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**"Creating an environment at the national and international levels
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for all, and its impact on sustainable development"**

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**Working Out Of Crisis  
How Best To Foster Social and Economic Recovery Using Employment in  
Countries Emerging from Conflict  
The Case for West Africa**

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The theme of this roundtable, “Working Out of Crises: How to Foster Social and Economic Recovery Using Employment in Countries Emerging from Conflict” may seem general but it concerns the livelihood of millions of people around the world. In my presentation, the focus is on youth unemployment in West Africa and its impact on stability in the region. Because of time constraints, I will not address one tragic dimension of that issue, the massive illegal migration of able-bodied young West-Africans to Europe, in particular.

### ***I. Youth Unemployment and Conflict Escalation: the Vicious Circle***

In West Africa, youth unemployment and armed violence feed each other reciprocally. This dynamic produces a ‘vicious circle’ through which massive youth unemployment increasingly emerges as both a radical consequence and a fundamental cause of violence. Indeed, the last 15 years of violence in the subregion show that armed conflicts ‘employ’ first and foremost an ‘army’ of jobless and hopeless youth. There are today more than 100,000 young ex-combatants disarmed and demobilized in Liberia, a country with a devastated economy and an overwhelming unemployment rate. At the regional level, recent and ongoing DDR processes (Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire essentially) involve more than 200,000 ex-combatants, most of whom are very young people.

How to reintegrate these youth into societies devastated by years of armed conflict is one of the toughest challenges that must be addressed when implementing post-conflict recovery programmes in the subregion.

### ***II. Post-Conflict Recovery, Economic Distortions and Political Dysfunctions***

Massive unemployment emerges as a *symptom* of a deeper *dysfunction* in the political system, which usually is *bad management and corrupt governance*. In

this context, to foster social and economic recovery and create youth employment in post-conflict countries require efforts to promote sound governance. What is needed is sound governance compatible with sustained investment and economic efficiency. These new modalities of governance should also guarantee a fairly shared prosperity.

Efforts to break the ‘conflict trap’ should concentrate on the connection between power sharing, resource allocation and jobs creation. UNOWA has recently published a study on “Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa”. The study shows that there is a direct relationship between massive youth unemployment and violence in the subregion. The study proposes practical recommendations on how to address this issue cooperatively, including a proposal to establish a *Youth Employment Unit for West Africa*.

Taking into consideration the relationship between bad governance, youth unemployment and violence, it is worth mentioning that just as distortions, in prices, incentives, costs, etc., in the market system constitute a strong impediment to economic growth, *distortions in political governance* represent an important bottleneck for economic prosperity and social harmony. These dysfunctions are a dominant source of the economic (and employment) crisis and a powerful structural cause of conflict in the subregion.

Therefore, large-scale youth unemployment appears as both an economic concern and a political challenge. Hence the necessity of an integrated and balanced approach in which the international community, including development partners, UN institutions, especially the Bretton Woods institutions, should cooperate in a complementary manner.

### ***III. Working out of Crisis and Addressing the Paradox of the Youth in West Africa***

The youth are generally considered the future of societies. The population of West Africa is extremely young. More than 50% of the 300 million people living in West Africa are under 20 years of age. Almost 75% of this population is under 30. It is estimated that about 430 million people will live in the subregion by 2020: an increase of more than 100 million in just 15 years. The percentage of the younger segment of this population will even increase.

The combined effects of endemic conflict, natural disasters, economic mismanagement, poor governance and bottlenecks in the international trade system aggravate the economic crisis in West Africa, with incredibly high rates of youth unemployment: as high as 80% in some states, especially in conflict-affected countries.

This combination of factors and circumstances produces an extraordinary social and political environment in which the youth, instead of representing the future of West African societies, are paradoxically considered as an important threat to peace and security, which they are not. In conflict and post-conflict societies in particular, there is a great risk of idle youth being recruited, either nationally or regionally, by warlords or organized gangs into fighting factions and armed militias.

### ***IV. Working out of Crisis and Addressing the Challenge of Youth Unemployment in West Africa: Some Key Questions***

Youth unemployment in West Africa is increasingly becoming a ticking time-bomb even for countries that are currently stable. How to defuse this bomb is a national and international priority that brings a series of issues to mind. These issues include (but in no particular order):

1. Thinking of post-conflict employment policies at an early stage of the peace mediation process as a prerequisite for post-conflict reconstruction.
2. Investment in physical infrastructure and public works (ex. improved energy supply, irrigation systems and road networks) is crucial to job creation especially for non-qualified youth.
3. The private sector, domestic and international, as well as international financial institutions, should be engaged in the peace and post-conflict recovery processes at the very beginning. Improving governance to create an environment conducive to investment, including FDI (foreign direct investment) is essential.
4. Another priority is to make the best use of institutions and mechanisms such as the Global Compact, Poverty Alleviation Initiatives or the new Peacebuilding Commission, to promote job creation for youth in post-conflict situations.
5. Considering that the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants (DDR) are crucial for successful post-conflict recovery, I think that appropriate funding for DDR is essential. Especially the “R” (reintegration) of “DDR” should not be forgotten, which often is the case. Some wonder if DDR is a process or a concept. Our priority should be to make it effective whatever its definition.
6. There is a need for compatibility between long-term economic recovery concerns and immediate post-conflict recovery programs such as Quick Impact Projects, Stop Gap Projects, Armed for Development Programs and Vocational Training.

7. There is a need to avert the combined effects of the severe lack of opportunities in rural areas and the great illusions that urban areas offer better opportunities, which foster *lumpen-urbanization*, with massive and potentially explosive concentration of unemployed youth in a few urban areas.

These are many issues, questions and challenges to address if post-conflict recovery policies are to help the stabilization and reconstruction of post-conflict societies.

In closing, I would like to make two observations.

- I would like to thank the Youth Employment Network (YEN) for its important work and continued activity in the area of youth employment.
- I would also like to express my sincere thanks the UK for a contribution to help launch a concrete programme on youth employment in West Africa.

I thank you for your attention.