Empowering a Global Generation of Young People

ILO Director-General calls on the world’s governments, workers and employers to build on the areas of training and education for youth that will unleash the potential for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, and thus best serve the needs of communities and the planet.

Statement | Paris, France | 08 December 2015

Dear colleagues and friends,

I am delighted to join you in this event that puts at centre stage the youth who represent both the present and future of humanity, as we face the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development.

Can I start this conversation with two main messages.

The first is that climate and youth unemployment are related and very pressing crises, and need to be addressed in a coordinated manner.

The reality of today’s world, for many young women and men, is a lack of adequate employment opportunities, while the future is threatened by climate change.

Let me just give you a few numbers. Global unemployment levels currently exceed 200 million. But what is really alarming is that 74.5 million youth are unemployed today – in other words youth are three times more likely than other parts of the work force to be unemployed. Young people are at the sharp end of the labour market.

So this is a basic issue of generational fairness and social justice. Although youth are not responsible for the climate crisis of today, unfortunately, unless decisive action is taken urgently, you will be bearing most of the burden now and in the future.

And that is why we need to find integrated responses to these pressing, yet connected challenges of youth employment and climate change. And to do so effectively will require that governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations’ come together to collectively think about policies, strategies and actions within their respective roles and responsibilities, because finding solutions requires that youth be empowered and enabled to make use of their talent, creativity, dynamism, and spirit of innovation and of entrepreneurship to bring about the responses that we need.

I think we’ve all understood very well that young people will not stand by and just be the objects of policy responses. Young generations will not be, passively, at the receiving end of climate solutions; they will, and have to be, the architects of those solutions as well.
And my second message is that enabling young women and men to respond to climate change requires policies most specifically in the fields of education, training and skills building.

Strengthening our education and training systems to bridge the gap between the skills we have and the skills we need seems to me an absolute priority if we are to ensure a sustainable and just transition to low carbon societies.

The ILO’s own work on youth employment has demonstrated that with adequate support, talented young women and men can not only find decent work but can also create decent work through their own enterprises, and in that way generate employment opportunities for others. Let me give you just three examples.

A Youth Entrepreneurship Facility just completed in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda supported the creation of job opportunities for young people through entrepreneurship development in renewable energies, waste management, agriculture and other sectors of particular importance to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

In Central America and the Dominican Republic, one of our projects has provided technical support to the regional network of technical and vocational education institutions helping develop learning standards and curricula for green occupations.

In Bangladesh the training of solar technicians provided employment and income opportunities for young men and women, contributing to creating a skilled work force for the deployment of clean energy systems in that country.

With education, with technical skills and business development services, millions of young people can become leaders who will drive the clean energy revolution, transform agriculture and bring green innovation also in industrial sectors.

So, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

As we look to the future, it is imperative that governments, workers, employers come together to build on the areas of training and education that will unleash the potential for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship that will best serve the needs of our communities, and of the planet.

In all of this it seems to me of fundamental importance that youth is given a place in designing policies and in decision-making – and need to be not just passive but active members of those processes.

Thank you.