



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

**Research Base for the High Level Group Report
Youth
Summary of research based on commissioned papers**

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Introduction

1. Almost half the world's population is under the age of 20¹, yet scant research has been conducted regarding young people across the globe. Research about youth in Western societies and in predominantly Muslim contexts is of primary concern to the Alliance of Civilizations given the socioeconomic disadvantages faced by youth and their vulnerability to recruitment into extremist movements. As youth is one of the thematic priorities, it is essential to apply relevant research about the concerns of young people to a programme of recommendations and an action plan intended to meet current needs of young people.

2. To counter-balance the absence of centralized information on youth populations, the Alliance of Civilizations commissioned diverse papers on young people that include research on global trends among youth as well as trends that set Muslim youth apart from their non-Muslim peers. The numerous research papers, which are written by scholars, activists, and policy analysts, identify a lack of employment possibilities as a major challenge creating alienation, frustration, and declining social mobility for youth around the globe. In addition to an extensive examination of mainstream youth populations, research commissioned by the Alliance also focuses upon the extremist fringe and examines the underlying causes for young people's attraction to extremism in both European and Muslim societies. Not only is rising extremism one of the greatest threats to world peace, but finding remedies to deter young people from such behavior is one of the primary reasons the Alliance of Civilizations was established. "Extremism" is defined here as radical, violent behavior in pursuit of political goals.

3. While these two major challenges – unemployment and extremism – are afflicting greater numbers of young people, not many steps are being taken to involve youth in mainstream society. Few efforts are underway which encourage young people to contribute to creatively shaping their societies or that pave avenues of political participation in mainstream institutions. Therefore, the third topic with regards to youth research is the prioritization of recommendations designed to help young people participate and represent their own interests in social and political processes at national, regional, and international levels.

4. Taking these themes into consideration, the Alliance's research on youth has focused on three main topics:

- 1) Socioeconomic conditions affecting youth, including high unemployment rates and rising alienation;
- 2) Youth extremism, particularly among Muslims in European and in Muslim societies, where membership in radical groups is increasing; cultural alienation and humiliation frustrates Muslims' predicaments;
- 3) Youth mobilization and avenues for participation in politics and civil society.

¹ Youth Employment Network <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/yen/challenge/index.htm>
(retrieved 31 October 2006)

This paper concludes with a discussion on the need for further research on youth populations. As a relatively new field of research,² youth studies require greater resources in order to determine more relevant research priorities that influence the development policies concerning youth.

I. Socio-economic conditions

5. Overall, the rate of youth unemployment is two to three times greater than national unemployment levels worldwide. Strategies to enhance youth economic participation such as school-based career guidance, national youth employment strategies and the promotion of youth enterprise are important means by which to combat youth unemployment.

6. Over the last fifty years, youth activity in the labor force has decreased significantly across the globe. The activity rate of youth – defined by the United Nations as those people between the ages of 15 and 24 — declined more than 10%, from 70% percent in 1950 to 59 % in 2000. The global number of young people officially registered as unemployed rose from 70.8 million in 1994 to 85.7 million in 2004, accounting for 45% of total unemployment. Underemployed young people unable to break out of the cycle of poverty account for 20% of the world's estimated 535 million working poor in 2004.³ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan **stated that** “today, young people aged between 15 and 24 are only a quarter of the world's working population but they make up half of its unemployed.” He stressed the urgent need for action.⁴

7. Of all the youth populations in the world, those in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have the lowest participation rate in the labor force; 40 % of young people in this region are employed, compared to a worldwide average of 54%.⁵ Egypt offers a glimpse of this trend sweeping the broader Arab world. Official statistics produced by the Egyptian government show about a 9 % rate of unemployment among the country's 72 million people. However, studies monitoring youth unemployment indicate a different picture -- an estimated 25 percent of men and 59 % of women are unemployed in Egypt, where the median age is 20 years old.⁶ According to Mustafa Nabili, Chief Economist for the MENA region for the World Bank: “One of the main issues, if not the main issue, in the Arab world over the next twenty years is the unemployment problem...the Arab world has essentially to create about 85 to 90 million jobs over the next 20 years.”

