



Press Release

Rabat, 14th December 2011

North Africa Development Forum

The Tunis Declaration :

Youth participation must become a patent indicator of development

Three days of intense activities, exchange, frank and lively discussions marked the third edition of the North Africa Development Forum that was held in Tunis from 8-10 December 2011 and was devoted to the theme "Youth, actors of development in North Africa" , as this year is the International year for youth.

Never shall a public venue witness as much excitement and excitation as the place where the Forum was held and whose rooms and corridors will long remember the voices of the young and the old, and the echoes of their discussions that were sometimes passionate, sometimes serene and accomplices. According to all, the Forum has achieved its goal: to bring together views and positions, and build consensus on the best ways and means to promote the active participation of young people in the development process in North Africa, while focusing on the most vulnerable categories among them.

At the end of the proceedings, a final Declaration was adopted which summed up the spirit of the Forum and its major recommendations. This Declaration is meant to be a roadmap for young people and their associations in the first place - but also for governments, political and economic actors, civil society, the media, as well as development partners - to renew their commitment to promote the rights of youth. It is also a call to deploy every effort to expand for youth the participatory space that is rightfully theirs in any development process.

In her closing remarks, Ms. Karima Bounemra, Director of the ECA North Africa Office, noted that "by involving youth in decision-making, governments meet the challenge of participatory democracy and lay the foundation for a just and equitable society, in which young people, without distinction of sex or age, can draw upon their creative potential and dynamics."

The Tunis Declaration, a joint effort of the young people themselves, called for increased youth leadership regardless of gender, and urged to promote their effective participation in the political, economic and social arena. It recommended notably to deploy additional efforts to achieve more progress towards gender equality by encouraging the participation of young women in decision making at all levels. The Declaration noted emphatically that youth participation should be recognized as a development objective and all stakeholders should ensure that budgets are allocated for this purpose.

Another aspect that the Tunis Declaration highlighted is the need to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to make their action more effective and optimal so as to promote the role and the rights of adolescents and youth. The Declaration also called for increasing opportunities for exchange and dialogue between young people and politicians in the region.

Likewise, youth employment was also one of the major aspects underlined by the Tunis Declaration, adding that further efforts were needed and expected from governments and the private sector, in order to tailor education programs in compliance with the reality and the needs of the labour market on the one hand, and create more opportunities for youth, while promoting green and sustainable jobs, on the other hand.

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Furthermore, youth sexual and reproductive health rights, their participation in sustainable development and regional integration, as well as networking among youth organizations, the role of the media to raise awareness and bring about change, were all issues that the Tunis Declaration emphasized and focused upon. The same applies to the civil society, which, as recommended by the Declaration, should also stimulate a new meaning to youth participation in voluntary activity and community work.

The Forum was organized by the North Africa Office of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, in close collaboration with UNICEF, ISESCO, UNFPA, UNDP, UNESCO, UNIDO and UMA. It brought together nearly 150 youth and other participants from various backgrounds who came from the seven countries in the region (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan, Tunisia), and various national, regional and international, organizations. Together, they discussed youth related issues and what should be the participation of youth in development, as actors in their own right.

The Forum was an opportunity for the ECA North Africa Office and its partners to give youth a voice, a voice made more urgent given the recent events that occurred in the region and the dynamics they have engendered. The Tunis Declaration made them become more vocal and allowed them to reflect on their needs and expectations, but also on the responsibilities that they themselves must assume, within the framework of a coordinated and responsible review of youth policies by all development actors at all levels. This review is needed now to prepare youth in a concrete and practical way to anchor and undertake the transformational process that awaits the region.