

Transcript of President Jim Yong Kim's remarks at a Press Conference in Dhaka

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President Jim Yong Kim

Press Conference Dhaka, Bangladesh

Transcript

It's my privilege to accompany Secretary General of the United Nations on this trip. It's really his inspiration that let the World Bank Group to work in humanitarian response especially around the issue of refugees. When he was the High Commissioner of Refugees, he made an extremely compelling and inspiring speech in the United Nations about the situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. And so, we decided together, but with his leadership and vision, that the distinctions that traditionally made between humanitarian response and the development one, was actually a false one.

There are so much humanitarian responses based on development and that bringing the two worlds together was the most important thing we can do. So, over the last five and half years with the Secretary General Guterres, and also with his successor Filippo Grande, we have been working very close with our UN partners to bring humanitarian response and development together. After all there are some humanitarian response situations which lasts for decades and in the response indeed those are mostly development issues.

The second issue I want to bring up is that I'd like to also express my gratitude to the people of Bangladesh and to the Honorable Prime Minister and to the government. The response has been extremely generous and the level of

commitment to protecting the Rohingya has been something that is very moving to me.

With respect to the government of Bangladesh, we believe so strongly in the direction they are going in this year for issues quite separate from the issue of Rohingya. We provided 3.05 billion dollars of very concessional, low interest, long maturity loans to Bangladesh for its development priorities. This is the most we have ever given to Bangladesh and among all the countries that benefits from IDA funds. It receives the second most in the entire world and it is an indication of our belief in them that we went to such a high level. With respect to the Rohingya, we realized that this is a very special situation – and even before I was able to see the situation, of course, I heard so much about it from people who had already visited, and from our partners at the United Nations – that we decided under very exceptional circumstances, normal rules are very different. We would normally provide partially as grant, partially as loan. But under exceptional circumstances we have decided we will provide 480 million dollars – almost half a billion dollars – to the government of Bangladesh for the support of Rohingya and this will be all grant. Again, we worked very hard to convince the governors of the World Bank especially the donors, that this was the right thing to do.

What I saw today was both heartbreaking and appalling to hear stories of rape and torture, and burning of people's homes, the killing of young men, women, girls, boys, and then watching them burnt inside houses. These stories were absolutely appalling.

On the other hand, I was also deeply inspired by the courage and dignity of the people who were kind enough to speak to us. We spoke to the women and were allowed inside the women's space- the first men to be allowed in. They spoke to us with such authenticity, courage and clarity, that we knew once again that this is just the beginning. We need to support them even more. In fact, in all the meetings we had with the Rohingya, we had to push

hard to ask to get them to tell us specific needs they have. But they wanted to talk us with the dignity and their rights as human beings, and so we know they need more, but we are very inspired by their focus on rights of themselves and what they want as a people.

So, 480 million dollars is a good start but as the Secretary-General said, we need a lot more support. Right now, it's not hard to understand that this group of people is among the most discriminated people in the world. And this goes back decades. They are now living in the largest refugee camp of the world in extremely difficult conditions in the monsoon season. Now is the time for all people who have good faith and goodwill to step up and support the efforts of all the groups, UN agencies, World Bank, and also many CSOs and NGOs in supporting the Rohingya. The time is now to step up to provide the support they need.