a Western desire collectively 'to punish' Muslims for 9/11 and subsequent radical Islamist attacks on Western targets ('A Year after the War', 2004; 'The Great Divide', 2006). In the next section, we examine the recommendations of the HLG report in order to see what the 20 'eminent persons' believed were the causes of poor relations between the West and the Muslim world and what could be done to improve things. After that, we look at global justice from 'Western', and 'Islamic' perspectives, before turning in the final section to see to what extent the HLG recommendations were implemented by the UNAOC and with what effects.

### **The High Level Group report's recommendations**

Membership of the HLG, co-chaired by Professor Federico Mayor of Spain and Professor Mehmet Aydin of Turkey,<sup>4</sup> was chosen on a geographical basis to be representative of the world's regions, cultures and religions. Its 20 members were chosen from 'the fields of politics, academia, civil society, international finance, and media from all regions of the world' (<http://www.unaoc.org/who-we-are/high-level-group/>). The HLG met five times in the year following November 2005. Its second meeting coincided with a major international controversy, consequential to publication in a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, of derogatory cartoons of the founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad. This experience encouraged the HLG to focus on the media as a key area that UNAOC should address (Interview with Shamil Idriss, former Deputy Director of the Office of the Alliance of Civilisations). More generally, the HLG's 63-page report highlighted what its members saw as key causes of global instability and insecurity: increased radicalisation, extremism and terrorism, primarily undertaken by numerically small but very impactful extremist Islamist groups, such as al Qaeda. To address these issues, it was necessary to improve global justice and this would be addressed by focusing on four areas that the HLG saw as crucial: Education, Youth, Migration, and Media. These four areas were seen as potentially playing 'a critical role in helping to reduce cross-cultural tensions and to build bridges between communities.' (HLG Report, 2006: 25)

We ... live in an increasingly complex world, *where polarized perceptions, fueled by injustice and inequality, often lead to violence and conflict, threatening international*

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<sup>4</sup> At the time, Aydin was Minister of State of Turkey and Professor of Philosophy, and Mayor was President, Culture of Peace Foundation, and former Director-General, UNESCO.

*stability. Over the past few years, wars, occupation and acts of terror have exacerbated mutual suspicion and fear within and among societies. Some political leaders and sectors of the media, as well as radical groups have exploited this environment, painting mirror images of a world made up of mutually exclusive cultures, religions, or civilizations, historically distinct and destined for confrontation.*

*Worse, by promoting the misguided view that cultures are set on an unavoidable collision course, they help turn negotiable disputes into seemingly intractable identity-based conflicts that take hold of the popular imagination. It is essential, therefore, to counter the stereotypes and misconceptions that deepen patterns of hostility and mistrust among societies (emphases added; HLG Report, 2006: 3).*

This quotation from the HLG report highlights three of its key findings: (1) global injustices are a key cause of tension between the West and the Muslim world, (2) relations are worsened by ‘war, occupation and acts of terror’, and (3) a widespread but erroneous perception that ‘cultures are set on an unavoidable collision course’. The HLG report devoted a section to the Israel-Palestinians conflict and recommended its resolution as a starting point to improving relations more generally between the West and the ‘Muslim world’. However, the UNAOC has not addressed this issue because it is beyond its direct influence. Neither Israel nor the Palestinian regimes in power in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are members of the UNAOC Group of Friends and thus not really open to direct communication from UNAOC on the dispute.

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The HLG Report comprises two main parts, plus annexes. Part 1 discusses the historical and contemporary background to and causes of current problematic relations between the West and the Muslim world. The Report identifies the importance of concerted, sustained and interactive action at both state and civil society levels, in order to foster cross-cultural harmony and enhance global justice. In Part 2, the Report shifts to ‘Main Fields of Action and Thematic Recommendations’, exploring ‘the primary means by which such action could be taken – analyzing the key roles that education, youth, migration and media are currently playing in relations between societies and proposing actions that could be taken in each of these sectors to improve relations’ (HLG Report, 2006: 21). Part 2 aims, first, to provide an overview of the four areas, second, to advance ideas about what actions to take in each of them, and, third, to highlight and seek to expand and focus already-existing efforts of both governments and non-state actors in these areas. Finally, the Report suggests ways to develop, reinforce, link, and build upon these efforts via concerted action organised and coordinated by UNAOC in partnership with governments, multilateral institutions and civil society organisations.

