



**International Conference on Youth Employment in the
Mediterranean Region**

Opening remarks by:

**Mr. Charles Dan
Regional Director for Africa
International Labour Office**

**25 - 26 April 2012
Madrid, Spain**

His Excellency, Mr Gonzalo de Benito, Secretary of State for Foreign
Affairs of Spain,

Honourable representatives of the Diplomatic Community,

Mr Eduardo Lòpez Busquets, Director General of Casa Arab-IEAM,

Mr Aldo Olcese, Chairman, Fundacion Educacion para el Empleo
(EuropEFE),

Dear colleagues from the one UN,

Dear participants,

Allow me first to commend Spain for its commitment to respond to the youth employment challenge in the country and beyond.

Indeed, with the support of the Spanish Government, the ILO is promoting local economic development and entrepreneurship development for youth in Egypt; productive and decent work for youth in Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia; and gender equality and young women's empowerment in Algeria. Thank you, Mr. Secretary of State, for your confidence.

Let me also salute the Foundation Education for Employment for developing innovative partnerships, including with the ILO, to translate youth employment policies into individual opportunities and collective achievements.

And I would like to pay tribute to Casa Arabe for hosting us today and for strengthening the relations among peoples across the Mediterranean.

Freedom - equality - rights - social justice - employment: the young women and men across the Mediterranean region have expressed loud and clear their needs and aspirations.

They have the right to be heard.

We have the duty to listen.

Together, we have the possibility to succeed.

It is not an easy ride.

The global crisis has hit hard national economies.

The fiscal space has been tightened in almost all countries.

Young people are the most severely affected, as witnessed by the rapid growth in youth unemployment rates everywhere.

In the Middle East and North Africa, more than 50% of the unemployed are young people - women and men -

No indeed, it is not an easy ride.

But the crisis has also taught us one key lesson: nobody can do it alone.

This is why we are here today: to address together one of the most important political challenges in the region: how do we create employment opportunities for youth in the Mediterranean region?

We all know that the MENA region has tremendous potential to expand its collective growth.

And we all know that it is the young people, with their innovative ideas and their understanding of new trends, needs and possibilities who can contribute to the economic growth and social progress of their countries and their communities.

But to move ahead, a new pattern of growth is required to meet the formidable challenge of job creation.

It means a lot.

It means placing productive employment and decent work at the heart of macro-economic and development policies.

It means promoting education and training that correspond to the real needs of the economic sectors.

It means supporting youth entrepreneurship.

It means building trust across generations and societies.

And it means developing partnerships.

Let me develop these five priority policy requirements:

First, we need integrated policies for growth with clear targets for job creation.

According to the ILO's publication Global Employment Trends 2012, while the MENA region has a larger and better educated youth population than ever before, more than 26 per cent of young people in the labour force in the Middle East and more than 27 per cent in North Africa were unable to find a job last year.

Reversing this trend requires a different policy scenario in which youth employment should be among the main goals of macroeconomic frameworks, and should be a priority for fiscal policy.

Second, we need to invest in relevant education and training adapted to the sectoral needs of the economy:

Jobs are not created at the global level. Jobs are not created at the national level. Jobs are created at the sectoral level - sector by sector - enterprise by enterprise.

So we have to work closely with the private sector to reduce skills mismatches. This is not just a matter of public policy. It is also important for companies, employers' organizations and trade unions to take the initiative and collaborate with educational and vocational training institutions while at the same time promoting on-the-job training and internships.

Third, we need to promote youth entrepreneurship.

In the MENA region, most of the enterprises are still in the informal economy and have limited access to finance and support.

And we also need to promote the social economy - cooperatives, social enterprises, youth and women organizations, micro credit institutions, micro-insurance collective schemes - as a bridge and a lift between the informal and the formal economies.

This requires urgent attention to their environment through macro-economic and financial reforms. This also requires a cultural change: we need to value and promote micro, small and medium-sized enterprises as the best job creators.

Fourth, we need to build trust through social dialogue.

Young men and women aspire to participate in the social and economic policy making processes. Their voices need to be heard in national social dialogue as they call for a fair environment where they enjoy equal opportunities.

Social media and networks which are flourishing in the MENA region can also be key vehicles for youth mobilization and outreach to discuss youth employment policies.

Fifth, we need to foster partnerships and synergies.

Effective policies for youth employment require a high degree of policy coordination and coherence nationally and globally.

Public employment services and private employment agencies, labour administration and municipal authorities, employers' and workers' organizations, international organizations and non-governmental actors, all need to work together to accelerate and scale up the interventions.

Today, youth employment is an emergency global priority.

We must all do more and better.

From 18 to 19 April 2012, development partners and stakeholders gathered in Cairo, Egypt, where they adopted an ILO strategy on

“Employment for Stability and Socio-Economic Progress in North Africa”. This strategy will guide our future efforts as we upscale our support for youth employment in the region.

And next June in Geneva, our ILO’s annual International Labour Conference will address the youth employment crisis worldwide.

Open dialogue - joint analysis - out-of-the box thinking - concerted action: That’s the way ahead to tackle the youth unemployment crisis.

The youth are not asking for charity. They are looking for opportunities.

And this is precisely the objective of our gathering here: employment opportunities through education - training - sustainable enterprises - corporate social responsibility - public - private partnerships.

These are the real issues that matter to people across the Middle East and North Africa.

This requires confidence, commitment and consensus.

This is why we are in Madrid today.

Thank you so much for your attention.

Charles Dan

ILO Regional Director for Africa