



## **Summary reports of panel discussions (9 June 2011)**

### **Panel 1A. “Arab youth: Aspiring for social justice”**

1. Panel 1A was held on 9 June 2011 and moderated by Ms Jacki Davis of the European Policy Centre. It addressed a variety of issues related to the role of youth in recent and current uprisings in the Arab countries. In particular, what was the key driving factor for young people to participate in these events – the demand for democracy, the demand for a better life, or both? Was there a danger that the expectations of those young people would not be met, resulting in disappointment and apathy? How could political stability, which was so crucial to economic growth, be restored when young people’s demands for a better life had not yet been met and the continuing turmoil was making it even harder to do so? What help did young people in the Arab countries want and need from the international community and, in particular, from the ILO? How important had new media been in mobilizing young people versus the more traditional means?
2. The panellists were: Ms Sameera Abdullah, Deputy Editor of *Yamaniya* Newspaper and President of the Equal Citizenship Organization, Yemen; Mr Marouen Cherif, Coordinator of Young Workers, Union of Tunisian Telecasts and Office Coordinator of the National Youth Workers’ Union (UGTT), Tunisia; Ms Nazly Hussein, student activist, Egypt; and Mr Wissam Khedim, activist, Algeria.
3. There was a general feeling of optimism among the panellists about the outcomes of recent revolutions in a number of Arab countries. Even though the economic situation in some of those countries was not improving rapidly, most of the panellists expressed their satisfaction with the fall of the previous regimes and their commitment to the cause of democracy and freedom. Ms Abdullah thanked the ILO for its constant support, and expressed strong optimism about the changes to come, even if more human sacrifices would occur. She condemned the killings and the violations of rights of Yemeni women and men during 35 years of an oppressive regime, and expressed confidence that her country would find its way to freedom and a better life. Mr Cherif highlighted the role of Tunisian youth in overthrowing the dictatorial regime. He recalled the street fruit vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who had set himself on fire in protest against the regime. His death triggered mass protests which ultimately led to the downfall of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. He said that the sacrifice of Mr Bouazizi was the reflection on an entire society striving for a better life. He recalled that 70 per cent of young people in Tunisia, unemployed before the revolution, were discouraged and disappointed by the lack of opportunities. He noted that their quest for freedom was intrinsically linked to their pursuit of decent jobs, and so the slogan of the revolution had become “Employment is a right”. Ms Hussein acknowledged the difficult economic situation in post-revolutionary Egypt,

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but stressed that the economic problems were not the origin of other problems in the country. Revolution in Egypt was a result of a merging of two tracks – the democratic reform track and the labour rights track. Mr Khedim stressed that, because of its violent recent history, Algeria fully appreciated the importance of social dialogue in preventing violence. In his opinion, that was what made the Algerian case different from countries like Tunisia and Egypt.

4. There was broad recognition that both political and economic demands were key drivers of protest. Ms Abdullah emphasized that what the protesters in Yemen wanted was a modern State in which all goals could be achieved, including social goals, and that the protests were to a large extent driven by the inability of the previous regime to listen to the people. Moreover, Yemen had become a unified nation at the time of the revolution, since different tribes and social groups realized that they shared the same goal. Mr Cherif recalled that in Tunisia the protests had been carried out under the slogan “Employment is a right”, and that the protests had been driven by a number of economic problems, such as unequal regional development, the lack of a sound job-creation policy, and low purchasing power.
5. The panellists presented a number of suggestions on what the international community at large, and the ILO in particular, could do to help their countries. Mr Cherif called for assistance that could go beyond financial aid. He called for training programmes aimed at job creation, for the lightening of financial debts, and for help in narrowing the gap between international standards and the practices common in his country. Ms Hussein pointed out that Egypt’s challenges went beyond economic problems. In her view, the entire system needed a change to achieve social justice. Mr Khedim stated that the developed world should not encourage corruption or the flight of capital. Turning to the ILO, he felt that pressure could be put on the governments concerned regarding trade union rights, and that the ILO could train workers to defend their rights. Ms Abdullah expressed the hope that the international community would keep a vigilant eye on the aid provided to her country to ensure that it reached those who needed it.
6. Much discussion concerned the role of new mass media in mobilizing young people. Mr Cherif stated that the Internet made information sharing easy and that information sharing was fundamental to the revolution. Ms Abdullah added that in Yemen, other forms of media, such as television, had helped the revolution to spread across the country. Ms Hussein stated that, while the social media had aided the revolution, they were not the driving force behind it.
7. The panel ended with a discussion of what could be the main messages of the panellists for global youth. Mr Khedim called for young people to carry on the fight to achieve their goals and not to give up. Ms Hussein agreed, and stated that such a fight should be aimed at inequality and corruption. Mr Cherif stressed that young people needed to fight for decent work and social justice. Ms Abdullah asserted that young people needed to continue to fight for freedom, and urged the international community to take notice of the atrocities that were still occurring in Yemen.
8. At the end of the panel discussion, the Government member of Egypt stated his opinion that Ms Hussein had provided incorrect information with regard to the state of freedom of association and minimum wage policy in Egypt.

