

Speech for UNDP/PAPP Special Representative – Jens Toyberg -Frاندzen

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

I am delighted to welcome you here today in Ramallah to this discussion on the needs of Palestinian young people and youth organizations. Our starting point is this report on the attitudes and feelings of the youth and the activities of organizations in the West Bank and Gaza.

It makes both interesting and disturbing reading.

The report documents the large number of organizations that exist to support Palestinian youth and it shows the areas where more help is needed. This is of vital interest to those who want to plan effectively for the future.

Sadly, it also documents the level of despair among young people. More than 80 per cent said they felt depressed and 58 per cent said they felt insecure.

Young people are exceptionally vulnerable in a conflict situation. They are more likely to be injured, arrested or sucked into harmful situations. It is some consolation that the report finds that a clear majority (69 per cent) of young Palestinians reject violence as a useful tool. We have to make sure that young people see that there are other tools which can be more effective in improving their lives.

Young people in all countries are both a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation. Their imagination, ideals, energies and vision are essential for the continuing development of the societies in which they live. There is special need for new impetus to be given to the design and implementation of youth policies and programmes at all levels.

This is not a new sentiment. That was the opening paragraph of a UN resolution in 1996. Leaders have to engage with youth and help direct their energies in a productive direction. Particularly when the economic and political environment appears to offer limited hope.

Unemployment rates for youth range from 35 per cent in the West Bank to 51 per cent in Gaza. That represents a great waste of talent and we should work to harness those resources by offering the right training and job opportunities.

At UNDP we have always understood that you cannot develop an economy or develop a nation without developing its youth.

We have worked with the Palestinian Authority and local authorities to provide dozens of youth, study and sports centres.

Having facilities is one thing. It is also vital that we have the right activities with the right staff. Those who work with young people also need development and training.

This discussion brings together the Palestinian Authority, UNDP, international and national partners in youth development. It is the beginning of a process of consultation that will help all of us articulate a strategy that will govern youth policies for Palestinians for years to come.

Finally I would like to thank Near East Consulting, the young people of Sharek and everyone else who contributed to the report and wish you a fruitful afternoon's discussion.