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Education and training for sustainable development: the Consultation Forum for the private sector, socio-professional organizations and civil society opens in Tunis

Tunis, 18 May 2011. The ADEA Consultation Forum for the private sector, socio-professional organizations and NGOs was opened today by the Hon. Saïd Aïdi, Minister of Employment and Vocational Training of Tunisia. The purpose of the Forum, organized as part of the preparations for the 2011 ADEA Triennale, is to consult stakeholders who have a paramount role to play in the design and development of education and training systems: the private sector, socio-professional organizations and civil society.

The Triennale is the world's leading conference on education and training in Africa. In 2011, it will address the theme "Promoting critical knowledge, skills and qualifications for sustainable development in Africa: how to design and implement effective education and training systems?" It will be held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 27 November to 2 December 2011.

In his speech, ADEA Executive Secretary Ahlin Byll-Cataria highlighted the importance of ADEA's ongoing work in preparation for the 2011 Triennale, in the light of current political events. He spoke of the challenge facing Tunisia, the host country of the Forum, where the problem of employment and integration into society and the workforce for young people was a major factor that triggered the revolution of 14 January, as well as the heavy responsibility incumbent on the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training, whose task it is to respond quickly and effectively to the demand emanating from hundreds of thousands of young people who want immediate solutions to their problem of employment and integration.

Mr. Byll-Cataria stressed that the challenges facing African countries as regards access to relevant, good-quality education and training can under no circumstances be met by the public sector alone. "Through this consultation, we wish to analyze the lessons learned by the private sector and civil society and reflect on the reforms that should be undertaken, so that they meet the needs of society and the economy and make a real contribution to the occupational, economic, social, political and cultural integration of young people and adults in their respective environments", he declared.

The Hon. Saïd Aïdi, Tunisia's Minister of Employment and Vocational Training, emphasized the importance of the Forum's outcomes for African countries, particularly Tunisia, which has serious

employment problems and high unemployment that are largely due to problems in the education and training system. He noted that Tunisia suffers from lack of coordination between secondary, vocational and higher education; a general higher education system that focuses on quantity to the detriment of quality; and the mismatch between training and jobs, which is due to lack of interaction with the business world.

Mr. Aïdi described the measures taken by his government to deal with these problems, notably the identification of and attribution of priority to six areas with high employment potential: tourism in disadvantaged areas; energy savings and renewable energy sources; improvement of governance and competitiveness; development of the agri-food industry; skill-building in the health sector, particularly paramedical personnel; and investment in information and communication technology. Emphasis will also be given to developing “soft skills” and to creating a status of civil service internship to help young people excluded from the workforce.

These efforts are being made jointly with a variety of stakeholders, taking care not to place the public sector in opposition to the private and NGO sectors, and with the aim of establishing training tracks that meet the needs of the economy.

The Forum organized by ADEA is currently taking place in Tunis, from 18 to 20 May 2011. It is attended by some 50 participants, including African entrepreneurs, small and medium-sized enterprises operating in Africa, professional associations and organizations, employer and trade associations, chambers of commerce, NGOs, unions, and members of the African diaspora who invest in Africa.

Over the next three days, the Forum will explore ways of enhancing the involvement of the private sector and civil society, particularly to cope with the problems of youth employment and integration into the workforce. The Forum is expected to issue strong statements on strategies for an effective response by education and training systems, the development of public-private partnerships and cooperation to promote sustainable development, responses to the challenges facing civil society in its efforts to promote access and equity in the training system, and the development of partnerships between local and international NGOs and the private sector.

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