

[RESENDING]

For Immediate Release



Arab youth, key drivers of Arab development and democratization

Issam Fares Institute-American University of Beirut and UNICEF launch new report on youth in the Middle East and North Africa

Beirut, Lebanon- 19/11/2011 – Young men and women in the Arab world have faced numerous constraints and inequities over the years, significantly contributing to the uprisings that still shake the Middle East and North Africa region, says a new report launched in Beirut today.

A Generation on the Move: Insights into the conditions, aspirations and activism of Arab youth is produced by the Issam Fares Institute-American University of Beirut, with the support of UNICEF. It is the result of a two-year partnership that also drew on the collaboration of over 50 scholars across the region and abroad, in order to better understand the conditions and worldviews of youth in the MENA region.

“We are pleased to have partnered with UNICEF to better understand the issues that young Arabs are concerned about, along with their aspirations for greater rights and opportunities in building a better Arab world,” IFI Director Rami G. Khouri noted. “When we started researching this issue, young Arabs were largely passive and apolitical; today, they have sparked and manned one of the most important historical transformations anywhere in the world in modern history. We hope this report sheds light on why this happened, and why our societies must continue to focus on the grievances of young people that continue to define their lives in most cases.”

Young people between the ages of 15-24 represent nearly one fifth of the population of the Middle East and North Africa, representing the largest youth cohort in the history of the region. While today’s young men and women are more educated than previous generations, educational quality is poor and this generation of young people faces diminishing opportunities to secure good jobs, access housing, achieve financial independence, and start their families. Countries in MENA have largely failed to adapt their economic, social, and political institutions to the changes brought by the unprecedented numbers of young people as they transition into adulthood.

“The region is going through a transition offering a demographic dividend we can reap, if sufficient and timely investments are made for the positive development of young people,” said Shahida Azfar, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North

Africa. "Arab countries today must place youth issues at the heart of their public agendas and national development processes."

The result of intensive research and consultations, the report argues that understanding the mind-set of young men and women across the region provides a window into the challenges that Arab societies are facing today, and into the current events affecting them and their societies. The report suggests priority areas for further research, policy analysis and new interventions. A key finding of the report is that the constraints and inequities that young people have faced for years are the main driving force behind their rebellions and demands for real change.

Two issues are particularly prominent in youth's calls for reform: the need to enjoy the full rights they are entitled to as citizens, and the need to have their voices heard within the family, the community and the decision-making process.

A deeper, more comprehensive knowledge of the issues affecting youth, the report concludes, is a key step toward harnessing the energy, talent and commitment with which they can contribute to their countries' development.

"The future of the region lies with its youth. Concerted efforts by all are crucial if this future generation is to fulfill its aspirations," Azfar said.

About Issam Fares Institute: The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut harnesses the policy-related research of AUB's internationally respected faculty in order to raise the quality of public policy-related debate and decision-making in the Arab World and abroad, and enhance the Arab World's input into international affairs by enriching the quality of interaction among scholars, officials and civil society actors. It funds and manages research projects, hosts lectures, workshops and conferences, and publishes a range of materials on issues such as youth, climate change and the environment, Arab-international affairs, and Palestinian refugee camps.

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Note to Editors

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Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty

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