## **Panel 1B. “Global youth: Leading change”**

9. Panel 1B was held on 9 June 2011 and moderated by Ms Jacki Davis of the European Policy Centre. It addressed a number of challenges facing young people across the world following the worst economic crisis since the 1930s and against the backdrop of uprisings

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across the Arab world. In particular, what were the biggest challenges for young people and how could they be given hope? How important was it to enable young people to actively contribute to resolving issues that affected them and what else could be done to involve them in that process? What help did young people want and need from the international community and, in particular, from the ILO? What could be the most effective ways to build bridges among young people around the world?

- 10.** The panellists were Ms Monique Coleman, UN Youth Champion, United States; Ms Alanda Kariza, author and activist, Indonesia; Mr Octavio Rubio Rengifo, Department of Young Workers, General Confederation of Workers, Colombia; and Mr Roberto Suárez Santos, Director of International and European Social Department, Confederation of Employers' Organizations, Spain.
- 11.** The panellists identified a number of challenges facing young people. Ms Coleman stated that the biggest issue for young people today was access to information and resources. However, in her travels around the world as the UN Youth Champion she did not sense any feeling of hopelessness among young people. The greatest problem facing the international community was, in her view, the distinction that was often drawn between young people and everyone else; the fact of the matter was that the young needed the wisdom of the old, and the old needed the energy of the young. Ms Kariza asserted that young people faced a lack of opportunity, but that in the post-1998 crisis, Indonesian young people were not afraid of speaking up. Mr Rubio Rengifo asserted that the fundamental issue concerning youth was unemployment, and stressed the importance of implementing practical programmes and projects that could prepare young people to enter the labour market. Mr Suárez Santos also pointed at unemployment as a challenge. He stressed that in Spain now, as in the 1990s, people felt no satisfaction in return for their investment in education and training.
- 12.** There was a discussion on how young people could be made to feel included in the decision-making process, including in traditional institutions such as workers' and employers' organizations. Ms Coleman asserted that young people needed more than to simply "feel" included. She stressed that open dialogue and authenticity on the part of both young people and employers was essential. She noted that authenticity became harder with age. Ms Kariza added that it was crucial for governments to have platforms that were accessible to young people, and that it was important not only to connect, but for older generations to provide guidance. By commenting on the question of whether or not the issue of the perceived decline of youth involvement in trade unions could be resolved, Mr Rubio Rengifo stressed that legislation in many regions often made it difficult or impossible for young people to become unionized. At the same time, he emphasized the importance of trade unions to move forward and reach out to people in the informal sector and to unemployed people. Mr Suárez Santos added that young people were not apathetic, but rather apolitical. Institutions had to be changed from the inside and needed to learn how to draw young people in.
- 13.** A number of ways in which the international community, and the ILO in particular, could support global youth were suggested by the panellists. Mr Suárez Santos stated that the ILO had to be an organization which helped develop business and companies by creating a climate for enterprise development. Mr Rubio Rengifo added that the ILO's role was to exert pressure in order to have policies implemented which were conducive to development. Ms Kariza requested that the ILO help make opportunities available in her region, adding that the key issue for her was better education and more choices in education. She also remarked that the ILO should help foster a spirit of entrepreneurship in Indonesia, where only an estimated 0.1 per cent of the population were entrepreneurs. Ms Coleman expressed the wish for international organizations to be more open to new ideas, in particular ideas related to social business.

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- 14.** The panellists looked at a number of ways to build bridges among young people around the world to enable young people to help each other. Ms Coleman stressed that young people had always been revolutionary, organized themselves, and built communities, whether through social media or by using other means. She advocated a more integrated approach, and called on leaders to listen to the concerns expressed by young people. She stressed that even though problems facing young people might be different around the world, raising awareness of the problems was an important first step towards addressing them. Ms Kariza elaborated on the annual Indonesian Youth Conference and on the fact that each year the conference organizers invited many leaders to allow the concerns of young people to be heard by other actors in society, which could lead to dialogue addressing those concerns. She also stressed the importance for young people to believe in themselves and in their dreams. Young people had to be confident and able to make the right choices and then take responsibility. Mr Rubio Rengifo underlined the importance of sharing experiences to tackle common problems such as youth unemployment or migration. Another critical point was to ensure that different organizations dealing with the same issues were brought together, as there was too much fragmentation in dealing with those issues. An integrated approach was needed, as well as dialogue among the different organizations.
- 15.** The moderator concluded the panel discussion by asking each of the panellists about their top priority for the UN General Assembly High-level Meeting on Youth in July (part of the International Year of Youth), to enable young people to lead change and be empowered to do so. Mr Suárez Santos responded that the key feature of young people was their capacity for innovation and risk-taking. The challenge was therefore how to give young people more opportunities to acquire experience so that they would enjoy good prospects for the future, be innovative and contribute to society. Mr Rubio Rengifo was of the opinion that more social dialogue on the topic of youth was needed. He stressed, however, that young people should not only be the subject of social dialogue but should be encouraged to participate actively in social dialogue and have their voices heard and taken into account. He also emphasized that the topic of youth was linked to many other areas in the world of work and therefore required an integrated approach. Ms Kariza stressed the need to improve the educational system as well as the opportunities for young people to learn, acquire training and gain experience. Ms Coleman commended the United Nations for all its efforts on youth in terms of proclaiming 2010 the International Year of Youth, the many activities undertaken and the convening of the UN General Assembly High-level Meeting on Youth. She concluded by stating that young people should know that it was not the first time in history that young people were facing many difficulties, and that lessons could be learned from past experiences, while looking towards solutions for the future.



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