² Recently released by the Arab League, the Annual Report of Arab Youth Issues (2005) enumerates the universal deficiencies in research concerning youth populations (defined as ages 15 to 29) as it is a new and growing field of research.

³ Global Employment Trends for Youth (ILO 2004). Based on the totals of registered unemployed, these are very conservative figures as in many countries unemployed and underemployed youth do not register themselves and the estimated real levels are much higher.

⁴ United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan's opening address to the 4th European Union/Latin America and Caribbean Summit of Heads of State, May 12, 2006.

http://www.eu2006.at/en/News/Speeches_Interviews/1205annan.html (retrieved 31 October 2006).

⁵ Quoted in the International Business Leaders Forum Sourcebook the Middle East, 2006 www.iblf.org (retrieved 25 October 2006).

⁶ BBC Report *Economic development in MENA*, 2005. According to the ILO Report for 2004, the labor force in Palestine grew from 39% in 1995 to 49% in the second quarter of 2000. Youth between the ages of 15 and 34 account for 60% of the Palestinian labor force. In Tunisia, the percentage of new entrants to the labor market who completed their secondary and higher education increased from 46% in 1994 to 58.5 % in 1997.

8. Arguing for more rigorous research in the field of youth, the latest *Annual Report of Arab Youth Issues* (League of Arab States, 2005) yielded some surprising, nuanced results. First and foremost, the report contends that data on unemployment statistics in the Arab region differ drastically between national surveys and individual reports. One of the central findings on youth unemployment in the Arab region is that the unemployment rate among the highly educated classes is greater than the unemployment rate among populations who have attained lower levels of education. Moreover, in addition to overall unemployment rates increasing among both adults and youth, child labor has increased in many Arab cities.

9. There is also a significant and growing gender gap in unemployment. The average female unemployment rate in 2003 was 16.5% as compared to the male rate of 10.6%, according to International Labour Organization (ILO) statistics. Globally, young women have higher unemployment rates (31.7%) than young men (22.7%), while the World Bank estimates that Arab female unemployment rates are twice that of male unemployment rates in the region.

10. The profound absence of job opportunities worldwide and a grim prognosis for growth in the worldwide job market have caused disaffection among youth, leading to family dysfunction, crime, and drug abuse, all of which have global ramifications and exacerbate the world's protracted conflicts. While any direct link between unemployment and extremism is challenged by both sociologists and youth employment experts, obtaining and keeping a job rank at the top of youth concerns as reflected in polls of youth and in consultations with youth experts and advocates.⁷

11. Notwithstanding these data, it must be noted that recent scholarship has established that unemployment conditions are far less of a direct cause of youth extremism than scholars had assumed a decade ago.

II. Youth Extremism

In Europe

12. The root causes of radicalization among Muslim youth in Western societies are complex. Social alienation, marginalization, coupled with targeted indoctrination lead youth toward extremism. In addition, failed U.S. policies in the Middle East, which have become another source of youth discontent, have created fertile ground for radical groups and clerics seeking to radicalize young Muslims.

13. Research shows that young Muslims experience a general uneasiness about their lives in the West. One analyst who has conducted extensive interviews with disaffected youth in Europe reports that this apprehension stems less from being Muslim in secular societies and more from

⁷ Polling of 1.4 million youth in the MENA region conducted by ImagineNations and the website of Mr. Amr Khaled revealed that employment ranked as the top concern of young people. Moreover, the Secretary-General of the European Youth Forum noted that jobs are "the primary force for the social inclusion of young people into society." This has been reflected in the report of the working meeting on Youth and Media, organized by the Alliance of Civilizations and hosted by the Mission of Qatar to the UN (13 May 2006).

being the targets of daily discrimination. This condition has created fertile ground for extremists to penetrate all social classes and recruit young people as members in their organizations.

