

**Statement of the OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger on  
“Youth engagement: the nexus to building inclusive societies and sustaining peace”**

**UNAOC Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting**

*New York, 22 September 2017*

**High Representative,  
Excellences,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure to be in your midst for the first time in my new capacity as Secretary General of the OSCE. High Representative Al-Nasser, thank you for the kind invitation to this Ministerial Meeting.

Over the past decade the Alliance has been a strong voice against the forces that fuel polarization and extremism. In your efforts to build bridges between cultures, religions and peoples, the OSCE has always stood by your side. I am committed to use my tenure in office to further advance our strong partnership rooted in shared values and principles.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Nowadays young people are increasingly united in seeking ways to engage and get their voices heard on a vast array of issues related to peace and security. Their efforts have not gone unheeded. Security Council Resolution 2250 on “Youth, Peace and Security” calls upon the international community to increase the participation of youth in conflict prevention activities. This is a positive development, but still not sufficient. We should be doing more *with youth for youth*.

Young people are often misrepresented and their voices are rarely heard in peace and security fora. Access to decision-making bodies and expression of their legitimate concerns on political representation or employment opportunities are still very difficult. Young leaders need appropriate platforms to fully unleash their creative potential and come up with innovative solutions to the many problems facing our communities.

Young leaders have a key role to play also in our common efforts to build inclusive and pluralistic societies. When they are provided with the appropriate platforms they often come up with creative and inspiring solutions to address the many problems we face, such as countering growing manifestations of racism and xenophobia and preventing violent extremism.

The OSCE’s commitment to promote the inclusion of youth in the peace and security agenda dates back to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Over the years, we have also accomplished some important steps to engage more – and more effectively – with young people. In recent years, our annual OSCE Chairmanships have increasingly featured youth as a priority area and have appointed youth representatives for support and advice.

The OSCE Group of Friends of Youth and Security, chaired by Spain, wants to build a critical mass among delegations to support the youth agenda. In May this year, the OSCE

Malaga Conference on *Working with youth for youth: Strengthening security and co-operation online*, jointly organized with Spain, gathered more than 100 young people from across the OSCE area. It discussed and adopted a number of recommendations on key priority areas such as countering violent extremism, public participation and countering intolerance online.

But we at the OSCE have gone beyond political measures. At the programmatic level, a number of initiatives are aimed to engage more closely with young people. In my Office, a youth mainstreaming strategy is currently being drafted to give youth throughout the OSCE region a voice within the Organization, and to make sure that their perspectives and concerns are taken into account in our policies, projects and activities.

Our Field Missions increasingly engage with youth in a number of ways. They support Youth Advisory Groups, a platform designed for young people to provide OSCE staff with creative insights into youth-specific concerns, and Youth Contact Groups, in which young leaders from different regions gather to exchange experiences on effective ways to question prejudices and build mutual trust and confidence. The Secretariat advocates for the replication of these experiences within and between regions.

Nonetheless, a lot of ground remains to be covered to ensure the systematic participation of young people in peace and security efforts. Together, we must rally the necessary political will to better support young people in preventing and helping end conflicts, countering urgent global and transnational challenges, and building inclusive societies.

Thank you.