



Venue: Almaty City, “Tien Shan” Grand Hotel, Conference Hall – 2nd floor 115 Bogenbay Batyr Street

Date and time: 8 September 2017, 10:00 – 18:00

Holding of the UNESCO II International Youth Forum “Youth cooperation in the field of strengthening intercultural dialogue and prevention of violent extremism” (hereafter Forum) was based on understanding of importance of the critical role of young women and men in development of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding, which are the basic principles of the global sustainable development programme, against the backdrop of expanding socio-political phenomenon in the modern world which makes all states and societies vulnerable to outbreaks of violent extremism.

The forum was conducted in the context of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures, 2013-2022 and in the context of celebrating the International Youth Day (12 August) and the International Literacy Day (8 September). A total of 90 young representatives from Afghanistan, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Tatarstan (Russian Federation) aged 17 to 30, and also 10 representatives of the national and international organizations took part in the Youth Forum. Such kind of participation instilled confidence that this event became a starting point of creation of youth networks in the region in the relevant fields and gave an opportunity for young participants to work closely with decision-makers in creation of inclusive, tolerant and cooperative society, based on mutual respect, human rights and freedoms.

The key objective of the event was arranging a discussion platform for young people from different countries for deep and thorough discussion of the main challenges of intercultural dialogue and subsequent collaborative elaboration of recommendations for politicians and authorities on prevention of violent extremism in the region.

One of the essential objectives, set up by the Forum organizers, was to raise the awareness of decision-makers, media and civil society of the importance of youth engagement in building peaceful societies and promoting sustainable development, which means the following:

- Encourage youth to participate actively in prevention of conflicts and consolidation of peace, strengthening understanding;
- Promote sharing knowledge and best practices on prevention of violent extremism;
- Exchange concepts of religious and human values with a view to demonstrate that religion is not always the cause of radicalization;
- Combat ideological polarization and social stereotypes; improve understanding and cooperation among people from different cultures;
- Enhance youth potential in corresponding areas by conducting discussions in different spheres;
- Promote intercultural dialogue among the youth; ensure opportunities for their learning on how to work collaboratively and to build networks;
- Engage youth in UNESCO's programme activities/work.

The Forum was organized and held by the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty under support of Almaty City Mayor Office, that productively worked together on advancement of the effective youth policy, understanding that these days the numerous youth population recognizes the need for changes and demands respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, including respect for their cultural authenticity and heritage, and looks for new opportunities to learn to live together in the age of globalization for a greater future.

During the opening ceremony Mr. Sergey Karpov, Acting Director of the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty, emphasized that the Forum is an opportunity for youth to be heard, and that the Forum promotes participation of the younger generation in decision-making processes. This is especially important, as the voice of youth is not always heard in the power circles, especially as part of implementation of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, where the youth is one of the driving forces of this process. Ms. Altynai Dyussekova, Counsellor of the Mayor of Almaty City, after informing about social and youth projects in Almaty City, also highlighted the importance of building a dialogue between local government authorities and youth representatives. Ms. Gulnara Kapekova, the Head of the Science Department of RSBSE "Centre for the Rapprochement of Cultures" supported Ms. A. Dyussekova's speech and noted that the youth is the history mainspring. It is the youth who always broke stereotypes, and it is the youth who set forth the most constructive ideas on its discussion platforms and today's Forum clearly demonstrates it again.

Besides, during the Forum opening ceremony, the speakers voiced their hope that the Forum participants would work out recommendations to enhance implementation of effective mechanisms of strengthening intercultural dialogue and creation of peaceful and inclusive society.

From the very beginning the young participants of the Forum showed great interest, demonstrating strong start from the first session, which was devoted to discussion of the matters of potential dialogue between the government agencies and international organizations on strengthening of intercultural dialogue and prevention of violent extremism with youth participation.

The Forum started with the session on the efforts of the governments and international organizations on strengthening intercultural dialogue and prevention of violent extremism with youth participation. During this session the speakers were unanimous that social stability could influence the decision of youth and their families on participation in extremist acts. This process should start with human rights, rule of law, intercultural dialogue and empowering all young women and men in the activity aimed at prevention of violent extremism, integration into decision-making process and strengthening trust between the decision-makers and the youth.

Session 1: Efforts of the governments and international organizations on strengthening intercultural dialogue and prevention of violent extremism with youth participation

Mr. Beibut Turabayev, Director of "Research and Analysis Centre" of the Department of Religious Affairs of Almaty City, mentioned the significance of holding the Forum in Almaty City, as there are 700 000 citizens aged 14 to 30 years in the city. He mentioned that there were many reasons for extremism, such as economic or social; however, the main reasons were low religious and theological literacy, in particular, among youth, who, in his opinion, represent the risk group due to their age-related vulnerability.

