

Hello Everyone, and welcome to our beautiful and actively green country
LEBANON.

I begin by introducing myself; my name is Rida Boutros. I graduated from the Lebanese University with a Master's degree in Biodiversity, Management and Conservation of Natural resources, and I am now the Project coordinator of Jouzour Loubnan Association: A 10 years old NGO that works on the creation and protection of forests in Lebanon and the dissemination of environmental awareness amongst the youth and the local communities in the areas of our intervention.

I got into this field because I thought that I would be an accomplished and happy person If I work in what I love and believe in.

And I am lucky! My thoughts were right! BUT It is not the case of all my fellows.

I want to ask you please to raise your hands if you are under 30 years old.

Volunteers, students, and interns stand up, please.

I understood from the organizers that there was a real willing to deeply involve youth in this event. Even though you made this effort, I can tell you today that it is not enough! WE NEED MORE!

How can you build a future without youth?

I have noticed that all the environmental activities and events here in Lebanon or the country neighborhood call for students, volunteers and interns. It is maybe about time we involve young, creative and passionate professionals to work sustainably in your institutions.

Us, the youth are profoundly aware and directly touched by our environment's deterioration, and we have the ability and determination to be involved.

Why should young professionals leave their hometowns in rural areas to find jobs in the cities or outside their countries?! Who will protect and maintain those abandoned rural areas better than their people? Those flourishing rural areas have been preserved for centuries but today that are abandoned by our governments and our decision makers. I, personally, had to move from my hometown at the North of Lebanon to Beirut to find a job. Some of the youth are

now working in jobs that are unrelated to our field of education, and worse; some had to even accept positions within companies that are partially responsible for our planet's destruction. And guess what? They are not happy at all!

When it comes to education and choosing majors, we have an acceptable range of choices.

When it comes to volunteering in plantations campaigns and green events, we are recently finding more opportunities.

But, when it's time for stable job opportunities for young professionals, we are left alone. Are you creating enough job opportunities for us?

How can we ensure the continuity and sustainability of our fight to protect what is left from our forests if we do not involve youth? How can we convert the new generation if we do not include youth?

On behalf of the youth, I am addressing Ministries' officials, FAO, EU, and large organizations, I am addressing policy and decisions makers, universities and researchers. Incorporate us in your Projects and Policymaking.

Senior experts are of course essential, I do not deny that, but so are young and fresh minded people.

We are full of resources, full of energy, full of creativity... our short experience and love of risk-taking may help you bring unconventional ways to tackle issues you have been addressing perhaps in traditional ways! We know how to communicate with the new generation.

We have skin in the game ladies and gentleman! Our future is unsecured; our ambitions are undermined ...

On behalf of the youth, I have one simple request:

Create secured job opportunities for the youth!

Involve us to empower us!

As you tackle "gender" issues, please do tackle "youth" issue! Every time you build a project, consider hiring young people to join your team!

We chose the environment and forestry as majors. We chose to embrace environmental careers; we chose to volunteer and devote time ... We want to be more involved and engaged.

We are constantly bombarded by attractive and greedy consumerist and polluting promotional messages. The capitalist world understood that you could not change the general public's behavioral culture without reaching out to the youth. They are even succeeding in converting the converted ones. It's not too late to bring the youth back on the right track to preserve our forest and our earth.

There will be no sustainable conservation of our forests without the sustainable growth of forest advocates.

I am rising the voice for a better quality of life. And I am telling you, We all want to help our planet and our forest recover from human greediness.

When you call us to take action, we are responsive and responsible.

Invest in our young farmers, young forestry experts.

Invest in building our capacities because we will be following your steps.

We are your greatest capital. We are your greatest asset.

In the end, as Baba Dioum said, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught.

We understood what you taught us, we love what we understood and we will conserve what we love.

We promise you! Now promise us too!