



Republic of Tunisia

Check Against Delivery

Address by Mr. Samir LABIDI

Minister of Youth, Sports and Physical Education

at

**the opening ceremony of
the International Year of Youth**



United Nations Headquarters, August 12th 2010

Mr. Secretary General,

Ms. Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,



I would like, first of all, to express my happiness to be present here at the headquarters of the United Nations, and to meet with personalities, institutions and young people who, through their contributions, have enriched the United Nations approach to youth affairs in the world. Tunisia is indeed honored to address you from this rostrum on this great day which marks the inauguration of the “International Year of Youth”.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and high regard to **Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations**, for his kind invitation to Tunisia to participate in this opening session, for the commendable efforts he has been exerting to serve peace and security in the world, and for all he has done to ensure the success of the “International Year of Youth”. My thanks are also due to the United Nations Organization, to all member States, and to regional and international organizations, for having supported Tunisia’s proposal to proclaim **2010 an “International Year of Youth”**. This proposal is, in fact, one of several other initiatives that were previously launched by Tunisia, and that won the unanimous support of the United Nations, concerning, in particular, the establishment of the **World Solidarity Fund (2002)**, and the promotion of the **right of youth to practice sports and physical education (2003)**.

In this context, I would like to thank **Dr. Ali Abdessalam Triki, President of the United Nations General Assembly, and H.E. Ambassador Jean Sylvestre Zinsou, Permanent Representative of Benin**, and coordinator of the “International Year of Youth”, for the sustained efforts they have both exerted and the intensive consultations

they have conducted with all the concerned parties to ensure the success of this important global event.

I am pleased to inform you that on the same day you inaugurate the “International Year of Youth” at the headquarters of the United Nations, a large youth ceremony is being held in the Carthage Amphitheater in Tunis, under the high patronage of **President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia**, with the participation of 10,000 young men and women, to mark the launch of the “International Year of Youth” in all Tunisian cities and villages.

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In Tunisia, youth have a strategic importance in the development policy, and are considered as an active partner in all issues of national concern. The Tunisian legislation has been developed to increase youth participation in public affairs. The voting age and the age for parliamentary candidacy were lowered to 18 and 23 respectively. Dialogue with youth has been adopted as a constant approach for dealing with youth affairs, through the organization, every five years, of a **large youth consultation** aimed at identifying their views, expectations and suggestions. The fourth Youth Consultation is currently being conducted in Tunisia, and its results will be taken into consideration in defining the orientations of the next development plan.

Under the instructions of the Head of State, a **comprehensive Dialogue with Youth was conducted all along the year 2008**. Being open and pluralist, this dialogue involved hundreds of thousands of young people from all social categories, regions and intellectual and political tendencies, and was crowned with the adoption of a **National Youth Pact**.

On the occasion of the “International Year of Youth”, the implementation of the **National Youth Strategy (2009 – 2014)** was launched. This strategy aims at promoting youth life in Tunisia, and

involves all the concerned parties, including civil society and the private sector. Moreover, the national report on youth in Tunisia, submitted each year to the Council of Ministers , offers a regular opportunity to assess the plans and programs targeting youth in all fields.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Based on this rich experience in terms of care for youth, dialogue with youth, and concern for youth issues, and convinced that the future of the world depends on the degree of care offered to youth and on their involvement in the affairs of their country and their world, and keen on involving the international community in materializing this approach, **President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali** called, on November 24, 2008, for proclaiming **2010 an “International Year of Youth”**, and for organizing a **World Youth Conference** as the main activity that marks this global event.

This initiative won large support on the part of member States, after having been presented in various international, regional and sub-regional meetings.

Today, we feel proud of **the UN General Assembly’s adoption, on December 18, 2009, of a resolution proclaiming 2010 an “International Year of Youth”** under the motto **“Dialogue and Mutual Understanding”**.

Following the adoption of this resolution, and keen on ensuring a successful celebration of this major event, Tunisia established a **national commission** that includes different governmental parties, along with representatives of civil society, the private sector and the media. This commission has prepared a rich and varied national program that extends over a full year and covers all cities and villages and all youth sectors. Our country will also host various international and regional youth meetings, workshops and events.

As part of the celebration of the “International Year of Youth”, the first **“Youth Parliament”** was established in Tunisia. Inaugurated last July 25th on the occasion of Republic Day, this parliament is intended to

consolidate youth's ability to assume responsibility, and to promote pluralist dialogue within a climate of democracy and freedom.

The year 2010 also witnessed the enactment of a **law organizing volunteer action**. This law aims at enhancing the sense of beneficial action among Tunisian youth, and encouraging them to be involved in volunteer and solidarity-based action at the national and international levels.

Tunisia has also decided to include **young representatives of both genders** in the national delegations that will participate in the relevant UN meetings, in accordance with the call launched by the United Nations in this regard. This in addition to creating the **UN Youth Association**, so as to spread the culture of the United Nations and anchor its values and principles among young people, and organizing the participation of Tunisian youth delegations in international youth conferences.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In every nation, young people are the most exposed to the impacts of local blunders and international disparities, as these arouse in them feelings of despair and frustration that have the worst consequences on their upbringing and expectations. One of the most flagrant local blunders committed against youth is to neglect their concerns and ambitions, to thrust them in religious, racial or factional conflicts, to fill them with feelings of hatred, rancor and racism, and to take non-calculated decisions that block their prospects and destroy their future.

It is our duty vis-à-vis youth to act, with diligence and determination, to alleviate the tensions and disparities prevailing in our world, and to spare no effort so as to pave for the rising generations the path of security and prosperity.

In this context, **Tunisia expresses, once again, its firm support** to the call launched by the United Nations to the member states, agencies, funds, UN programs and specialized international organizations, to take advantage of the "International Year of Youth". **It considers the**

“International Year of Youth” a propitious opportunity for all the concerned parties to turn to the symbols of vitality and optimism in our societies, namely young men and women, to heighten their interest in the affairs of their world, and to seek the surest path to improve their conditions and fend off the dangers threatening them, away from the accumulated mutual misunderstandings and missed opportunities, through a constructive collective effort that lays the ground for a secure and prosperous future for all humanity.

Nations draw their strength from their youth, and so does the world as a whole. Anytime and anywhere, youth are the bright element of the present and the hope of the future. They are the symbol of all the lofty values that they embrace and that have an impact on their behavior, in the forefront of which the values of freedom, equality, justice, dialogue, tolerance, democracy and human rights.

Today, hope is placed in youth to engage in development and innovation, and to contribute, along with all good-willed forces in the world, to promoting these values and spreading them among all people, **regardless of their nationality, color, culture and religion.** For security and stability in the world can be achieved only through **consensus, coexistence, cooperation and solidarity.**

No doubt, **Tunisia will actively endeavor,** along with all the nations of the world and all the concerned parties, to give a concrete substance to the **motto of the “International Year of Youth”,** and to make **dialogue and mutual understanding a tangible reality in all parts of the globe.**

Thank you for your attention.

