

## Experts Convene in Damascus to Review Policy Priorities for Middle East Youth

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**June 14, 2010 (DAMASCUS)** – The Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings, the Dubai School of Government, and the Development Research Centre at the Syria Trust for Development hosted an expert roundtable meeting in Damascus on June 13 and 14 to identify new and emerging priorities in youth-focused research and policymaking in the region.

In addition to the organizing partners, scholars and practitioners representing key global and regional institutions were present from the World Bank, the Population Council, several United Nations agencies, League of Arab States, as well as from top universities in the United States and the region. The meeting was held at the Danish Institute in Damascus.

Since its inception in 2006, the Middle East Youth Initiative has explored how social, economic, and institutional challenges interact to affect the lives of the region's youth. The Initiative has produced a significant body of foundational research on the state of young people across the region, which is compiled in an edited volume: *Generation in Waiting: The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East* (Brookings Press, 2009). Recently the Initiative has partnered with Silatech on the *Taqeem* program, which has initiated a series of impact evaluations of youth programs in Yemen and has documented the emerging landscape of social entrepreneurship and social investment in the Middle East.

The expert roundtable was a private event which brought together a select group of scholars from the Middle East Youth Initiative network and partner organizations to reflect on the Initiative's past achievements and to develop a new framework for future youth research. The meeting successfully built consensus around key issues and sectors in need of further research, identified country priorities and emerging policy instruments, and reached agreement on a process for cross-country engagement among key stakeholders across government, research, business, civil society and development networks.

Tarik Yousef, dean of the Dubai School of Government and nonresident senior fellow at the Wolfensohn Center, states: "Through our work at the Middle East Youth Initiative, we have cultivated a network of regional experts and thought leaders who share our commitment to advancing economic development in the region that engages and benefits young people. As policymakers in the Middle East are facing increasing pressure to integrate youth into their development strategies, we envision our Initiative to continue building on local, regional and international expertise on demographic and economic trends to better inform future policies."

Nader Kabbani, director of the Development Research Centre at the Syria Trust for Development, a non-profit non-government organization chaired by Her Excellency Mrs. Asma Al Assad, the First Lady of Syria, has led two studies on Syrian youth for the Middle East Youth Initiative: "Why Young Syrians Prefer Public Sector Jobs," (March 2009) and a study of youth exclusion in Syria, which appeared in *Generation in Waiting*.

Kabbani says: "Our efforts to study youth social-economic transitions in Syria have benefited greatly from working and exchanging ideas with colleagues from the Middle East Youth Initiative. The Initiative has managed to engage a truly unique group of scholars and intellectuals around this important issue and is contributing to better informed policy discussions throughout the region. We are honored to be hosting this roundtable and are looking forward to the next phase of engagement."

"The collective efforts of institutional actors from across the region and internationally is key to advancing the youth agenda forward." says Samantha Constant, Associate Director of the Middle East Youth Initiative at the Wolfensohn

Center for Development at Brookings, “Over the years, we have worked to fill the literature gap on the critical transitional experiences of young people in the region. There is a great deal more that needs be done in understanding the issue and engaging with new partners and scholars. I cannot think of a more special place to reflect on priorities for the next generation than in beautiful historical Damascus.”

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The Middle East Youth Initiative – a joint project of the Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings and the Dubai School of Government – is devoted to promoting the economic and social inclusion of young people in the Middle East. Learn more at: [www.shababinclusion.org](http://www.shababinclusion.org).

The Syria Trust for Development is a non-profit non-governmental organization established in 2007 focusing on the areas of Rural Development, Learning and Cultural Heritage. It aims to empower people from all walks of life to play a full role in building and shaping their society. The Development Research Centre conducts research in support of the Trust’s activities as well as external research and capacity development projects. Learn more at: [research.syriatrust.org](http://research.syriatrust.org).