The Report observes that there was much concern in the international community consequential to deadly events, such as 9/11 and, for many people around the world, a strong desire for enhanced human security and prosperity. The opening paragraph of the Report discusses the post-9/11 context of international instability and insecurity. The Report is very critical of the efforts of previous ‘international community’ efforts to deal adequately with structural problems of global injustice which, the HLG believed, encourages some Muslims towards radicalism, with a few resorting to extremism and, in a tiny number of cases, to active terrorism. The Report addresses the issue of global injustice as follows:

Our world is alarmingly out of balance. For many, the last century brought unprecedented progress, prosperity, and freedom. For others, it marked an era of

subjugation, humiliation and dispossession. Ours is a world of great inequalities and paradoxes: a world where the income of the planet's three richest people is greater than the combined income of the world's least developed countries; where modern medicine performs daily miracles and yet 3 million people die every year of preventable diseases; where we know more about distant universes than ever before, yet 130 million children have no access to education; where despite the existence of multilateral covenants and institutions, the international community often seems helpless in the face of conflict and genocide. For most of humanity, freedom from want and freedom from fear appear as elusive as ever (HLG Report, 2006: 3).

What explains these manifestations of injustice? The Report is clear that the explanation is *not* to be found in a 'clash of civilizations' between the West and the Muslim world (Huntington, 1993, 1997). Instead, the HLG avers, relations between the West and the Muslim world were until recently relatively harmonious, building on and reflecting a desirable civilisational and cultural diversity, 'a basic feature of human society and a driving force of human progress'. 'Civilizations and cultures', the Report underlines, 'reflect the great wealth and heritage of humankind; their nature is to overlap, interact and evolve in relation to one another. There is no hierarchy among cultures, as each has contributed to the evolution of humanity. The history of civilizations is in fact a history of mutual borrowing and constant cross-fertilization' (*ibid.*, p. 5). What has recently occurred – that is, post-9/11 US-led invasions of Muslim countries; polarising wealth-related effects of post-Cold War globalisation; and perceived concentration of power in the West – served not only to put under pressure harmonious relations between the West and the Muslim world but also to shed a persistent spotlight on global injustice. The HLG concluded that what is now required is a strongly proactive strategy from the international community to deal with global injustice.

The Report also notes that, mainly as a consequence of three decades of rapid, but economically and developmentally polarising globalisation, the world's wealth is now divided between a tiny number of fabulously wealthy individuals and hundreds of millions of people existing in misery and absolute poverty, with little or no real prospect to improve things. For some among the impoverished, socio-political implications of poverty include: 'despair, a sense of injustice, and alienation that, when combined with political grievances, can foster extremism'. The Report sees an axiomatic link between poverty and extremism and contends that 'eradicating' poverty would necessarily reduce marginalisation, alienation and extremism and 'must be aggressively pursued through various means, including the Millennium Development Goals' (*ibid.*).

In sum, inter-civilisational interactions between the West and the Muslim world led historically to advantages for both 'sides'; but this is not necessarily perceived to be the case today. The HLG Report envisaged the UNAOC as the UN's main source of coordination of both new and already existing efforts to ameliorate inter-civilisational tensions via improved global justice, to be undertaken collectively by governments, multilateral institutions, and civil society organisations. In other words, the HLG proposed that the UNAOC should serve as the key UN facilitator of focused and purposive endeavours, bringing together both state and non-state actors.

The Report outlines a number of what the HLG sees as practical and achievable steps not only to reinforce constructive voices in the international community but also to try to encourage the mass media to be even-handed in relation to issues linked to relations between the West and the Muslim world, so as to help encourage constructive public debates. In

addition, the HLG proposed specific educational approaches and methods aiming to help young people to work together to promote appreciation of diversity and values of moderation and cooperation. Finally, the Report outlined potential 'systems and strategies for collective action to produce the conditions in which security, stability and development can thrive' (<http://www.unaoc.org/who-we-are/high-level-group/>). The overall aim was to find ways to address popular concerns and rebuild confidence in inter-civilisational interactions. To do this, four foci were proposed: Education, Youth, Migration, and Media.