Ms. Arina Plokhikh, the National Programme Officer for Social and Human Sciences of the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty and Session moderator, has drawn the participants' focus that, despite the fact that the Department of Religious Affairs was established not so long ago, the Department and the City Government are open to work with the youth on social projects. She expressed confidence that activists and leaders, who participate at the Forum, would make their contribution to this work. Ms. Plokhikh further informed the attendees on the possibility of developing joint projects based on experience of Turkey, calling on Mr. Ali Çiviler, Project Director, Turkic Council (Istanbul, Turkey) to speak, who presented the projects.

Mr. Ali Çiviler has noted that in the course of business activity considerable attention is paid to issues of prevention of violent extremism. He has also noted the fact that the international community emphasizes the educational function in the context of the represented aspect. In the United Nations Declaration “The Sustainable Development Goals: Steering the United Nations towards 2030” the issues of prevention of violent extremism are included in the implementation agenda. Also the UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security note that young people play an important role in the conflict management. In his speech, Mr. Ali Çiviler has shared with young Forum participants the experience of creating joint dialogue platforms with various international organizations that expand the boundaries of knowledge and practical experience exchange. He has also noted that the Forum is a significant event in the region and its thematic components speak about understanding of the importance of the urgent questions and readiness of searching for joint solutions.

Further Mr. Aibek Sydykov, Deputy Director of RSBSE “Centre for the Rapprochement of Cultures” made a presentation on consolidated knowledge and work of independent research scientists in the field of history, archeology and culture. The Forum participants had an opportunity to be among the first to familiarize with the concept of operations of the Center and its role on strengthening the international dialogue of the nations of Central Asia. The speaker has noted that the Centre is focused on the educational activity oriented toward the youth, including development and publishing the scientific and educational materials.

To conclude Session 1, Ms. Arina Plokhikh, the National Programme Officer for Social and Human Sciences of the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty, has informed the attendees on the UNESCO global programmes and best practices in the area of youth cooperation for prevention of violent extremism. She has noted that these days under conditions of intensive globalization that has effaced the boundaries not only of economic and technological process, but also as part of interaction between people, cultures, religious and ethnic groups - intercultural dialogue becomes the central issue of the modern world. Further, Ms. Arina Plokhikh has presented the UNESCO position of the importance of the intercultural dialogue, which means an open and respectful exchange of views between representatives of different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic origin and heritage based on mutual understanding and tolerance. In addition, it is very important that the dialogue in which freedom of speech is linked to the right to be heard; the dialogue where diversity is regarded as means, but not as barriers; the dialogue where conflicts are resolved together, but not competitively; where decisions are made through peace, but not through violence. It was further said that UNESCO activity on prevention of violent extremism by means of education is oriented at empowerment of the national education systems (for example, developing an educational policy, support of teachers, developing educational programmes) so that properly and effectively promote efforts of the countries on prevention of violent terrorism.

Ms. Aigerim Zhanseitova, the Assistant for Culture Sector of the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty was the moderator of Session 2 of the Forum. Within the framework of this session the speakers have presented the experience of their countries in issues of prevention of violent extremism and have expressed their unanimous opinion for the intercultural dialogue development.

Session 2: The Youth's approach to prevention of violent extremism and development of intercultural dialogue

The session has started with Ms. Aliya Khassanova's (Kazakhstan) presentation “Religious stereotypes: origins, consequences and prevention measures”. The speaker has addressed the issues of existence of two parallel processes in the modern world - globalization (alongside with homogenization) and revival of identity. As part of cultural authenticity, religious authenticity is an integral part of each human consciousness in regard to religion, and according to the speaker it is associated with the stereotypes, based on gender difference, ethnic and religious belonging. The speaker suggested educational activities and holding youth forums, like the present one, as one of the effective preventive measures.

While presenting the experience of the Kazakhstan Federation of UNESCO Clubs in advancing the international mutual understanding and the role of youth education in building a peaceful and sustainable society, Ms. Bakhytgul Kubeyeva (Kazakhstan) has noted that club activity advances educational skills of youth. In her opinion, education is the key aspect and the Clubs promote unity of youth, young girls and young men. In that regard, it is much more efficient to advance the discussed issues if there were a youth network among the Asian countries, similar to the international best practice. The cultural exchange, introducing the efficient contribution to peace, consent and mutual understanding would be the goal of such network.

Ms. Sayerakhon Gapurova's (Kyrgyzstan) presentation "Setting up a comfortable platform for integration of youth by means of education" was in tune with the previous speaker, as setting up a platform represents a new format of an exchange of knowledge and skills, within one country, and within one region. Representing an example of unique youth culture with friendly and easy atmosphere, the platform will help young men to build an inter-ethnic dialogue and will raise interest to receiving new information.