14. No definitive data capture statistics about radicals in Europe, but according to counter-terrorism officials, the number of radicals is increasing. For example, there are apparently as many as 20 different hard-line Muslim groups operating in the Netherlands, and in recent years, Britain has been home to as many as 3,000 veterans of al-Qaeda training camps. In Germany, approximately 30,600 people are members of Muslim organizations, 300 of whom are regarded as potentially “dangerous” because of their contacts with militant organizations. And about 3,000 are considered willing to use violence, but have no proven links to militant activities thus far, according to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

15. Even generally among Muslim youth in Europe, alienation from mainstream society is on the rise, increasing the potential for extremism at some point in the future. Many second and third-generation Muslims born in secular European societies are re-assessing their identity and religious beliefs. They are creating a new Muslim identity, one more reflective of their countries of birth. Conservative interpretations of Islam are increasingly challenged by values of tolerance, democracy, and civil liberties.

16. One factor that contributes to the increasing lure toward a Muslim – rather than European identity – is the presence of foreign imams (religious leaders) in Europe. These imams, who in overwhelming numbers are from Muslim countries, often import traditions from their countries of origin to their religious communities in Europe. There is great concern about the messages that religious leaders deliver in European mosques, particularly after September 11, 2001. One of the main difficulties for young Muslims in the West is that some of these imams do not understand the culture or even speak the language of their host country. This is particularly true with Arabic-speaking imams, who are the linguistic link with the country of origin. In Britain, for example, there are only about 30 imams who have been educated in the UK; however, approximately 1,000 are from abroad.

Youth extremism in Muslim societies

17. Since the first outbreak of militant activism in the predominantly Muslim world in the 1970s until the mid-1990s, the majority of activists have been religious nationalists whose fundamental goal was to generate revolutionary change within their own society. This goal revolved around confronting secular, pro-Western Muslim rulers seen as tyrants and oppressors. Fighting the “near enemy” took priority over fighting the “far enemy” in order to establish a utopian Muslim order.

18. However, by the mid-1990s, a dramatic change occurred within the militant universe. Extremism became global. The following events provided inspiration for this development: the Iranian Revolution in 1979; the withdrawal of Russian troops from Afghanistan and the collapse of the Soviet Union; the 1991 Persian Gulf War; the wars in Chechnya and Bosnia; and the defeat of religious nationalists at home, in countries such as Algeria and Egypt.

19. Thus, what had been strictly viewed as the “near enemy” became intimately intertwined with the “far enemy.” Muslim extremists now were articulating a new goal: to carry out armed resistance whenever the *ummah* (the collective community of believers) and its religious symbols and territories were perceived to be threatened by outside aggressors. This new strategy was evident as militant attacks extended beyond national and regional borders. They were no longer confined to the back alleyways of Upper Egypt, but were launched instead on the streets of Nairobi, Dar al-Sallam, London, Madrid, and across the Middle East.

20. In addition to the dramatic shifts in world politics that resulted from this new strategy, there was also another important development. Mainstream Islamists, not militants, directly benefited from the turmoil. Their gains have been evident in recent legislative elections in Egypt and the occupied territories of Palestine.

21. Since September 11, 2001, the Internet has become a primary channel for disseminating extremist ideas around the globe. Extremist websites promote the re-establishment of the Caliphate, condemn the foreign policies of Western governments in the Muslim world, view the so called “war on terrorism” as a war against Islam, discredit Muslim religious scholars who oppose this idea, and highlight Muslim suffering around the world.

22. Various factors play a role in the cultural alienation of young people including the lack of role models and reduced opportunities to express issues relevant to young people in their own cultural and religious contexts. In the cultural arena, there is a great imbalance between products that are representative of Muslim youth and those which are mainly targeted at non-Muslim audiences. This not only affects possibilities for meaningful cultural dialogue but it also has a detrimental affect on how young people view themselves and their own culture.