Regarding Education, the Report notes that 'Education systems today face the challenge of preparing young people for an interdependent world that is unsettling to individual and collective identities'. The Report affirms the importance of education as a vital instrument to prepare young people with suitable knowledge and perspective to tackle existing and emergent problems. This is because it is vitally important both to be educated about one's own culture *and* to know about others. It is necessary to know about one's own community – a vital component to help instill and develop a sense of societal cohesion and unity – and also essential that, in modern multicultural societies, we also learn about other societies and cultures. In addition, we need to comprehend global issues and understand how they affect us all. To address these concerns, states and other education providers should provide broad-based education – covering, *inter alia*, politics, international relations, economics, history, sports, art, drama and film – so as satisfactorily to build and develop interactive relations between individuals and their communities. According to the Report, the overall objective should be broad-based educational programmes, helping young people in particular to avoid the kind of 'exclusivist thinking which holds that one group's interests may be advanced at the expense of others or that one group's victimization justifies the victimization of others' (HLG Report, 2006: 25).

Turning to Youth, the Report contends that if young people from various cultures have a chance to meet with and learn about each other then they are likely to get to know and like each other as individuals. The result is that they will not, for the most part, perceive their

counterparts from different cultures and/or religions in a poor light, which, the Report avers, is the likely consequence if young people draw their understanding only from stereotypically malign expressions of different cultures as represented in many television programmes, films, newspapers and social media. The third area of focus – Migration – is seen by the HLG as a problematic issue because perceptions of migrants in many countries are, the Report states, increasingly negative. The Report recommends that both the benefits and challenges of migration are both clarified and highlighted, with extra steps taken to deal with discrimination against migrants. The final area highlighted by the Report – Media – is seen by the HLG as crucial in portraying members of different cultures in either a benign or malign way. In this context, the Report notes the impact of 9/11 and subsequent extremist Islamist attacks on the West on perceptions of many in the West to Muslims and vice versa. The urgent objective aim, the Report declares, must be to encourage fairness and balance in how the media presents information other cultures.

Following the Report's recommendations, the Alliance implemented eight Special Projects, devoted to Education, Youth, Migration and Media. These are (1) 'Summer schools', run in conjunction with EF Education First, a private international education company, where a group of 75-100 participants aged 18-35 engage in workshops, roundtables and collaborative work focused on fostering diversity and global citizenship; reducing stereotypes and identity-based tensions; promoting intercultural harmony and social justice'; (2) the 'Intercultural Innovation Award' and (3) 'Intercultural Leaders Award', both run in partnership with the

German luxury car business, BMW Group (4) several initiatives devoted to furtherance of 'Media and Information Literacy' (5) the Plural + Youth Video Festival, run in conjunction with the International Migration Organisation; (6) the UNAOC Fellowship Programme, which brings together young people from both the West and the Muslim world to share experiences; (7) the Youth Solidarity Fund, which provides seed funding to outstanding youth-led initiatives that promote long-term constructive relationships between people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds; and (8) the annual 'Hate Speech Conference', focusing on how to reduce hate speech from the media (Further details of these initiatives at <http://www.unaoc.org/>). The impact of these Special Projects is hard to gauge in the context of improving inter-civilisational relations and global justice. Those benefitting from the Special Projects are few in number and mainly come from an-already existing elite. On the other hand, it is hard to know what more the Alliance can do to further its goals in relation to Education, Youth, Migration and Media, given its precarious financial position and only patchy support the UNAOC receives from its Group of Friends, discussed below.

In sum, the Report is a systematic summary of what the HLG identifies as pressing issues that pertain directly to the pursuit of improved global justice in order to address inter-civilisational/cultural disharmony and associated conflicts. The HLG recognises the need of sustained action in relation to specific issue areas, while also acknowledging that without substantially improving global justice it would be very difficult to register sustained improvements in relations between the West and the Muslim world. The next section turns to the issue of global justice, focusing on both 'Western' and 'Islamic' perspectives. Its aim is to help locate UNAOC and its work in this context.

