

***Mary Kawar\****

## **Opening Statement**

Excellency

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me start by thanking the **Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development** and for initiating this event and organizing it at a time in history when the issues of decent work and poverty are so pertinent to both individuals and families. Indeed the timing of this indicates that the DIIFSD as a global organization is opening pathways for the interdisciplinary research and dialogue aimed at impacting people's lives. We hope that this Forum will offer an opportunity for multi-stakeholder dialogue on the opportunities and challenges of applying the Decent Work approach to poverty reduction and to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the next 2 days we are going to deliberate through papers prepared by the ILO and other United Nations systems on the trends and consequences of poverty and lack of decent work in our world today.

Why the focus on poverty and decent work and why is this more urgent than before?

We are indeed in at a particular junction in social and economic history where people everywhere and especially young people are asking for a chance to live in dignity and have access to a decent list. An underlying factor is the issue of governance, accountability, participation and rights.

Here are some facts that directly or indirectly led to this:

- Today In absolute numbers, people in developing countries living in extreme poverty (living on less than \$1.25 a day) is around 900 million (according the UN's annual report card of regional progress towards the eight MDGs)
- The number of unemployed men and women stands at 205 million in 2010,
- The share of workers living with their families below the US\$ 2 a day poverty line is estimated at around 39 per cent, or 1.2 billion workers worldwide.
- Many of those who work remain poor and cannot lift themselves out poverty. The estimated working poverty rate at the extreme US\$ 1.25 level for 2009 is 20.7 per cent.

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\* Senior Specialist on Skills and productivity, representing the Regional Director, Ms. Nada Al-Nashif

- There are unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment everywhere, sometimes seven or ten times higher than the rate for adults.
- Following the financial and economic crisis which started in 2009, the global economy grew at a rapid pace of 4.8 per cent in 2010. However, due to the fragile state of the labour market in many countries, high levels of public debt and continued vulnerabilities in the financial sector and private households, downside risks predominate.
- Inequality of income still prevails: Here is one figure to highlight this: 3.5 billion people in the world together have the same income as 61 million people (3,500 million, 61 million people).
- In the Middle East and North Africa The youth unemployment rate is almost four times the adult rate and Gender inequalities continue to be a major concern, as the gap

No wonder so many people in the Middle East and outside it are upset and angry. Too many feel pressured, between the immediate social impact of the financial downturn. They see that their governments has too little strength or will to rein in the unaccountable power of financial operators which wield so much influence on our societies. They see Governments who promise the basics of decent life, health housing education and jobs and are unable to deliver

In short it is easy not to be optimistic about the future.

When the MDGS were agreed upon back in September 2000 the world was facing an era of economic growth which is quite unlike the economic situation of today.

The MDGs were first agreed upon at the UN MDG summit in September 2000, the eight MDGs set worldwide objectives for reducing extreme poverty and hunger, improving health and education, empowering women and ensuring environmental sustainability by 2015.

At last year's MDG summit in New York, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the goals and the expansion of successful approaches; a global strategy for women's and children's health was launched with more than \$40bn in commitments. Achieving the goals will require equitable and inclusive economic growth – growth that reaches everyone and that will enable all people, especially the poor and marginalised, to benefit from economic opportunities. Between now and 2015, we must make sure that promises made become promises kept.

We in the ILO believe there is a direct link between poverty reduction and decent work. The goal of Decent Work for All and the pledges in the Millennium Declaration go hand in hand. The ILO's Decent Work Agenda, in a context of fair globalization, is essential to the achievement of these shared aims. In the ILO, we believe that Decent work is one of

the basic needs in the lives of people, (individuals and families) which too often goes unsatisfied.

The primary goal of the ILO is to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people. In order to help Member States and the social partners achieve this aim, the ILO pursues the Decent Work Agenda which focuses on four inseparable objectives:

**Employment** – the principal route out of poverty is through work and income

**Rights** – without the effective enforcement of fundamental rights at work people will not be empowered to escape from poverty

**Social protection** – it safeguards income and underpins health and ensures access to essential services as a means to offset life's risks.

**Dialogue** – in a world of growing interdependence and complexity and the internationalization of production, social dialogue and the practice of tripartism between governments and the representative organizations of workers and employers is now more relevant to achieving solutions and to building up social cohesion and the rule of law through.

In the next few days we will have sessions on each and every ILO strategic objective. Within each topic we will address the issue identify the challenges and attempt to review international good practices and the way forward. It is hoped that this provides the participants with an overview of the main issues to enable them to make their own judgments. We sincerely hope that this contribution from experts from the ILO and several other UN agencies, Mainly UNDP, UNFPA and ESCWA, UNAIDS will be a value-added to the work of the International Institute for Family Studies and Development and the economic and social policy making process to our host country Qatar.