Young people from around the world develop recommendations at UNAOC Youth Event

Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon enjoyed a celebrity-style arrival at the 5th UNAOC Global Forum Youth Event in Vienna, Austria, on Tuesday, Feb. 26, 2013. Participants and journalist swarmed him taking photographs on iPads and phones.

In addressing the youth he reiterated his commitment to ensuring youth involvement in promoting dialogue and responsible leadership.

He said he was impressed with the courage and effort shown by young people, and the world looks to them as agents of change that can only be achieved with a willingness to be a part of it.

> "We need the input of youth," he said.

After his speech four participants took the stage to ask the secretary general questions. They addressed religious tolerance, responsible leadership and development. In response, the secretary general said promoting dialogue and diversity is key. Also, he said the world is looking up to its leaders, but youth still have a major role to play.

> "When leaders do not listen to changing aspirations of people it is the beginning of hatred and distrust between the government, between the leadership and the people," he said.

Participants aged 18 to 35 came from all over the world, with large numbers from Africa and the Middle East. Sessions focused on three main issues to be discussed in the Fifth UNAOC Global Form in the following days—religious pluralism, media diversity, and migration.

> "Everyone from different parts of the world have different interpretations of what's right and what's wrong," said Salima Visram, a participant from Canada. "The Koran was formed or created 4,000 years ago and the different between the times then and the times now, are obviously very vast. And the interpretations from then and now… there's a huge spectrum, of anything that can be interpreted from the Koran and that's

> what I learned today, that no matter where you're from and what you're background is, every interpretation is correct."

Participants in small groups came up with lists of ideas, including how to create programs to ease migrant adjustments in new countries, encourage religious dialogue and provide press freedom.

> "You have more than 150 people over here and when we sit down on the discussion table, we don't really seem to disagree on anything," said Zainab Iqtidar, a participant from Pakistan. "So if 150 people, from I don't know how many different countries, can sit down and agree on almost everything, I can assume we would probably have a lot less wars and conflict in the world."

The conference opened with remarks from Suleiman Jasir Al-Herbish, the director general of the OPEC Fund for International Development. He stressed that sustainable development is essential for the global community.

> "Let us think of many people in the Middle East, Africa and many other places in the world without even a place to call home," he said. "Improving the quality of life of these people will have to be at the heart of any responsible leadership."

Both Al-Herbish and UNAOC high representative Jorge Sampaio acknowledged the participants are both current and future world leaders.

Participants said they benefited from exposure to new ideas.

> "If I had not come here, I would not have been able to perhaps in the future stand in other people's shoes and take decisions and think like them," said Bavesh Moorthy, a participant from India. "Today I get to understand what other people think of different topics. For example, the Balkans. It's not something someone from Asia from India would have understood."

At the end of the day, four participants were selected to synthesize the recommendations and present them in a video to the UNAOC at the Global Forum later in the week.

One of the ideas coming out of the discussion was to form programs for migrant children to receive education in their mother tongue as well as in the language of their new country. Another was to open up the media landscape by using social media to convert a monologue to dialogue.

Specific recommendations included:

Freedom of media:

1. Use social media to "transform media from monologue to a dialogue" and use this dialogue to prompt people to participate in more debates.

2. In regards to the freedom of speech, The UNAOC needs to establish a legal basis for the exchange of ideas.

Media and Diversity:

1. Need to cultivate plural society through culturally diverse art.

2. Need to create training programs for minority professionals in media.

Migration:

1. Need to make the path to citizenship for migrants easier.

2. Must create a taskforce.

Religious Diversity:

1. States should invest in formal and informal education systems.

2. Need to define relationships between youth and stakeholders so that stakeholders will listen to youth members of the population.

Freedom of religion:

1. Must enforce cooperation of various forms of ethical religious education in early childhood years.

2. Need to ensure the right to freedom of religion.

Migration and Integration:

1. Must create policy law with an aim to enhance minorities in society.

Must strive for successful inclusion by providing children with education in mother tongue.

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