

## UNICEF Executive Board September 2022

Saddam Sayyaleh

My name is Saddam Sayyaleh from Jordan. It is my pleasure today to be among you. I am here representing my young self - a former child worker and an orphan from a refugee camp, a dropout turned social entrepreneur, a board member of Generation Unlimited, and a representative of the many platforms through which I advocate for the most vulnerable - such as my social enterprise called "I Learn".

Today, young people in the Middle East and North Africa are inspired -- and aspire! -- for positive change. One in five people in MENA is an adolescent. Young people, especially girls, remain socially, economically and politically excluded. The region faces the highest youth unemployment rate in the world, combined with the lowest labour force participation rate. Conflicts, climate change and political instability further increase vulnerabilities of young people, exposing them to violence, exploitation and abuse.

Today in MENA, the types of skills needed in the labour market are changing. Technological changes are making many jobs vulnerable to automation, while education systems are outdated and fragmented. These challenges are more acute for youth in disadvantaged communities, and those who lack opportunities because of their gender, race, sexuality, disability or ethnic background.

Today's young people cannot afford to wait for the adults to create the opportunities we need, and demand. We are taking action – and we ask for you to help foster an enabling environment and pave the way for us. By investing in youth-led solutions. By investing in education systems that offer a broad variety of skills to match today's professional opportunities, including both disruptive technical skills AND core transferable skills, such as critical and analytical thinking, problem solving, creativity, leadership, resilience, and digital literacy

Since its establishment 10 years ago, I Learn has been working with over ten thousand young volunteers who collectively impacted in their own communities over thirty thousand children drop-outs and child labor; and over 6000 thousand young people took up-skilling programs.

Let's remember it is only with young people as equal partners -- and heirs of the future of work -- that we can transform systems to propel young people forward.

Today I call upon us all, and public and private sector leaders, to join forces with young people, To, together, help us accelerate action and sustain investment so we can jointly catalyze impact at scale.

Let me end by sharing an important quote from one of my fellow youth leaders: *"When it comes to the future of work, we sometimes forget the superheroes of the story: youth."*