23. In recent years, computer and video games increasingly have become an important medium for young people in the West. The industry is increasing rapidly and is now competing with the film industry in revenues. After September 11, 2001, Arabs became the new main target of racism and stereotyping in Western computer and video games. National armies in the West developed games to stereotype Arabs. Similarly, armed groups in the Middle East designed games to combat Americans and those perceived to be their enemies. A series of entertaining games with educational themes integrated into the action of the game could be a powerful means to reach a wide sector of youth.

III. Youth participation in global and regional politics and civil society

24. Although young people comprise a majority of the world’s population, their views and voices have few channels of expression. Those who have direct influence upon their lives, such as policy makers, generally do not view them as a powerbase and, therefore, make little effort to include them in local or national affairs or in decisions that directly affect their lives.

25. The global growth of youth movements and organizations in recent years offers new opportunities for youth mobilization. Student exchange programs, sports activities and political involvement can provide new opportunities for promoting cross-cultural understanding and

respect for diversity. Moreover, supporting young people's participation in decision making processes can benefit society as a whole, since young people are a source of innovative ideas and provide energy for positive change.

Increasing solidarity and understanding through International Youth Exchanges

26. Youth exchange is an effective method for overcoming cultural barriers, enhancing intercultural awareness and fostering individual development. None of the large-scale government-funded reciprocal exchange programs, however, focus on bridging Muslim and Western countries with the exception of the Euro-Med (Euro-Mediterranean) YOUTH Program, which is currently limited to exchanges between the European Union and countries that border the Mediterranean basin⁸. A recent survey of cultural exchanges involving international students in the United States revealed that the largest proportion of funded student exchanges occur with Europe (over 25%), whereas the lowest proportion is with the Middle East (0.5%). There is therefore an urgent need to scale up youth exchange programs between young people in the West and in Muslim countries.

27. The Euro-Mediterranean YOUTH Programme gives special focus to the participation of young people who would not normally have such opportunities. Over 25,000 young people participated in the last five years, the majority in multilateral group youth exchanges.⁹ Supported by trained youth workers or youth leaders, young people are involved in every stage of the project, including the planning, operation, and evaluation of the two-week exchanges, which converts exchange projects into longer-term programmes. Preparations for the start of the new Euro-Med Youth programme (planned to start in 2007) are in hand and this coming year, the sponsoring MEDA governments have the job of creating National Agencies, which will cooperate with their European counterparts in running and evaluating the program. Other programmes that offer exemplary models are the *Universia* programme in Latin America, which encompasses a network of 985 universities engaged in youth exchanges and the United States Peace Corps.

28. Provision for youth exchange globally is very unequal – some countries have no programmes, some have only limited bilateral agreements with other countries.¹⁰ Existing programmes tend to support academic or individual stays of secondary school or university students. The United States invests in bringing students into the country – especially relevant here is the YES scheme in which students from predominantly Muslim countries receive scholarships to study for a year in American universities. However, there is little reciprocity in these “exchanges.”¹¹ False perceptions and negative prejudice often hamper the operation of exchanges even where opportunities exist – for example, in Indonesia, one organizer told of the difficulties of recruiting Australian participants to come to Borneo on exchanges due to

⁸ Europe and, initially, Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Occupied Territories, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

⁹ At present we have little scientific research about the specific pedagogical approaches which should be used within the EuroMed context.

¹⁰ For example, Indonesia has three bilateral agreements with Australia, Canada and Malaysia.

