



# General Assembly

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### Prevention of armed conflict

#### **Letter dated 27 November 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to convey herewith a copy of the summary report of the third Organization of Islamic Cooperation Member States Conference on Mediation, entitled “Exploring approaches to effective mediation: the role of culturally sensitive mediation”, held in Istanbul on 1 November 2019 (see annex).\*

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 31.

(Signed) Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu  
Permanent Representative

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\* Circulated in Arabic, English and French only.



## **Annex to the letter dated 27 November 2019 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

### **SUMMARY REPORT**

#### **THE THIRD OIC MEMBER STATES CONFERENCE ON MEDIATION**

The Third OIC Member States Conference on Mediation was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey with the cooperation and support of the OIC General Secretariat and SESRIC on 1 November 2019 in İstanbul. The conference was entitled “Exploring Approaches to Effective Mediation: The Role of Culturally Sensitive Mediation”. With more than 250 participants, the Conference brought together high-level officials from several countries, the OIC General Secretariat as well as representatives from diplomatic and consular missions, conflict resolution and mediation experts, scholars and students.

The first half of the Conference was livestreamed on and uploaded to the official Youtube channel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey (@TCDisileri). The official website for the Conference ([istanbulmediation.org](http://istanbulmediation.org)) is regularly updated. Throughout the Conference, #istanbulmediation was widely shared on Twitter.

This year’s Conference highlighted the significance of culturally sensitive mediation and aimed to contribute to the efforts to draft a guideline for mediators in this regard. Prior to the Conference, Turkey submitted a strawman to lay out the role that culture and cultural sensitivity may play in mediation processes to help mediators in all cultural contexts. Following this draft and the subsequent decision of the OIC Contact Group of Friends of Mediation, a brainstorming session was organized in September 2019 by the Statistical, Economic, Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) on the matter.

In his opening address, H.E. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, stressed the need for capacity-building on mediation at the OIC level, given its huge potential as the second largest international organization after the UN, its responsibility to end the conflicts that take place in its geography, and the prominent role that can be played by regional and sub-regional organizations in conflict prevention and resolution. Minister Çavuşoğlu underlined that the Conference provided the OIC family with an invaluable opportunity to think together, which is a first step towards acting together.

As a keynote speaker, H.E. Youssef Al-Dobeay, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs of the OIC, reminded the founding principles of the OIC: establishing peace, stability, coherence and security and promoting development across the OIC geography. He echoed Minister Çavuşoğlu’s remarks, noting the fact that 60% of global conflicts take place in the OIC geography, which hampers development efforts and drives countries into poverty. H.E. Al-Dobeay expressed support to mediation in resolving these conflicts and to raising OIC-wide awareness as well as building capacity.

#### **FIRST SESSION: “PRESENTATION BY THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS”**

In the first session moderated by Ambassador Erdoğan İşcan, member of the UN Committee Against Torture, the High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Miguel Moratinos delivered a presentation on the role of culture and identity.

Before presenting the floor to the High Representative Moratinos, the moderator underscored the importance of upholding the UN system given the amount of devastation and suffering that humanity had to endure in the aftermath of WWII that gave birth to it. He reminded that it was the international community that devised the UN system, which is why it proves a challenging yet necessary task to carry it forward, promoting dialogue and mediation in the process, despite evolving threats.

The High Representative pointed out that there are many complex threats to peace at a time when cultural and religious pluralism is being challenged by the rise in xenophobia, racism and radicalization.

Confirming the value of mediation as the most essential tool for conflict prevention and sustaining peace, the High Representative Moratinos advocated that in order to be effective, mediation must be applied across the full the spectrum of the peace continuum and complemented by social, cultural and religious dimensions. Traditional diplomacy must always be engaged in the process, but due to the complexity of today's world and the changing nature of peace and conflict, it should be accompanied by further considerations to achieve its goal. This finding calls for the introduction of a new approach in mediation, which includes the aforementioned dimensions and is mindful of the relatively new actors in the process, i.e. women, civil society and religious bodies.

During the discussion session with participants, several examples were presented where traditional mediation fell short of delivering the desired outcome, and should instead have been complemented by a bottom-up process with civil society. It was established that new tools and mechanisms must be introduced to the mix to resolve the conflicts of the 21st century. In the case of protracted conflicts where multiple mediation efforts have failed, the High Representative recommended having perseverance and conviction as the best tool at hand. Furthermore, he suggested that realpolitik may not allow for such elements as spirituality and culture/religion but in today's conflicts "where people's identities clash", it is essential to devise a more holistic approach.

Further into the discussion session, the High Representative Moratinos put forward three recommendations for what makes a good mediator: to engage with the parties/stakeholders involved, to work for the constituency to create an environment conducive to agreement, and to think outside the box.

Moreover, he added the role of mediation on cultural restoration, citing the works of the dedicated UNAOC unit to the restoration of religious sites. The High Representative Moratinos wrapped up this session by warning against ignoring cultural and religious aspects, which might lead to inconclusive mediation and post-conflict resolution efforts.

