



**Employment for Stability and Socio-Economic Progress in North
Africa: Stakeholders' and Development Partners' Conference**

Opening Remarks

by

Mr Charles Dan

Regional Director for Africa

Cairo, 18 April 2012

Your Excellency the Minister of Manpower and Migration of Egypt;

Honourable Ministers;

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and UN Representatives;

Dear Representative of the League of Arab States;

Dear Representative of the Arab Labour Organization;

Dear Representatives of the ILO's Tripartite Constituents;

Dear Directors of the ILO Decent Work Team in Cairo and ILO Office in Algiers;

Dear Colleagues;

Dear Friends,

Bonjour,

Good afternoon,

Salaam aleikuom,

I am honoured to be here today, among constituents and development partners, to continue our joint journey of advancing stability and socio-economic progress in North Africa.

Thank you so much, Honourable Minister, Mr Fathy Fikry, for welcoming, on behalf of the Government of Egypt, this important event in Cairo. Please convey our respect and gratitude to the Prime Minister of Egypt, His Excellency, Mr Kamal Ganzouri.

May I express my highest consideration to the Honourable Ministers from across North Africa who are here with us. Your presence is a great demonstration of your governments' commitment to the Decent Work approach towards stability and growth in North Africa.

We are privileged to have with us the League of Arab States and the Arab Labor Organization. I firmly believe that the close partnership between our organizations has better equipped us to be at the service of our tripartite constituents in the region.

I acknowledge the presence of our social partners, representatives of employers and workers who play a critical role in promoting inclusiveness and dialogue in the region.

And, I would like to pay a special tribute to the Ambassadors and representatives of the diplomatic community, development partners and UN organisations who are present here. Thank you for your confidence.

We are today in Cairo for a great cause: To promote, together, a new era of social justice in North Africa.

People's protests in the region have been echoed across the world. They reflect an urgent and impatient call for a decent life – for a better future.

To respond to this call, to respond to this impatience, let me highlight today three policy priorities:

First, promoting efficient and sustainable growth:

For growth to be sustainable, it must be efficient and broadly shared. Public policies have to create an environment that allows all segments of the population to contribute to, and benefit from economic growth through productive and decent work.

Such a conducive environment requires:

- Making full employment a priority macroeconomic target in itself;
- Promoting universal ratification and effective application of fundamental principles and rights at work; and
- Establishing well designed social protection systems, including social protection floors.

Second, fostering fairness and equality for youth in the labour market:

Everywhere in the world, youth continue to pay a heavy toll to the global economic crisis. What can be done to bring hope to the youth in the labour market?

The voices of the youth themselves need to be fully heard as they call for a fair environment where they enjoy equal opportunities to get a good education and relevant training, and equal opportunities to compete for quality jobs.

In addition, priority attention should be paid to:

- A sectoral approach to youth employment creation;
- A conducive environment for youth entrepreneurship, including in the social economy;
- Collective bargaining leading to fair and inclusive wage systems.

Third, building social trust and solidarity:

More than ever, we need to build social trust through social dialogue. We need to foster democratic governance through tripartism, freedom of association and collective bargaining.

I am proud that we have established, based on a sense of global solidarity, firm and fruitful partnerships to advance the Decent Work Agenda in North Africa.

I wish to acknowledge the tremendous support from the Governments of Canada, Norway, Australia, the United States, Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Spain, Italy, as well as the European Commission amongst others, in this collective effort.

Let me give you some examples of our interventions and activities at national level:

- In March last year, the ILO's Director-General, Mr Juan Somavia, undertook a mission to Egypt to identify needs and pledge ILO's support to the reform. Together with our development partners, we have been able to build a substantial portfolio of technical cooperation projects to address critical issues of youth employment, social dialogue, working conditions, rights at work and gender equality.
- On 30 March this year, the ILO signed an agreement with the European Union and the Government of Tunisia to create jobs through labour-intensive investments; to facilitate the reintegration of jobless youth; and boost local economic development in five Tunisian provinces.
- In Morocco, the ILO is supporting employment creation for youth through fostering youth entrepreneurship.
- In Algeria, the ILO is also promoting productive employment and decent work for youth, particularly for young women.
- In Libya, the ILO is committed to assisting the national recovery process through offering support to human resource development, capacity-building and participatory development. And, the ILO stands ready to support the employers and workers of Libya set up free and independent organizations.

North Africa represents a bridge of cultures, ideas and creativity. The countries of the sub-region face similar experiences and similar challenges. They enjoy a special geographical and political significance, being at the crossroads of the Arab World, Africa and Europe.

This fact puts a special responsibility on the international community to support youth employment creation and Decent Work for all.

The ILO's strategy on "Employment for Stability and Socio-Economic Progress in North Africa" is part of meeting this responsibility. The strategy is grounded on priorities that we have identified together, through draft Decent Work Country Programmes and national road maps for recovery and decent work.

Today, our common vision is clear: Employment, social protection, rights and voice for all women and men in the region.

Today, our common response is clear: Building on the strengths of the region, acknowledging its dynamic and young population, its vast natural resources and large regional market.

And today, our common ambition is clear: Offering the people of North Africa productive opportunities; and giving the youth hope for the future through decent work for all.

Thank you for your attention.