¹¹ See, for example, the “Open Doors 2005 Fast Facts” report which shows that American students studying in the Middle East made up just 0.5% of the total of Americans studying abroad.

exaggerated fear of terrorist bombings.¹² Another dimension to exchanges is supporting intra-Muslim exchanges, which would be very helpful in promoting solidarity between young people as a learning space for dialogue. The new Safar Arabic Youth Mobility Fund¹³ is a good example of this, as it enables individual young people to engage in traveling in order to learn, to attend training events, to enter apprenticeships and to hold meetings in countries ranging from Morocco to Pakistan and beyond.

Youth empowerment through participation

29. Young people are a major source of innovative ideas and energy for positive change. The global growth of youth movements and organizations in recent years offers new opportunities for youth mobilization. Supporting young people's participation in decision making processes such as community councils, youth organizations and governing bodies of civil society organizations and religious institutions can benefit society as a whole. Globally, youth representation experienced renewed growth in recent years through the convening of regional youth platforms. These networks provide opportunities for initiatives such as an Alliance of Civilizations to gather input from, and assist in the mobilization of youth from diverse cultural, religious, and national backgrounds.

30. Unfortunately, the prospects and structures for youth participation are sorely lacking and under-resourced at local, national and international levels. For young people to be heard properly, they need constructive channels for communication to decision-makers at all levels. Starting in their local communities, young people can influence policies through consultations, the establishment of youth parliaments and similar instruments for local democracy.

31. Valuable lessons were learned, for instance, by the OSCE in Bosnia Herzegovina where partnerships were established with young people in a range of municipalities and "two-way street" meetings organized with local politicians and civil servants. The main conclusions drawn after the two-year project were: training and support of young people (advocacy and lobbying skills) and politicians/civil servants (the benefits of meeting with young people) are critical for creating a mutually interested parties who will maximize the beneficial opportunities and incentives offered; the provision of a fund for youth (however small) is crucial as a first step; and the process takes time to become sustainable.¹⁴

32. National youth councils do not exist in every country, and even in places where they exist, financial and human resources vary enormously - as do the degrees to which governments support or are otherwise involved in their structures. Globally, youth representation has had a new impetus in the last couple of years through the convening of Regional youth platforms in the

¹² Meeting with Republic of Indonesia national youth council (KNPI) officials, Bogor, April 2006

¹³ Set up by the Arab Education Forum with an initial grant from the Ford Foundation; see: <http://www.almoultaqa.com/> (retrieved 31 October 2006)

¹⁴ For more detail see: Finn Denstad (2004) *Bosnia Herzegovina: Youth Programme Manager*, Norwegian Centre for Human Rights. <http://www.humanrights.uio.no/forskning/publ/publikasjonsliste.html> (retrieved 31 October 2006)

GCCC¹⁵ and together with the larger international youth NGOs to form ICMYO.¹⁶ Still, they are only capable of holding annual meetings and, although they support this with virtual communication, there is a great feeling that opportunities have been missed for cooperation, learning from each other's experiences and influencing policies in an effective way.

33. Increasingly, Muslim youth are organizing themselves internationally. The Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO) has been in existence since 1996 and currently holds a seat on the Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sport's Advisory Council.¹⁷ Founded more recently in 2004, the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYFDC)¹⁸ is now affiliated with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and is involved in consultations related to youth issues in the OIC's Ten Year Plan. Some progress has been made since the adoption in 1995 of the UN General Assembly's *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond*. Last year, the UN's Youth Focal Point convened two consultation meetings with youth representatives from the five continents to review progress since 1995 and make recommendations for the future. The participants were united in recommending full implementation of the World Programme and their analysis pointed to clear limitations in the current system,¹⁹ specifically:

a clear need to improve the current framework of consultation for the development of youth policy so as to include relevant intergovernmental co-operation, consultations with competent and representative non-governmental organizations and other youth structures. In addition, without adequate and sustainable financing and clear channels for mainstreaming youth issues within the United Nations system, the present framework cannot become effective and sustainable; [and] despite clear divisions of responsibilities among United Nations agencies, there is a lack of coordination as regards to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

34. There is no explicit mechanism for youth organizations to be involved in the work of the UN. Consultation possibilities are welcomed, but they tend to be irregular events and perhaps overly-dependent on individual initiatives.