### **Global Justice in Western and Islamic perspectives**

The 2006 High Level Group report provided the intellectual justification and rationale for creation of the UNAOC. The HLG worked from a key premise: deterioration in relations between the West and the Muslim world is traceable to perceptions, especially among many Muslims in the Global South, of a world characterised by declining global justice. Distinct from international justice, which focuses predominantly on relations between states and/or nations, global justice is concerned with 'justice among human beings'. Focusing on global justice is to 'take individual human beings as of primary concern' and to seek to understand 'what fairness among such agents involves'. Global justice is concerned with a range of issues and subsequently necessary 'actions that cut across states or involve different agents, relationships, and structures that might be invisible in an inquiry seeking justice among states exclusively'. Brock explains that an issue becomes a concern of global justice 'when the problem either affects agents resident in more than one state or the problem is unresolvable without their co-operation' (Brock, 2015: 2). She also notes that 'possibly the next most prominent global justice issue after considerations of proper use of force concerns the impact of, and responsibilities created by', globalisation, including: gender, immigration, natural environment, and health issues (Brock 2015: 4). The HLG report not only highlights the impact of post-Cold War globalisation on relations between the West and the Muslim world, with the former being seen as disproportionately benefiting, but also discusses the impact of the use of force post-9/11 involving US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which significantly changed international circumstances.

Nancy Fraser is a prominent exponent of what I refer to as a Western understanding of global justice, which hinges on reform of extant international institutions and structures. Fraser points to greater prominence today, compared to the Cold War period, of culture in

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international relations. For Fraser (2003: 1), the post-Cold War international order is marked by 'increased salience of culture', observable in various ways, including: 'declining centrality of labor vis-à-vis religion and ethnicity in the constitution of collective identities; in heightened awareness of cultural pluralism in the wake of increased immigration ... and finally, as a consequence of all these shifts, in a new reflexive awareness of "others", hence in a new stress on identity and difference'. She ponders the ramifications of culture's increased salience for understanding international relations and the related prospects for global justice. For Fraser, a 'defining feature of globalization is the widespread politicization of culture, especially in struggles over identity and difference'. These 'struggles for recognition', which have increased markedly in recent years, suggest 'an epochal shift in the political winds: a massive resurgence of the politics of *status*' (emphasis in original; Fraser 2003: 1) The turn to recognition characterises an expansion of political contestation, as an enhanced understanding of global justice, necessitating looking for understanding beyond questions of distribution, to include 'issues of representation, identity and difference'. In this perspective,

injustice appears in the guise of status subordination, rooted in institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value ... The remedy ... is recognition, understood broadly ... to encompass not only reforms aimed at upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups but also efforts to recognize, and valorize, diversity, on the one hand, and efforts to transform the symbolic order, deconstruct the terms that underlie existing status differentiations, and thus change everyone's social identity, on the other' (Fraser 2003: 3)

Fraser is pointing to the often-unjust impact of post-Cold War globalisation on millions of people, especially the poor in the Global South, and associated necessity of finding ways to improve and make more equitable international development outcomes in order to reduce associated negative impacts, including radicalisation, extremism and terrorism; in short, to improve global justice. As Lynch (2012) notes, when many people consider the polarising effects of international development in the context of globalisation they often move from its initially moral dimensions to consider a highly material factor: 'neoliberal competition of the "market" [in] international development'. From there it is but a short jump to begin to ponder on how more generally the conditions of globalisation appear to encourage or exacerbate an unjust and polarised world, where the rich benefit disproportionately. In short, post-Cold War globalisation has been instrumental in creating a new language of political claims making, with the 'the center of gravity' changing 'from redistribution to recognition'. 'From the distributive perspective ... justice requires a politics of redistribution' (Fraser 2003: 2, 4).

