

Middle East Plenary : A Youth Dialogue : Perspective of the COVID-19 Pandemic UN Global Compact

On the 15th and 16th of June, more than 20,000 people attended the 20th anniversary UN Global Compact Leaders Summit online. Our organization was honored to be part of this worldwide event, reuniting high level speakers to address the private sector's response to "three unprecedented and interconnected global crises: health, inequality and climate change".

On Tuesday June 16th, a Regional Youth Session took place called "Middle East Plenary : A Youth Dialogue : Perspective of the COVID-19 Pandemic". It was hosted by Dr. Dima Jamali and featured four different speakers : Omar Itani, the co-founder FabricAID ; Maya Terro the co-founder of Foodblessed ; Kevin Chalhoub, Founder & CEO of EV Lab ; and finally, Lynn Malkawi, Founder & Director of Wasel for Awareness & Education.

The panel focused on the importance of youth dialogue during Covid-19, especially on how the youth hold the key to a better recovery. Challenges faced by young people mount, and many respond with resilience and innovative solutions. Hence, the session showcased the youth's perspective of the COVID-19 pandemic, risks, concerns, and solutions for both the private sector and governments. Over the course of an hour, Dr. Dima Jamali moderated the session and directed her question to the four panelists which focused on recovery and sustainability of youth efforts in Middle eastern countries.

Lynn Malkawi is currently the Founder and Director of the NGO Wasel which aims at its core to bridge the gap between youth and adolescents in different parts of Amman and the municipalities, youth of different geographical and socio-economic backgrounds through its civic engagement programs. During this session, she insisted that a re-globalization of the world is much needed, through multilateralism. Indeed, full self-sufficiency is not possible today. She also advocated for a future with a better technology inclusion. One of the main issues the pandemic highlighted is the unequal access to technologies and to internet. Her advice to the youth ? Develop your digital skills and expand your partnerships !

Kevin Chalhoub, an engineer and CEO of EV Lab, found it amazing to see the global connection around the world to fight the pandemic. According to him, the same must be done about climate change : "With a common purpose, we can achieve real things. We saw that it's possible to tackle issue on a global scale". Of course, the youth has a key role to play in setting this common purpose. To governments he said : "Create a social safety net and do not take example on the United States and their poor healthcare system". His advice to the youth ? Advocate for change in your local community.

The co-founder of the NGO Food Blessed, Maya Terro, emphasized the power of individual behavior : youth must realize the impact of their everyday decision. Foodblessed is a local hunger relief initiative run by a group of volunteers with a passion and will to fight hunger in Lebanon. Thanks to her expertise, she emphasized on the power of food : choices in term of nutrition affect consumers but also the planet. Food wasting makes absolutely no sense socially and environmentally. She then added some context about the social and political situation of her country, Lebanon, affirming that in this time of crisis there is no trust nor help from the government, which is corrupt, and that the private sector is struggling. However there is a silver lining : citizens can heavily rely on the community. "Youth have a role to play, it's a source of inspiration" she stated.

Finally, the last speaker, Omar Itani, is the co-founder of FabricAid, an organization which collects, sorts and redistributes clothes to disadvantaged communities at micro-prices. Their goal is to deliver good quality clothing into the hands of people who need them, while also reducing fabric wastes. During the session, Omar Itani focused on how today's economy is not fair and the way it always ends up crashing, calling it "vicious capitalism". Better laws and regulation are needed, because economic and socially issues are deeply connected. His advice to the youth ? We, as a society, need to have a shift on the perspective of success, of what success is.

This regional session took place on the main stage, which gave the chance for many people to attend. It was the only session in the Summit focusing on the youth, allowing it to stand unique amongst the rest. Hence, it turned out to be a great success and yielded a great deal of positive feedback.

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Camille Moullec