35. Given that there is a minimum of nineteen organizations and agencies within the UN system with some responsibility for questions pertaining to, the challenges faced by the Youth Focal Point are clear. At the time of writing, at least two of the posts were vacant from the Youth Focal Point's full complement of eight staff.

36. European experience in involving young people in policy making may be useful in looking at the global possibilities: the Council of Europe has established a co-management system in which

¹⁵ Global Cooperation Coordinating Committee (GCCC) is composed of: Asian Students Association, Asian Youth Council, Arab Youth Union, African Youth Network, Caribbean Federation of Youth, European Youth Forum Jeunesse, Latin American Youth forum, Pacific Youth Council, Pan-African Youth Movement.

¹⁶ International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations (ICMYO) is composed of the members of the GCCC, and 14 international youth NGOs.

¹⁷ See: <http://www.coe.int/youth> (retrieved 31 October 2006)

¹⁸ See : <http://www.icyf.com/> (retrieved 31 October 2006)

¹⁹ See: Consultative Meeting on the Ten-Year Review of the World Programme of Action for Youth. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/coimbrareport.pdf> (retrieved 31 October 2006)

youth representatives have equal votes with governments in deciding the allocation of resources and activities; and the European Union's Open Method of Coordination brings together youth representatives, researchers, governments and other key actors in consultations which feed into policy and practice.

37. Growth in global youth issue websites has been marked recently. Mainly published in English, they aim to link together young people and involve them in projects and sometimes in conferences and meetings.²⁰ And their organizers have connections and contacts in various parts of the UN system. Still, the challenges remain to find sustainable and direct ways for young people to influence the international system.

Youth research – the need for comparable evidence

38. Youth research is a relatively new academic discipline and is on its way to being established around the world,²¹ although the United States, Europe, and Australasia have a majority of resources in this field.²² Some refer to the golden triangle of policy, practice, and research, which underlines decision-making based on empirical evidence within a given area. Although some advances have been made recently, youth research will need greater resources and recognition in order to play an effective role and contribute to evidence-based youth policy as recommended by the youth organizations convened by the United Nations in Portugal last year.²³

39. Consolidating solid research about “youth extremism” within the context of the Alliance has been hampered by the fact that there is no agreed definition of the term, although much work has been carried out in related fields, for instance, the causes of “youth violence” or “combating extreme right-wing youth groups.” Obtaining credible, comparable data about young people globally is also massively challenging: recent attempts by the UN's Division for Social Policy and Development to gather **qualitative** (as opposed to quantitative) indicators and statistics about the world's youth yielded large gaps in current knowledge.²⁴ In its critique of the limited scope of the youth research field, The Annual Report of Arab Youth Issues (League of Arab States 2005) cited the overemphasis of quantitative (over qualitative or theoretical) research and the lack of attention paid to social and political participation. The report referred to questionable theoretical and methodological approaches employed among the studies consolidated for the annual report with an eye to improve the research agenda. Nevertheless, the report cited the universal flaws in research on youth as lacking a “comprehensive dynamic historical vision” and

²⁰ See, for example, Global Youth Action Network <http://www.youthlink.org/gyanv5/index.htm> (retrieved 31 October 2006), or the Glocal Forum www.glocalforum.org (retrieved 31 October 2006).

²¹ Its relative newness can be seen that the Sociology of Youth Research Committee of the International Sociological Association is committee number 34. <http://www.alli.fi/youth/research/ibyr/> (retrieved 31 October 2006).

²² See: Lynne Chisholm (2004) “Worldviews and the views of worlds: is there a global community of youth research?”, Finnish Youth Research Society, Helsinki

²³ See: Consultative Meeting on the 10-Year Review of the World Programme of Action for Youth: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/coimbrareport.pdf> (retrieved 31 October 2006).