#### **SECOND SESSION: "PANEL ON CULTURALLY SENSITIVE MEDIATION: CONTOURS OF A CODE OF CONDUCT"**

The second session was joined by Nebil Dabur (Director General of SESRIC), Mutlaq bin Majid Al-qahtani (Ambassador, Special Envoy of the Foreign Minister of the State of Qatar for Counter-Terrorism and Mediation of Conflict Resolution), Abdessattar Ben Moussa (Former Head of Tunisian Human Rights League and the Current Ombudsman of the Republic of Tunisia), Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (Member of the United Nations Standby Team of Mediation Experts) and Nejib Friji (Director of the International Peace Institute MENA Office) as panelists. Ahmed Sareer (Ambassador, Head of Peace, Security and Conflict Resolution Unit of the General Secretariat, Organization of Islamic Cooperation) moderated the panel.

The panel explored the contours of culturally sensitive mediation efforts and set of rules which should guide them. When it comes to cultural considerations in a conflict setting, insider mediators might have an advantage but this should not exclude outsider mediators from venturing into this mission. Drawing on two OIC Council of Foreign Ministers Resolutions on strengthening the mediation capacity of the OIC, the Organization is fulfilling its task of developing a Code of Conduct for Culturally Sensitive Mediation Approaches to provide a crucial tool in assisting in the de-escalation and resolution of conflicts.

The panelists elaborated on the possible features of such a code of conduct and emphasized that it should prescribe a specific set of requirements, including cultural preparation for mediation, active listening, having the language skills for the cultural context, emotional intelligence, avoiding preconceived notions about what a certain culture is, and the role of religious and traditional leaders.

The panel presented the Tunisian case, where insider mediation of inclusive nature navigated the country through the storms in its democratic transition. This case illustrated the importance of active listening and being sensitive to the cultural preconceptions of different parties, culminating in an inclusive roadmap for the Tunisian reconciliation process.

The best way to eliminate conflict is to prevent it in the first place, which calls for cooperative action by international and regional organizations to develop the necessary mechanisms and tools.

Another case was the Philippines where cultural aspects regulated the design of the mediation and peace process, and even the selection of mediators. In the Philippines case, being culturally attuned to the context benefitted the peace process. It was noted that notwithstanding the importance of being culturally sensitive, cross-cultural conflicts are not always about culture, and the oppressive nature of culture should not be overlooked. Otherwise, certain cultural aspects that originally initiated the conflict might overwhelm the peace process and restart the conflict. What is important is to encourage positive transformations in perceptions to minimize the likelihood of this scenario.

### **THIRD SESSION: “PANEL ON HUMAN-CENTRIC CONFLICT RESOLUTION: NOTES FROM THE FIELD”**

Moderated by Prof. Dr. Fuat Keyman (Director of the Istanbul Policy Center), the final session of the Conference was joined by Nasser Judeh (Member of the UNSG’s High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, Former Foreign Minister of Jordan) and Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan (Former Head of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine). With the participation of two high-level officials with strong field experience, the panel particularly focused on Palestine and Ukraine. Mr. Judeh suggested that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should instead be viewed as an Arab-Israeli conflict because it relates to the Arab world as a whole. The key to succeeding in conflict prevention and mediation efforts is for the Muslim world to assume ownership of the conflicts taking place in this geography.

Furthermore, Mr. Judeh proposed that due to its one-of-a-kind nature and backing of the OIC countries, the Arab Peace Initiative is an important mechanism that could be used effectively. He drew attention to the stalemate in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which leads people into despair and fuels extremism.

Sharing his experience in the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Mr. Apakan underlined how the nature of the Ukrainian conflict quickly shifted from a political one to a militarized one. He further stressed the need to establish a sustainable ceasefire first, and transition into political conciliation process afterwards.

Additionally, he affirmed the role technology plays in conflict prevention and mediation efforts, and reiterated the importance of exploring new tools in this process.

The essential take-home messages from the panel were the following: adopting a human-centric approach in conflict prevention and mediation is crucial. Mediators must effectively engage with the grassroots and civilians in an inclusive manner to understand their concerns and expectations. Communication is key in diplomacy and all mediation initiatives. Preventing and resolving conflict requires more communication and discussion among stakeholders.

### **CLOSING REMARKS BY The DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR FOREIGN POLICY, ANALYSIS AND COORDINATION**

In his concluding remarks, Director-General for Foreign Policy, Analysis and Coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Ambassador Burak Akçapar wrapped up the main messages from the panels of the Conference.

He also highlighted the importance of the UN and OIC in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and mediation in order to eliminate human suffering.

Ambassador Akçapar commended the initiatives that have been taken by the OIC level in the field, and touched upon the work undertaken by the OIC Contact Group of Friends of Mediation and Turkey's "Mediation for Peace Certificate Program", which trains OIC member states' diplomats into mediators. He maintained that the best investment to the future of conflict prevention and resolution efforts is educating the youth, pointing out to the presence of large number of students in the audience.

Ambassador Akçapar referred to the Council of Foreign Ministers decisions and underlined the responsibility of enhancing the mediation capacity of the OIC as a joint priority of all member states.

He mentioned that the Third OIC Member States Conference represents a step towards fulfilling the task of preparing a Code of Conduct for culturally sensitive mediation while also noting that conflict is not culture-specific- it could happen anywhere. This guideline or Code of Conduct would be drafted with all conflicts in mind not only those in the OIC geography.

He concluded his remarks by reminding the audience that the best way to approach conflicts is to prevent them in the first place.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We thank the rapporteurs of the Conference: Prof. Dr. Ebru Canan-Sokullu, Mr. Fadi Farasin, and Dr. Pınar Akpınar.