Next speaker Ms. Nazgul Zholdoshova (Kyrgyzstan) has supported her fellow countrywoman and has presented the results of the research conducted in Kyrgyzstan through social network websites covering 1000 respondents aged 14 to 32. Now the youth makes 31 % of the whole population of the country. She presented factors of violent extremism among the youth in the Kyrgyz Republic; one of the factors is poor quality of education, both secular and theological education. Therefore, she thinks that setting up a youth platform in the Central Asia region is a very timely step.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world", these words of Nelson Mandela have run like a golden thread through Ms. Nilufar Abdullo's (Tajikistan) presentation, in which she focused attention of the Forum participants that not only the intensive dialogue of cultures is the distinctive feature of the modern world, but also cross-cultural interaction, which can be described using such notions as integration, rapprochement, creative interaction, etc. In the context of such approach, the problem of cultural pluralism is especially noteworthy as one of the global problems of the modern society.

Ms. Jawhara Mustafa (Egypt) has noted the importance of issues of youth empowerment in diverse spheres of human development. She has drawn the forum participants' attention to problems of youth marginalization and their consequences. She has noted that by means of social networks, youth gets a powerful platform, which is their daily social environment where they can express their opinions and problems. However, they are not yet properly represented in the governments, especially in developing countries and especially in Central Asia.

Ms. Liana Gatiyatullina (Tatarstan, Russian Federation) has presented to the participants the experience of the Academy of Youth Diplomacy, as an example of "The International Youth Cooperation in the Republic of Tatarstan". According to her, the Academy is unique in its way at regional level as it supports youth and youth initiatives in the sphere of international cooperation. The Academy unites youth aged 14 to 30, who are not indifferent and who are patriots of their society, region and the country. By developing various directions of its activity, the Academy first of all stands for the development of intercultural dialogue and is ready to cooperate with other organizations of the region.

Mr. Abdul Basit Musadik (Afghanistan) has noted the difficulties which the youth in Afghanistan encounter. The poverty level in the country is up to 39%, and problems in the system of education accompany this phenomenon. More than three decades of the conflict adversely affected the system of education in Afghanistan. Girls of school age have especially suffered, as the Taliban regularly used violence and compulsion to prevent them from going to

schools. In 2001 not a single girl officially attended school or university, and only one million boys had access to education. The level of youth unemployment in the country is high - 40 % and there are concerns about the problem of drug usage among youth. There is also a big concern regarding the problem of forced marriages. The speaker has also noted that the number of Afghani refugees, especially young men, is second after the Syrian refugees, and those refugees represent considerably large communities.

Ms. Akmaral Satinbayeva (Kyrgyzstan) has shared information with the Forum participants on youth problems in Kyrgyzstan and supported her colleagues, the previous speakers, on the problems of cross-cultural and inter-religious intolerance. It is still difficult for her to speak about those bloody events, as she witnessed the ethnic conflict in Osh. Despite the difficult situation back then the Osh youth of different nationalities united and showed their position by running a campaign of planting flowers under a slogan "Plant Seeds of Peace in Osh!" According to the speaker, the youth was always ahead of the times and it demanded search for various approaches of work with the youth. An example of such innovative approach was to advance ethnic equality by uniting the "advanced" youth in 25 informal groups (over 500 people), in which they exchanged various professional skills thus removing the barriers in understanding each other.

Mr. Kazbek Kuikenov (Kazakhstan) was the last speaker of Session 2. He has presented "The Main Principles of Work with Teenagers with the Example of School of Leadership "Zhana Urpak". Work with teenagers should be organized based on principles of mutual understanding and friendly treatment. The Forum participants were active during the interactive dialogue with the speaker, thereby, once again confirmed conventionality of proposed approaches. Session 3 was a special one in the Forum work, when the participants discussed the issues raised in the previous sessions and elaborated joint recommendations, specifically on the spheres of impact.

Session 3: Brainstorming among Participants and Developing Recommendations for Youth and the Government Agencies

The session participants were divided into several groups for brainstorming and collective preparation of recommendations:

- **Role of the Youth in Prevention of Violent Extremism.**
Expert: Aliya Tankibayeva – Faculty Member, Social Sciences College, KIMEP University
- **Role of Media and Social Networks in Prevention of Violent Extremism and Strengthening of Intercultural Dialogue.**
Expert: Sergey Karpov – Programme Specialist of Communication and Information Sector of the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty
- **Role of the Civil Society and the Government in Prevention of Violent Extremism.**
Expert: Dana Shayakhmet - Dean for Students Affairs, Narxoz University.