²⁴ See report at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/youthindicators.htm> (retrieved 31 October 2006).

being myopically focused on risk-related problems – as opposed to a positive focus on talented and gifted young people who have made a constructive social impact.²⁵

40. Therefore, the intention of the Arab League and UNDP to call for the establishment of a Centre for Youth Research and Advocacy is a welcome response to the deficit in knowledge about youth.

41. Research conducted in the area of youth for the Alliance of Civilizations initiative has revealed specific kinds of projects that could encourage the empowerment of young people, which follow in the remainder of this section.

42. For example, a Global Youth Alliance could serve as a mechanism through which youth can contribute to all projects related to youth. Such an organization could be supported by a Global Youth Solidarity Fund. The initiative could begin with the convening and mobilization of various youth networks and associations to promote dialogue, alliance and a culture of peace. These organizations have already begun working together to organize meetings that would provide the opportunity for young people of diverse backgrounds to set an agenda for action which they can then present to global leaders to win their support and assistance. In addition, a survey has been conducted identifying 468 youth organizations from 125 countries that could be engaged as partners.

43. The United States, the European Union, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference could take the number of youth exchanges that occur between their countries from the bottom of the list of inter-regional exchanges to the top. Extended-stay exchanges could be prioritized, along with group exchanges, and exchanges subsidized enough to allow participation from strata of society other than elite populations.

44. Successful programs may be expanded to fit such a priority – i.e. the Erasmus Program and the Universia network may be enlarged to encompass predominantly Muslim countries; the EuroMed Youth Programme could be expanded beyond the immediate Mediterranean region to include every country in Europe and the Middle East; and the American Peace Corps Program could increase operations in predominantly Muslim countries.² As more governments support exchanges, more private donors would be likely to follow suit. To ensure that the quantity of exchanges does not outstrip the quality, some of these resources could be devoted to the following three accompanying objectives:

- a. Increase structural support provided by universities and other host-institutions for such exchanges;
- b. Train youth exchange facilitators by civil society organizations with experience in the principles of non-formal education and learning.³
- c. Produce and disseminate the results of research into pedagogical approaches needed for successful exchanges. Partners could include the European Commission, Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation, and NGO's with research and practice component to their work.

²⁵ Executive Summary, *The Annual Report of Arab Youth Issues* (2005), p. 9.

45. It would be advantageous for religious leaders and civil society activists to establish a network of websites that link youth to religious scholars who can speak in constructive ways to the contemporary challenges facing youth today. Such sites could feature discussion groups led by religious scholars, provide interpretations of religious history and scripture that challenge exclusivist approaches, promote ideas and tools for young people to get involved in their communities, and present links to youth advocacy networks. While this may involve the creation of new websites, the effort should begin by convening managers of existing sites such as Beliefnet, Islam-Online, and MuslimHeritage with concerned civil society and religious leaders to establish criteria for network membership and to strategize on how to reach at-risk youth.

46. Muslim and Western public and private donors could collaborate to establish a Cultural Fund and Networking Service to connect young Muslim artists, writers, musicians, film makers, etc. with their Western counterparts and leaders in the culture industry. This could help to facilitate the dissemination of contemporary Muslim culture to other societies and, in doing so, to promote the cause of dialogue and understanding.

47. A coalition of key stakeholders could help to develop a consensus youth employment strategy. A coalition of multilateral agencies and civil society organizations with experience in promoting youth employment could be convened and supported to pilot broad-based youth employment initiatives, particularly in countries where youth unemployment and alienation are major problems. Consultations with the Youth Employment Network²⁶ and non-governmental organizations in this field indicate that such an initiative would be welcomed and that models of “one-stop-shopping” for youth employment (including job training, resume-writing and interview skills-development, job-seeking and placement, career counseling, and even micro-credit financing) have proven successful at national levels.

²⁶ Which includes the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Labor Organization.