

**Speech at the Pacific Summit and Policy Dialogue on Youth
Entrepreneurship by Mr. Donglin LI, ILO Director for the
Pacific Island Countries**

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Chair, Fiji Young Entrepreneurs Council (YEC)

Representatives from Government, Employers and Youth participants

Ladies and gentlemen.

Very good morning to all of you. I am very honoured to be here among you at this event and very pleased to see such a wide participated gathering of youth from different countries on this occasion. I am thankful to the SPC, PYC and Commonwealth Secretariat for co-organising this important Dialogue.

ILO, as a specialized agency of UN, seeks the promotion of social justice and fundamental principles and rights since its inception in 1919. The primary goal

of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

Achieving decent work for youth is a challenge shared by all countries across the world these days. As per ILO estimates, more than 200 million people are unemployed worldwide, including nearly 80 million youth. There are 40 Million new comers to the labour market every year. The global youth unemployment rate stood at about 13 per cent. On average, young women and men are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than adults.

In Asia and the Pacific today young women and men between the ages 15 and 24 years accounts for 18% of region's population but 44% of the unemployed, 3.5 times more likely than adults to be unemployed. Their potential is not being fully realized because they lack access to productive and decent work.

Youth unemployment rate is 23% in the Pacific, some countries even more than 50%.

The implications of this reality are clear: most young people will not land jobs in Government or with large companies, despite their overwhelming intentions to do so, most young people will need to become entrepreneurs, whether by choice or by lack of other options, to realise their potential, innovation, and aspiration.

What does it take to be a successful entrepreneur? Of course, it takes a good education, sound business ideas backed by strong business plans, connections, energy and a positive spirit. Also an enabling environment is important for accessing to finance facilities, training opportunities, information and market and policies that incentivise start up and expansion.

It also takes an environment where the culture of entrepreneurship is fostered at school and where the notion of becoming an entrepreneur is presented as the option.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To address the Youth Employment Crisis, the International Labour Conference and its 185 member countries agreed on a resolution, a ‘call for Action’ in 2012. This Call for Action specifically addresses the way forward and out of the crisis with the following recommendations:

1. Designing Employment and economic policies that place jobs first
2. Enhancing Education, Training & Skills and facilitating the school-to-work transition
3. Promoting Labour Market Policies
4. Encouraging Entrepreneurship and self-employment
5. Enhancing the rights for young people
6. Confirming ILO action – with advocacy, technical cooperation and knowledge

The 4th recommendation that I mentioned is indeed encouraging entrepreneurship and self-employment. Clearly, micro, small and medium-sized businesses are the drivers of new jobs, and behind every enterprise lies the spirit and imagination of an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurship strengthens economic growth, speeds up modernization and can play a crucial role in spurring sustainable development and generating decent jobs.

The ILO has provided extensive support toward enhancing young people understanding of Entrepreneurship, including with the roll out of its ‘Start Your Business’ (SYB) and “Know About Business” (KAB) modules in many countries

of the region, in view to developing awareness in schools and vocational training centres.

The ILO is also supporting the young entrepreneurs to be part of the national private sector organization, utilising its national platform to come together to network, to share ideas and best practices, more importantly to be able to influence policy development affecting youth and young entrepreneurs to be more conducive for them to grow. The ILO's most recent support to countries has been the establishment of Young Entrepreneurs Councils (YEC) within the Employers' or National Private Sector Organisations.

I am happy to announce that YEC Fiji and Vanuatu are operational and YEC Solomon Island and Tonga are almost operational. It is our objective to expand this initiative to other countries in the future.

In this respect, I would like to acknowledge the partnership of the Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Youth Council (PYC) and the Pacific Leadership Programme (PLP) in this initiative. ILO will continue to work with our pacific partners, providing support and assistance for the establishment of the YEC and to strengthen its capacity to represent the voice and interest of youth entrepreneurs and to provide value services. ILO will continue working with its constituents to pursue its Decent Work Agenda, thus creating greater employment opportunities for youth in the Pacific.

Thank you for your attention.