The Forum participants, young women and men, have voiced their opinion that countering violent extremism is an insufficient measure and recognized the necessity of implementing initiatives on its prevention by means of "soft power" (education, science, culture and communications) aimed at constraining threats which appear due to misunderstanding of cultural and religious peculiarities, hatred and ignorance.

Based on the results of the session, the participants suggested the following recommendations:

Education

- Capacity building of the teachers and professors of educational institutions in the field of intercultural dialogue, religious studies, self-knowledge and critical thinking for more efficient education of young people.
- Conducting free trainings and workshops with the participation of national and international experts to increase the literacy among young people about human rights, the consequences of violent extremism, precautionary measures for recruitment to extremist groups.
- Promotion of innovative teaching methods in the field of intercultural and interreligious dialogue using the Internet, gadgets and social media.
- Develop a special training programme to prevent and counter violent extremism for vulnerable segments of the population and for those who have previously been involved in extremist acts.
- Share international experience with local PVE specialists for the further application and dissemination of the best practices among the citizens.
- Building capacity of local self-governing bodies to manage local conflicts and support social cohesion.

Social and human sciences

- Establish co-working centres for youth for collective development of the youth movement to prevent violent extremism.
- Develop projects on the use of hotlines, free consultations and software applications for the prevention of violent extremism. Raising awareness of the available methods of prevention.
- Create accessible clubs of interests for young people, so they can develop their hobbies and be engaged in their spare time. For example, in the field of sports, music, arts.
- Create more affordable conditions for exercising sports and proper nutrition for young people. For example, making an annual bike ride rate cheaper; in canteens of educational institutions make more 'healthy menu' including vegetables and fruits, as well as provide free machines for drinking water.
- To conduct forums, workshops, trainings in Russian, Kazakh and English languages, with the participation of well-known and media representatives, UN staff. Also, increase the participation of the government in these activities to build an effective dialogue between youth and national authorities.
- Increase funding for youth forums through active cooperation with the government to enable more young people to participate in the event.
- Promotion of volunteer activities, increasing the active position of young people and their participation in raising awareness of the prevention of violent extremism, promoting intercultural dialogue in the region.
- Consider the possibility of self-employment by young people and adolescents with a view to further voluntary contribution of funds for social projects. Promoting financial literacy among the adolescents.
- Promote closer cooperation between young activists engaged in research, raising awareness of the problem of violent extremism and decision-makers to improve the policies and governmental programmes based on the experience of youth initiatives.
- Conduct the research on the development of violent extremism in the region with a focus on youth and the dynamics of youth identity for implementing more effective preventive initiatives and preventing violent extremism.
- Development of youth programmes of the Centre for the Rapprochement of Cultures in Almaty to strengthen intercultural dialogue among students of educational institutions in Central Asia.
- Active involvement of young people in the implementation of the programme of International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures, 2013-2022. Promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the region, while clearly distinguishing the concepts of "extremism" and "religion."

Culture

- To organize festivals, exhibitions, sessions of cinemalogy with the involvement of young people to get acquainted with the culture, way of life and traditions of other peoples.
- Increase involvement of young people in UNESCO's projects on the Great Silk Road, tangible and intangible cultural heritage.
- Conduct free trainings, workshops for young people in the preservation of cultural heritage for our descendants, measures to prevent the destruction of cultural monuments.
- Create a 'youth wing' at the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty to promote cultural values among young people.

Communication and information

- Introduction of a training programme for young people "MIL - media information literacy", is especially useful for vulnerable segments of the population.
- Increase literacy in the media, critical and analytical thinking among young people through school, national and international campaigns in order to prevent the dissemination of the messages with hate speech or fake news or any incitement to violence.
- Promote the fight against extremism with the help of social networks and media representatives.
- Create a blog and channel on YouTube, which will release a detailed information about extremism, violent acts and its consequences, methods of countering and prevention. Allow young people to participate in this project and create video content by themselves.
- Create a single application for mobile phones and other gadgets, which will provide a large number of scenarios of conflict situations in the field of religion and culture. Through the application it will be possible to find out reliable information about different religions, sects, extremist currents. And also scenarios of behavior when recruiting to extremist groups; how to avoid conflict; where to address when a conflict situation arises or if suspicion of the development of extremist groups or acts is being developed.
- Combat stereotypes by presenting reliable information and successful stories through media and social networks about those, who are the most often discriminated and considered to be incited to hatred, violent acts motivated by hatred or violent extremism. It is possible to create a single hash tag to make it easier for a person to find counter-information about a particular culture or religion.
- Introduce fines or penalties for those who create and disseminate fake news / information.
- Create both long-term and effective short-term programmes in the field of communication and information.