



**REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA**  
**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
**DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS**

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71 UNGA

UNAOC Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting

New York, 23 September 2016, 3.00 pm to 6.00 pm, CR 4, UNHQs

**Mr. Rayko Raytchev**  
Director General for Global Affairs  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria

**Mr. High Representative,**

Bulgaria supports the objectives and the work of the UNAOC aimed at promoting peace, tolerance, dialogue and understanding.

The four pillars of the UNAOC focused on youth, education, media and migration address some of the most pressing and complex challenges the international community faces today which further strengthens the role of the UNAOC in the global efforts for preventing violence, promoting diversity and building peaceful and inclusive societies, particularly in the context of the current migration pressures.

Bulgaria strongly believes that building societies based on respect for human rights and the rule of law through education and social and political inclusion creates the favourable conditions for preventing and combatting xenophobia, hatred and discrimination and for promoting intercultural dialogue, tolerance and understanding.

**Mr. High Representative,**

Bulgaria is encouraged by the special attention the UNAOC attaches to preventing and eliminating the marginalization and radicalization of young people as youth is particularly vulnerable to extremist ideologies, hate speech, xenophobic language and propaganda. UNAOC's campaign against hate speech in the media launched last December is an important initiative in this context which should be further developed.

Bulgaria welcomes the outcomes of the UNAOC's side event on "Combating xenophobic language in the media and fostering inclusive integration of migrants and refugees" (*co-organized by the European Union, the International Organization for Migration and the Permanent Mission of Malta; New York, 15 September 2016*) which served as a good platform for Member States and other stakeholders to share experiences and best practices related to the prevention and countering of hate speech against refugees and migrants by reconfirming the global commitment to combatting xenophobia, prejudice and discrimination.

As a country with a long history of tolerance and respect for diversity where people from different cultures, religions and ethnicities have been living peacefully together for centuries Bulgaria has a lot to share and contribute to promoting mutual understanding and dialogue.

Equality before the law is a fundamental principle enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. Discrimination is prohibited by law. All relevant legislation and government policies contain anti-discriminatory regulations. Special attention is given to combatting stereotypes and prejudices, if and when such occur against persons with respect to their ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender identity or any other status.

**Mr. High Representative,**

Bulgaria attaches great importance to education considering its crucial role in preventing xenophobia and discrimination. The Bulgarian Government has adopted a Strategy for the educational integration of children and students from ethnic minority groups for the period 2015 - 2020. Efforts are made also to guarantee the right to education of refugee children. Education in public schools in Bulgaria is free of charge for all children, including refugees. Refugees have the same rights as Bulgarian citizens.

The State Agency for Refugees provides Bulgarian language courses to refugees free of charge which enables their rapid integration in the society.

Bulgaria highlights the particular vulnerability of migrant and refugee children. One in every 45 children in the world today is on the move or about sixty-five million children in total. The number of child refugees has risen by an astounding 77 per cent in only five years with unaccompanied children being most at risk of the worst forms of violence, abuse and harm. This is one of the greatest challenges of our age and we have to take immediate action to ensure that there is no lost generation. Every one of these children needs protection and the full realization of their human rights.

Being a transit and a host country of thousands of migrants and refugees Bulgaria is making every effort, in cooperation with the EU, UNICEF and other partners, to ensure good living conditions for all those fleeing from the scourge of war and seeking refuge by paying particular attention to the rights and specific needs of children, especially unaccompanied children, through the provision of essential services such as food, accommodation, healthcare, education, etc., taking into consideration the best interests of the child.

**Thank you, Mr. High Representative!**