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For Immediate Release

## Youth Employment in the Arab States

*ILO and FES meeting aims to raise awareness on the urgency of promoting decent work for youth.*

**Beirut (ILO/FES News)** – A two-day expert meeting was jointly organized by the *International Labour Organization (ILO)* and *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)* in Beirut on 12-13 March 2012 in order to take stock of the existing knowledge on youth employment, and to review practical solutions to the current deficits of decent work for youth in the MENA region.

The meeting brought together participants including government, workers' and employers' representatives, researchers, youth organizations, and other relevant stakeholders from Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, occupied Palestinian territory, Yemen, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Morocco, Tunisia, and Sudan.

"We have seen Arab youth's aspirations for more freedom, decent jobs, equality and social justice. Their demands are shared by most Arab people. Underlying these demands are significant developmental failures, including the nexus of unemployment, poverty, inequality and the deficit of democratic governance and social dialogue", said Ms. Nada Al Nashif, Regional Director – ILO Regional Office for Arab States, in her opening speech.

Mr. Samir Farah, FES Representative in Lebanon, said "The unemployment rates in the Arab region are the highest globally, according to the Arab Labour Organization. There is an urgent need for more and better jobs, and for targeted actions in the education and skills development sector in order to increase productivity and jobs quality".

The main issues of discussion centred on youth employment in the Arab region, including decent work and youth expectations; the role of skills in a context of low labour demand; the economic and social costs of migration; solutions for more social justice; and empowerment strategies to ensure youth voices in policy making. The meeting was structured around the following six panels:

**Panel 1:** We will not be a lost generation. Youth employment in the Arab region - getting the facts right.

**Panel 2:** We have the skills, where are the jobs? Skills project and programmes where there is no labour demand.

**Panel 3:** Should I take any job? Youth expectations and decent work.

**Panel 4:** Is going abroad my only option? - The double edged sword of migration.

**Panel 5:** ... after Tahrir, back to business as usual? - Paths and solutions towards more jobs and more social justice.

**Panel 6:** Does anyone listen after a year? - The enduring power of gerontocracies versus youth empowerment.

Panellists presented the concerns of the youth in Arab region and participants exchanged views and shared good practices on youth employment policies and programmes from within and outside the region. They also developed networks and explored partnerships for addressing youth issues in the Arab region.

The next steps agreed upon as a result of the meeting were to work jointly on a future report on Youth Employment for the global discussions of the International Labour Conference 2012, to document good practices in order to facilitate upsacing of isolated initiatives, and to set up a Community of Practice to continue to exchange on what works best in the Arab world to tackle Youth Employment issues.

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