Fraser also identifies an associated issue: political or participatory justice. Improvements in this regard would require 'social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers'. To be serious about participatory parity requires a more equal 'distribution of material resources' so as to 'ensure participants' independence and "voice". Second, the institutionalized cultural patterns of interpretation and evaluation express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem. Both these conditions are necessary for participatory parity' (Fraser 1998: 5).

The Alliance's goal of improving 'cross-cultural relations between diverse nations and communities' is similar to Fraser's concept of the necessity of improving 'status subordination' by focusing on 'issues of representation'. Other 'Western' scholars, such as Petito (2007) and Uthup (2010), also point to the vital importance of improved civilisational



*dialogue* for more harmonious relations between the West and the Muslim world, in order to facilitate improved political/participatory justice. How, Uthup (2010) asks, can ‘global divides, particularly in the area of culture, be bridged?’ This is especially problematic for many Muslims following US-led invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) which, coupled with the aftermath of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks on Western targets, provided them with strong reasons to doubt the sincerity and motivation of the West in its relations with the Muslim world. The point remains, however, that improved recognitive parity is a *sine qua non* for an improved relationship between Western and Muslim worlds. But this position can only be reached and then maintained if the relationship is based not on one ‘side’ aspiring to overall superiority over the other but instead draws on a situation of durable mutual respect: that is, with Muslims and Westerners learning from each other’s civilisational and cultural strengths and accomplishments and using this knowledge to cooperate in pursuit of shared goals that help to deal with global injustice issues, including skewed development outcomes.

These concerns tap into a primary apprehension of the United Nations, a system and framework founded seven decades ago on a fundamental principle, reflected in the UN Charter: an unjust world can never be a peaceful and cooperative world. In October 2015, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon highlighted the continued relevance of a pursuit of global justice in relation to the UNAOC mission, which he stated, was ‘to promote dignity, justice and stability for all people’ (‘Secretary-General’s Remarks’, 2015). Yet, while the value of justice permeates the UN system, how does this sit with an ‘Islamic perspective’ on global justice? Like the concept of justice within the UN legal order, the notion of justice in Islam includes aspects of fairness and equity. However, justice is an absolute right at the heart of the Qur’an and a primary objective of its relevance: the supreme, overarching and quintessential value in relation to legal, political and social issues. Samuel (2010: 112) notes, in addition, another ‘key feature of Islamic justice [which] is the Islamic conception of legitimacy and authenticity’. Note however that the conception of justice in Islam is a much more profound and overarching value compared to that found in the UN system. This is because Muslims believe that the conception of justice in Islam comes not from humans but from a higher source: God. In Islam, justice is ‘the end served by equity, but also to be synonymous with equity’ (Higgins 1994: 220), a claim that chimes well with Fraser’s notion of participatory justice. In short, in Islam, equity has a key function in the pursuit of global justice. It is an overarching principal, incorporating key social and human development issues, to be addressed by purposeful and goal-orientated concern with global justice, including reduction and eventual elimination of poverty in the context of addressing glaring developmental and economic inequalities in the Global South.

Echoing Fraser’s concerns with participatory, distributive and recognitive justice, a Muslim scholar, Abdul Aziz Said, in a commentary for the Assad Library, Damascus, Syria, calls for ‘inter-civilizational bridge building’, with three interrelated goals. These are: (1) development and deepening of normatively desirable values, including expanding common understandings of truth, (2) transformation of conflict-filled relationships into those exhibiting collective good works which serve humanity, and (3) demonstration of the appropriateness and applicability of shared civilizational values (Said, 2002: 7). While achievement of these goals may be problematic – not least, because of their wide-ranging nature and the need for durable cooperation at the international level to achieve them – it is necessary to mention them in order to highlight common ground between ‘Western’ and ‘Islamic’ conceptions of justice.

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Seeking to affirm common ground in relation to global justice between Western and Islamic approaches, an Islamic legal scholar, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, seeks to reconcile his identity as a Muslim with his commitment to universal human rights, a key component of Fraser's worldview, central to her three strands of global justice. In his book, *Muslims and Global Justice* (2010), An-Na'im advances the theme of global justice from an Islamic perspective, critically examining the role that Muslims 'should' play in the development of what he identifies as a 'pragmatic', rights-based framework for justice.

