

**Statement by Mr Mohamed Khaled KHIARI, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the UN at the Panel on youth employment crisis;
A call for action (New York, 30 May 2013).**

Thank you Mme Moderator for giving me the floor to comment on the recent findings of the 2013 ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth and shed some lights on the Tunisian experience; challenges and partnerships in the promotion of youth employment.

We are pleased to co-sponsor this panel which provides a unique opportunity for both panelists and participants to explain and react to the policy measures contained in the ILO call for action as well as highlight specific challenges for countries experiencing high incidence of youth employment and sharing good practices in dealing with the issue.

Before that we'd like to express our appreciation to the ILO for its dedication to the issue of employment. We've been delighted to work closely with the permanent Mission of Germany and ILO's office in New York, under the guidance of Ambassador Peter Wittig and Ambassador Telma Viale, in order to make this event successful. We're also pleased to welcome Mr José Manuel Zalazar, Assistant Director General at the ILO and Mr Ahmad Alhindawi, Secretary- General's Envoy on Youth. The level and quality of panelists are indicative to the importance we all attach to the issues and challenges we want to address.

Dear Participants,

The findings of the recently launched ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013 estimated the global youth unemployment rate at 12.6 % in 2013, with About 73 million young people that are estimated to be unemployed in 2013. This number will be much higher if we add non decent and low quality jobs.

The depth and nature of the youth unemployment crisis differs across regions. The Middle East and North Africa region witnesses a very special situation with the highest youth unemployment rate of all regions. The youth unemployment rate in North Africa is very high, at 23.7 per cent in 2012. This rate is estimated at 28.3 % in the Middle East and is projected to increase gradually to 30.0 % in 2018 according to last ILO estimates. Unlike other regions, there's a disproportion between the level of education and the opportunity to find a decent job. College graduates in Tunisia and in North Africa are experiencing much more difficulties finding jobs comparing to people having primary or secondary education level. There's a saying among Tunisian youth which over the years has been unfortunately widely endorsed by young generation that "there's no opportunity for future decent job regardless of whether or not you're an educated job seeker". The economic and social costs of this alarming situation for young people continue to rise and undermine economies' growth and political stability. Therefore, we believe that an urgent action is needed to address this crisis both nationally and at the global level.

Let me now move to my presentation related to the Tunisian experience; challenges and partnerships in the promotion of youth employment.

The youth unemployment crisis is considered as one of the main factors that contributed to the revolution of freedom and dignity in 2011. During the revolution against the former president, protesters were claiming, among other things, their rights for a decent employment and acceptable living conditions. Two years later, Unemployment in particular among university graduates remains the main problem faced by Tunisia in the short and medium term: The unemployment graduate rate is very high, it rose from 4% in 1994 to over 25% in 2012 (in the US, this level is only about 5%). The overall unemployment rate is also high and has continued to increase since 2005 to reach 13% at the end of 2010- the year of the revolution-and stabilize at 16.7% at end of 2012, due inter alia the negative cyclical events that took place after the revolution as well as the consequences of the Libyan revolution.

Today, two years after the revolution, in addition to the political challenge, Tunisia should address two structural and inter-related economic and social challenges whose resolution is a prerequisite for the stability and success of the current democratic political transition. The First challenge consists of the youth unemployment. It has reached a record level during the last years and should therefore be reduced quickly to restore hope to Tunisian youth. The Second important challenge has to do with the economic and social disparities among regions within the country. These disparities should be reduced including by encouraging a better distribution of wealth.

In the short term, The Tunisian government has designed an emergency program to stimulate the creation of new jobs, develop entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise, save the current threatened jobs and improve the employability of job seekers assets.

Besides the urgent action mentioned above, the government sought to lay the foundations that will ensure the development of a comprehensive, sustainable and balanced national employment strategy with a view of helping Tunisia to conduct in-depth structural reforms, in the coming years, in order to build an operational policy based on the following themes:

- Develop integrated policies focused on employment,
- Directing effort towards the production sectors that create job opportunities,
- Strengthening the capacity of the private sector to create intensive and decent jobs with high value-added,
- Development of skilled labor,
- Improve the functioning of the labor market and its governance

In addition, the government has signed a social contract with the private sector and the labor unions; designed to the enhance concerted efforts of all parties with a view to boosting the economy and providing a decent life and work for all Tunisians.

As a result to these actions, the unemployment rate fell in the end of year 2012 compared to 2011 by 2.2 points to reach 16.7% at the end of 2012 compared to 18.9% the end of the year 2011.

Besides these actions, the most important challenge in the medium and long term is to develop economic activities with high added value in order to increase the capacity of the economy to create jobs for graduates of higher education and reduce unemployment. **Solve the unemployment through a structural transformation, which includes changing the structure of current production, dominated by intensive sectors in low-skilled labor, constitutes the challenge at the medium and long run.**

In this regard, there's a need that the national efforts and strategies to achieve this structural transformation which could generate decent jobs for university graduates be supported by partners through international cooperation in several means of implementation including migration, technology transfer, trade and increased FDI.

In the same vein, and aiming to increase the global awareness about the youth unemployment crisis and the need for an urgent action at the global level to further promote the international cooperation in addressing these challenges; the Permanent Mission Tunisia has fostered the enhancement of the central role of employment in the global agenda, by taking several actions at the United Nations; first by initiating the call for a global strategy on youth employment, which has been adopted by several High level UN documents, such as the outcome of the 2011 high level meeting on youth and the Rio+20 outcome which both recognized the need for a global strategy on youth employment to address youth unemployment crisis at all levels. Currently the issue of full employment and decent work for all is at the agenda of the next meeting of the Open Working group on Sustainable development goals and we're looking forward to a productive discussion next meeting.

Secondly; the permanent Mission of Tunisia has taken a joint action with the permanent mission of Germany, in order to publish the 2012 ILO Call for Action, which represents a set of effective policies for action at the country level, as a document of the General Assembly (A/67/796), with the intention of underlining the urgency for immediate and targeted interventions, at the country level, to tackle the youth employment crisis, either in terms of quantity and quality of jobs. And in this regard, we are pleased to co-sponsor this panel which provides a unique opportunity for both panelists and participants to explain and react to the policy measures contained in the ILO call for action as well as highlight specific challenges for countries experiencing high incidence of youth employment and sharing good practices in dealing with the issue.

Thank you