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Statement by Dr Sahar Nasr
**UNIDO Arab Youth Forum — An Innovative Approach to Green
Growth and Job Creation in the MENA Region**
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Excellencies,
Partners in Development,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be amongst you today and to address such distinguished guests and participants from across the world on such an important topic—Youth.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has a very young population, and Egypt is home to the largest youth population in the region, where almost half of our citizens are under the age of 25.

This should be considered an opportunity rather than a challenge. In spite of the very tough and challenging times that the region is going through due to the recent developments, our youth should be productive agents of the society, rather than bearers of destruction and terrorism. They should be our hope for the future, rather than the misery of our nation.

That is why, the Government of Egypt has positioned youth at the core of its development agenda, taking all measures necessary to address their immediate needs, and ensure their inclusion.

Youth should play a pivotal role on the social, economic and political spheres—they should be job creators rather than job seekers.

It is critical that all Governments provide an enabling conducive business environment for youth to start their own businesses.

Today's conference is a great start for the year 2016, which H.E. President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi declared as "***The Year of Youth***".

For this very special occasion and given the significant importance of youth, H.E. the President made a number of momentous decisions, including the promise to allocate 20 percent of all loans financed by the Central Bank of Egypt to youth start-ups. This is expected to benefit approximately 350,000 enterprises and create four million new jobs opportunities.

And to facilitate youth's access to knowledge, H.E. the President launched the "***Bank of Knowledge***" - an initiative which aims to provide free access to online knowledge resources.

The Government of Egypt has also already undertaken major steps in promoting youth entrepreneurship through encouraging healthy competition, creating an enabling regulatory environment and strengthening financial infrastructure, as evident in the (i) issuance of the microfinance law; (ii) provision of specialized financial products (such as leasing, factoring, venture capital and Islamic finance); (iii) modernization of the payments system; (iv) issuance of a code of Corporate Governance to enhance transparency and governance; and the (v) establishment of the first private credit bureau (I-score).

We have also made considerable progress on the level of sectoral green growth strategies and policies, putting in mind how crucial it is to promote green jobs for the youth.

We should help these young capacities become entrepreneurs and translate their ideas into a productive reality.

Therefore, I am pleased to see forums and conferences such as today's placing youth as their strategic focus, and also recognizing businessmen who have a significant contribution in job creation for youth.

I am also delighted to witness this fruitful collaboration between the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport.

We look forward to seeing this translated into ambitious work programs and various regional initiatives. We are ready to join forces with you to move forward to attain inclusive economic growth and promote youth development.

In the end, I would like to thank you for your time and I wish you a very successful forum full of stimulating and productive discussions.