An-Na'im also discusses Islamic ambivalence toward political violence, showing how Muslims began grappling with this problem long before the 9/11 attacks. He also calls for improved cultural legitimacy of human rights in the Muslim world. An-Na'im argues that in order for a commitment to human rights to become truly universal, it is necessary to accommodate a range of different reasons for belief in those rights. This view recalls Fraser's commitment to participatory justice in that it affirms the right of all peer voices to be heard. Finally, also conceptually linked to Fraser's concept of participatory justice, An-Na'im proclaims the necessity of building an effective human rights framework for global justice. This involves a 'people-centred' approach to rights and global justice which would purposively empower local actors, enabling their concerns on human rights to be people-centred and not reliant on state regulation.

The aim of this section was to examine overlapping areas of agreement in conceptions of global justice from both 'Western' and 'Islamic' viewpoints. In the next section, we assess the achievements and disappointments of the Alliance over the last decade and identify the extent to which it has been able to achieve its goals in relation to inter-civilisational dialogue and global justice.

### **The UNAOC after a decade: Achievements and disappointments**

The HLG report did not set out a timescale for its recommendations. Now, however, a decade after the UNAOC's establishment, it is perhaps an appropriate point to assess whether the Report's recommendations were enacted and with what results. The assessment of this article is that there was a mixed outcome: Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 were attained, while Recommendations 4 and 6 were partially achieved. The rest of this section looks at outcomes linked to each of the seven recommendations and draws conclusions in relation to the work of the Alliance more generally.

The 2006 HLG report contained seven explicit recommendations to the UN Secretary-General. First, he 'should appoint a High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations' to carry out the report's recommendations. Second, a 'small support office', with two separate but overlapping functions, should facilitate the High Representative's work. The office would work to: (1) build wide-ranging partnerships state and non-state actors to advance specific projects, and (2) participate in major conferences and meetings to highlight and further the work of UNAOC. Third, a 'Forum for the Alliance of Civilizations' should be founded under UN auspices 'to provide a regular venue for representatives of governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to forge partnerships and to express commitments for action'. Fourth, the HLG recommended that 'self-organized' national, regional, and/or local level Alliance Councils' should be created to 'ensure the widespread participation and involvement of civil society' in 'Alliance-related activities'. Fifth, there should be a resolution supporting the UNAOC at the '62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly'. Sixth, an 'Alliance of Civilizations Fund' should be created to sustain

and develop 'global cooperation on cross-cultural issues and to promote initiatives aimed at encouraging dialogue and building bridges among communities'. Seventh, the UNAOC website should be further developed, to function as a major instrument to promote cross-cultural dialogue (HLG Report, 2006: 43-45).

The Report's first recommendation – that the UN Secretary-General should appoint a High Representative for the Alliance – was speedily done. A former president of Portugal, Jorge Sampaio, was appointed High Representative in April 2007, until replaced in 2013 by a Qatari, Nassir Abdulaziz al-Nasser. Second, an office with a small secretariat – comprising 16 staff members – was established at 730 Third Avenue, 20th Floor, New York, near to UN headquarters. Members of the Secretariat work in support of the High Representative and the wider goals of the Alliance. Staff numbers of the Secretariat are temporarily augmented when there is a particularly large or pressing task to achieve, such as, planning and operation of the Alliance's Global Forums, the key event in the Alliance's calendar (Interview with Matthew Hodes, Director of the Alliance Secretariat, New York, January 2016).

The third recommendation – to establish a regular 'Forum for the Alliance of Civilizations' – was in pursuit of building 'a global network of partners including States, International and regional organizations, civil society groups, foundations, and the private sector to improve cross-cultural relations between diverse nations and communities' (<http://www.unaoc.org/who-we-are/>) Three-day Forums have been held in Madrid (2008), Istanbul (2009), Rio de Janeiro (2010), Doha (2011), Vienna (2013), Bali (2014), and Baku (2016). Initially annually and now biennially, the global forums are the key 'shop window' of the Alliance. However, successive High Representatives have found it difficult to raise the necessary US\$2-3 million dollars to organise and run each forum. As we shall see below, more generally a serious lack of money has bedeviled the Alliance, substantially undermining its capacity to achieve its objectives.

