



**International Labour
Organization**
Decent Work Team for
North Africa
Cairo

Press release

Friday 10 June 2011

YOUTH LEADERS TELL ILO THEY NEED “JOBS, JOBS”, BUT EXPRESS OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE

GENEVA (ILO News) – Youth leaders from around the world told the annual conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) they need “jobs, jobs”, but expressed optimism that their efforts would eventually result in employment, more equitable societies and decent work.

Addressing the panel, ILO Director-General Juan Somavia told the youth: “You are acting as catalysts for the rest of the world,” adding that the changes they have initiated cannot be stopped. “The people will prevail because of their thirst for dignity and social justice.”

The young leaders were participants in an unprecedented high-level panel on youth that brought their concern, but also optimism and hope, directly to the floor of ILO Conference. The predominant message was that youth are ready and eager to contribute to making a difference if they are provided with opportunities to do so in the form of jobs, training and involvement in the political process.

“If you talk about a challenge ... it is all about jobs, jobs,” said Roberto Suarez Santos, a youth employment expert at Spain’s Confederation of Employers Organizations, adding that more than 40 per cent of the young people in Spain are currently unemployed. Mr. Suarez Santos said the key feature of youth was their capacity for innovation and risk-taking, so the challenge was how to give them more opportunities to acquire experience to have good prospects for the future, and contribute to society.

UN Youth Champion Monique Coleman of the United States said: “The young need the wisdom of the old, and the old need the energy of the young.”

Octavio Rubio Rengifo of the department of young workers in Colombia’s General Confederation of Workers said trade unions must also play their part in representing the young unemployed, noting “The unions have to move closer to the

unemployed, to workers in the informal economy, and of course, young people...Social dialogue should include young people in the discussion where issues of their concern are debated.”

Despite the highest ever global levels of youth unemployment, which the ILO estimates at 81 million people aged 15 to 24, Ms. Coleman, the American actress and Youth Champion, said, "I don't think there is a sense of hopelessness...if we do not have a positive outlook we are not going to reach a positive outcome".

Alanda Kariza, young author and President of “The Cure for Tomorrow” in Indonesia, said "Youth is the power of change, but we have also to make sure that it is a good change,” adding that a key element was the need for more education and a spirit of entrepreneurship.

Mr. Rubio Rengifo added, "There is too much fragmentation in the international community...we need a virtual dialogue and convergence in the international system.”

The young leaders also called for greater involvement of business in order to promote learning, education and training, saying "We need a climate for the development of business" and "The key is our capacity to learn.”

The panelists from Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen concurred that the international community should help turn their yearning for social justice into reality in a region where young people are particularly hard-hit by unemployment. They stressed that after the wave of protests in their region earlier this year, their aspirations now need to be turned into reality by tackling such key issues as unemployment, labour rights and social security.

“It is not enough to get rid of the old system, we must now rebuild,” said Marouen Cherif, coordinator of young workers in the Tunisian General Union of Labour (UGTT). He mentioned job creation as a priority, pointing out that one of the leading slogans of the protests was: “Employment is a right.”

Nazly Hussein, an Egyptian student activist who participated in the protests in January, urged the international community to help in the rebuilding effort and stressed that “most protests – even those in European countries – are a call for social justice more than for democracy. I think for social justice to be achieved the entire global system needs to change.”

“One thing we must never do is throw in the towel,” said Algerian youth activist Wissam Khedim, calling on youth to carry on the struggle to achieve their goals.

“We need the international community on our side. We need its assistance,” Samera Abdullah, Deputy Editor of Yemen’s Yamaniya newspaper said, her voice choking with emotion as she described the violence that rocked her impoverished country.

For more information in Arabic, kindly contact:
The Communication Department
ILO, Decent Work Team for North Africa
Cairo-Egypt
Tele: 002 02 23 99 9318 or 002 02 27 36 9299
Fax: 002 02 27 36 08 89