**REMARKS OF H.E. MR. NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER**

**UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations**

**UNAOC Group of Friends Annual Ministerial Meeting**

**September 23, (15:00- 18;00), New York, UNHQ CR 4**

Your Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon , the United Nations Secretary General

Your Excellency, Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the 71st session of the General Assembly,

Your Excellency, Mr. Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo, Minister of Foreign Affairs & Cooperation of Spain

Your Excellency, Mr. Mevlut Cavusoglu , Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to warmly welcome H.E Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations Secretary General, and express my great appreciation for the continuous support that he has provided for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations throughout his mandate.

His efforts have advanced UNAOC causes by upholding our shared values: peace, dialogue, tolerance, respect and diversity. He has regularly participated not only in our Ministerial meetings and Global forum. But he has done more. He has actively engaged in supporting our project activities, participating in our Youth events, the Summer School, and the Intercultural Innovation Awards. His active engagement has been energizing for all of us and if I may say so: for HIM as well.

I have been deeply privileged to work by his side. Together, we have made important gains through the Alliance activities and I can say that the progress we made in the past years is our shared legacy.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to thank you, Members of the Group of Friends, for your strong political and financial support. The work of UNAOC depends on it. Needless to say that, for UNAOC project activities to continue to deliver the high quality product it has become known for, we will always need your commitment through political and financial support.

Mr. Secretary-General; Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The past week, with the UN High Level Summit to address the large movements refugees and migrants and the Leaders Summit on refugees, revealed that Migration has become a more complex subject than ever. The massive movements of people we have witnessed in recent years has triggered responses that feature fear, hatred, discrimination and xenophobia.

With the flow of migrants bearing different traditions, cultures and religions, societies are increasingly becoming multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual. This evolution of modern societies brought with it fear. Fear that national identities are being diluted by growing diversity.

I am particularly concerned by the rise of xenophobic rhetoric increasingly used by political leaders and candidates that feed on stereotypes and suspicions that echo a very dark past.

As such, I welcome the Secretary-General’s campaign , “Together – Respect, Safety and Dignity for All”. I call on you, Members of the Group of Friends, to join this campaign and commit together to upholding the values of pluralism and diversity, as well as the rights and dignity of everyone forced by circumstance.

We must counteract the cynical and dangerous political calculus that comes with dividing people and multiplying fear. We must engage with the media and address the negative portrayal of migrants in the news.

As you know, the UN Alliance of Civilizations has already started working actively on combating xenophobia to prevent discrimination and exclusion. In December 2015, we launched the Hate Speech initiative that aims at countering narratives of hatred and addressing the treatment of migrants in the media in order to promote their social inclusion in host societies. Through the organization of a series of symposia and a social media campaign with the hashtag #SpreadNoHate we have already reached millions of people around the world. In addition, this past week, we organized a side event on “Combating xenophobic language in the media and fostering inclusive integration of migrants and refugees”.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we must all stand up against stereotypes and exclusion, and ensure that no refugee or migrant is left behind.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to which we all committed last year recognizes the contribution migration makes to economic progress. Our societies must embrace diversity to expand on that progress. Only by promoting diversity, respect and tolerance among people can we achieve peace and sustainable development worldwide.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a path to a better future. Acting together, we can counter xenophobia and turn fear into hope. Together, we can shape a new future, a future where migrants and refugees, host countries and host communities can live together in peaceful and inclusive societies.

Once again, I welcome his Excellency, our Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon and invite him to deliver his remarks.

Thank you.