The fifth recommendation of the Report – to place an item related to the UNAOC at the 62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2007 was not achieved, although this was related to timing of the resolution rather than the General Assembly's unwillingness to record its support for the Alliance. A UN General Assembly resolution, expressing strong support for the work of the Alliance, was adopted on 10 November 2009.<sup>5</sup> The seventh recommendation of the HLG related to development of the UNAOC website. This was fully achieved and today it is comprehensive, informative and user-friendly (Go to <http://www.unaoc.org/> to see the Alliance's website).

Turning to other recommendations, Recommendation 4 was partially accomplished. This envisaged 'self-organized' 'Alliance Councils' to inform the workings of the Alliance via involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) as equal partners with governments and international organisations (IOs). This was problematic because the UN is primarily an environment where governments and IOs interact, and it was not realistic to expect that CSOs would be their equal partners. This contention can be illustrated by reference to the UNAOC's 'Group of Friends', an entity currently comprising 118 governments, 26 IOs, and *no* CSOs (<http://www.unaoc.org/who-we-are/group-of-friends/members/>). Manonelles (2007: fn. 3) notes that at the UN a 'Group of Friends' is a 'usual practice ... a recognised way how a country which is sponsoring a particular international initiative' – such as Spain and Turkey

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<sup>5</sup> The General Assembly Resolution is presented in full at [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/14](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/14)

with UNAOC – forms ‘an informal group with those other member *states* supportive of the initiative to promote it, give support and content and ensure its advance in the agenda of the different intergovernmental bodies’ (emphasis added). In addition, the Alliance has ‘memorandums of understanding’ with 16 ‘Partner Organizations’; only one of which is a CSO, the Anna Lindh Foundation (<http://www.unaoc.org/who-we-are/partner-organizations/>).<sup>6</sup> In sum, the Report’s recommendation to create Alliance Councils, based on interactions as equals between states, IOs and CSOs, was not fulfilled due to unwillingness to treat CSOs as equal partners. The shortfall was implicitly recognised in the Alliance’s 2013-18 Strategic Review which identified a need to improve its ‘communications outreach and governance’ (‘UNAOC Strategic Review and Plan, 2013-18’, 2013: 6).

Recommendation 4 envisaged ‘national, regional, and/or local level Alliance Councils’. Today, there are over 30 national and regional councils, but *no* local-level councils, which might be expected to be the environment where CSOs would be most active, given their proximity to local-level organisations. By mid-2016, 25 member states among the 118-member Group of Friends) had devised and submitted to the Alliance their ‘National Strategies’, amounting to just over one-fifth (21%) of the total. These set out individual government’s strategies for furthering the work of the Alliance via individual domestic programmes of action. National Strategies were envisaged in the HLG report to feed into and inform Regional Strategies, with the latter bringing together a group of neighbouring countries, involving both governments and representative CSOs, in order ‘to generate common actions’. By mid-2016, regional strategies were established in four regions – South-East Europe, the Mediterranean region, the Black Sea region and Latin America – and other were said to be planned for Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and ‘possibly’ Central Asia (*ibid.*, p. 7). While the national and regional strategies were judged by UNAOC to be ‘important expressions of commitment to the principles of the Alliance’ they were seen to be ‘inconsistent in their application’; some related past achievements, while others outlined aspirational goals. Few mentioned ‘any mechanism for implementation’ (*ibid.*).

Recommendation 6 identified the need for an ‘Alliance of Civilizations Fund’, to supply sufficient financial resources, on a regular and sustainable basis, for the Alliance to go about its work. Clearly, a regular income was crucial to the capacity of the UNAOC to work towards amelioration of inter-civilisational tensions and conflicts in the context of pursuit of improved global justice. Following the recommendation, the UN Secretary-General created a ‘Voluntary Trust Fund’ to pay for Alliance projects and activities, the High Representative’s activities, and the AOC Secretariat’s need for operational and human resources. (<http://www.unaoc.org/who-we-are/voluntary-trust-fund/>). Yet, although the Fund was established, it did not prove adequate to the needs of the Alliance. This was not because the Alliance’s required excessive amounts of money; rather, it was because financial support was irregular, fragmented and overall insufficient. Since its inception the Alliance has been plagued by serious and continuous financial problems. The UNAOC’s ‘challenging fiscal position ... [is] reflected in diminishing unrestricted contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund’ (‘UNAOC Strategic Review and Plan, 2013-18’, 2013: 2). UNAOC funding grew from US\$1.7 million in 2006 to US\$4.6 million in 2010 but halved to US\$2.2 million in 2013. Lack of funding was a major problem for UNAOC, necessitating the need for ‘major improvements’ in fundraising (*ibid.*, p.6).

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<sup>6</sup> The Anna Lindh Foundation, is a ‘network of civil society organizations working for dialogue in the [Euro-Mediterranean] region’ (<http://www.unaoc.org/who-we-are/partner-organizations/>)

## Conclusion

After a decade, what overall conclusions can be drawn regarding the Alliance and its objectives of better inter-civilisational relations and improved global justice? The UNAOC's 2013-18 Strategic Review restated the commitment of the Alliance to Education, Youth, Migration and Media, while also declaring that it would expand into new areas, including: 'augmenting' the 'conflict prevention tool box' and helping 'deliver the post 2015 development agenda' ('UNAOC Strategic Review and Plan, 2013-2018', 2013: 16). High Representative Al-Nasser is keen to increase the Alliance's involvement in conflict prevention and wants it to work closely with the UN's Department of Political Affairs on 'Track 1.5' work (*ibid.*, p. 12). The 2013-18 Strategic Review also speaks about creating a database of 'best practices and lessons', publishing 'more analytical reports or case studies', becoming more 'field-driven' through work undertaken with other UN agencies, such as UNDP and UNESCO, as well as partner NGOs, and, finally, improving efforts to develop and deepen relations with its Group of Friends, private foundations, the private sector and significant development agencies (*ibid.*, p. 13). While if successfully achieved Alliance goals relating to conflict resolution and enhanced development would likely lead to improvements in global justice, it remains to be seen how the Alliance, continuously short of money and lacking experts in conflict resolution and development, could under present circumstances hope to move successfully into these new areas of concern.

The article has shown that since inception a decade ago the Alliance has made some progress towards institutionalising inter-civilisational dialogue at the UN, with particular focus on: Education, Youth, Migration and Media. On the other hand, the UNAOC's capacity to develop its planned ability regularly to bring together governments, IOs and CSOs was not achieved. The result is that while the UNAOC is now an established entity at the UN, its capacity to help demonstrably to improve global justice in the context of relations between the West and the Muslim world is undermined by financial, organisational and policy-related weaknesses.

Finally, how plausible is it to expect the Alliance to fulfil the expansive role envisaged for it in the High Level Group Report, as well as engage successfully with the new tasks set out by al-Nasser in the 2013 Strategic Review? As already noted, the HLG set out seven recommendations and of these, five were fulfilled and two were partially accomplished. On balance, this might seem a reasonable outcome. Yet, the 'partially accomplished' were probably more significant for their disappointments than accomplishments. Recommendation 4 envisaged national, regional, and/or local level Alliance Councils, which would, *inter alia*, consistently bring in regular CSO involvement to relevant debates under UNAOC auspices. This was not forthcoming. In addition, while some National and Regional Councils exist, no local-level councils do, the key environment where CSOs might be expected to coalesce and engage with the Alliance's agenda. From the perspective of improved global justice, which would depend on the full and consistent engagement of citizens and their representative organisations, their absence from UNAOC deliberations is a serious omission. This is because without the full engagement of CSOs, concerns of local communities will almost certainly not be addressed.

Recommendation 6 advised establishment of an 'Alliance of Civilizations Fund'. This, the HLG believed, was necessary to provide UNAOC with sufficient funds, on a regular and sustainable basis, to go about its necessary work. Yet, while a Voluntary Trust Fund was

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