

Transcript: Q and A with World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim

September 19, 2014

World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim
Q and A with Media
Sydney, Australia

Transcript

MODERATOR: Why don't you ask questions, and just identify from where you're from.

QUESTION: [Unclear] Sue Lannin from the ABC. Why did you ask, why did the world wait so long to respond to Ebola? Are you disappointed it's taken so long?

DR. KIM: Well what we've learned is that this Ebola crisis today is unlike anything we've seen before. Every single Ebola outbreak before has been in rural areas and we've been able to move in and very quickly bring it under control. So already more people have died as a result of this Ebola outbreak than all the Ebola outbreaks in history combined. Also, the infections are growing at a very alarming rate and they're now - we now hear that the number of people infected with Ebola is doubling every three weeks.

Now again, the good news is that if we get the kind of comprehensive response that I was talking about earlier, we make sure that we can prevent all of these new - any new infection; make sure that every single person has access to good quality care that includes intravenous hydration, management of electrolytes. If we can do that, then we can really stop it right now.

Now again, the thing I worry most about is if we don't have a response that's adequate and really able to cover everybody, then this could get much, much worse. So this has surprised everyone. None of us thought that Ebola could look like it's looking right now. But again, we

have a window of opportunity. We can stop this thing in its tracks, but everybody has to move right now.

QUESTION: How long do you estimate is this window of opportunity?

DR. KIM: Well you know we feel like in order to avoid the worst effects, in the next four to six months we really have to bring it under control.

QUESTION: Countries that have given money, do you think that they should send personnel as well?

DR. KIM: Well I think that the countries that are sending personnel, we're very grateful. The one - the most important thing though is that the World Health Organization has to come out with a standardized approach to providing care, and they're doing it right now. In fact, I was just on the phone in an airport lounge with the chief of the cabinet of the World Health Organization and we were talking back and forth about what the elements and what it's going to look like. I think within the next week you'll have a very clear algorithmic approach to responding and once you have that and we put in place the things we need to train anybody, I think that more personnel will be welcome.

Now the problem though is it can't be done helter skelter. It has to be done in an organized way. Everyone has to learn what the procedures are. Everyone has to learn about how to prevent the spread of infection. Then at that point, then I think it could work very, very well. We're focusing though on making sure that health workers in Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone from those countries have all the training and tools that they need. That's really the first priority.

QUESTION: Between Ebola and geopolitics, what do you think is the greatest risk to the G20's growth target going ahead and what do countries need to do most urgently?

DR. KIM: Well you know, there's - I would say there's no one thing. So Ebola, if we don't get it under control, if the response falls apart, then it really could be a risk for the entire world. Certainly it will be a risk for West Africa if we don't get it under control. Now again, the good news is, we have all the tools to get it under control so I'm optimistic that we'll do that. The biggest risk to economic growth, there are several. There are lots of downside risks. Especially the developing countries are very concerned about the removal of the

unconventional monetary policies of the United States. And that looks like it's going to start happening sometime in the middle of next year, but Janet Yellen has been very clear with communicating well ahead of time, and what we're saying is that especially for developing countries, if they continue with structural reforms, they'll be able to prepare themselves for the eventual unwinding of the unconventional monetary policies.

You know, I'm worried about future epidemics. One of the things that we have to do is think about, if we had an influenza pandemic, if we had another SARS- like pandemic, would we be ready? And I think we need to think about that.

Climate change is another issue that we have to be concerned about. When we think about shocks to the global economy, we don't always think about pandemics or climate change, but I think now we have to. We have to think about whether we're going to be prepared for that.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that climate change...

QUESTION: How do you rate Ebola becoming a pandemic? You were talking about it spreading to East Africa and beyond East Africa, beyond the African continent?

DR. KIM: Well you know in - Ebola in the form that it is now is relatively difficult to transmit. There was an Ebola patient who came to the United States, but because every hospital in the United States uses universal precautions, nobody else was infected. Now the concern though of course is that the longer it stays in human beings and the more people get infected, the more chance the virus has to mutate. This is the concern. But that concern - again it's the same solution. The same solution is prevent new infections and treat everyone who is sick. So as long as Ebola doesn't mutate and we get the response out then I'm not very concerned, but we've got to move and we've got to move now.

[Over speaking]

QUESTION: Who's going to manage (inaudible) who.

DR. KIM: Well the good news for me is that the Secretary General has really stepped up. He's put together an outstanding team. That team is coordinating very closely with the Americans, with the UK, with the French, with all the different groups that are involved,

coordinating with us very closely. For something like this, this is no longer just a health emergency. It's a food security emergency. It's a security emergency. Because it's in - because it has so many dimensions right now, it's entirely appropriate for the Secretary General himself to be at the center of it and the fact that he's stepped up I think is really important.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that climate change is not on the G20 agenda and the Australian Treasurer has ruled it out?

DR. KIM: Well you know climate change is an extremely important issue for us at the World Bank group and next week, there will be a climate summit. So I don't think that climate is being ignored. The climate summit on the 23rd of this month is unprecedented, More than 125 heads of state will be getting together. They'll be making announcements about what they're planning to do to combat climate change. We're going to be going into the meeting and we think that there's been tremendous progress on issues like a price on carbon, tremendous progress on the preservation of forests, on building cleaner, more livable cities. So there's a lot going on in climate change and so I wouldn't say that the issue of climate change is being ignored, not at all. It's just that right now the UN's taking the lead on it.

QUESTION: Do you have a comment on the shutdown in Sierra Leone in relation to the Ebola, the shutdown in Sierra Leone. I think some people are staying in their homes...

DR. KIM: Yes. So I mentioned it earlier, but there - with every great outbreak, there are two contagions. The one is of the actual virus. And then the other is the fear related to the virus. So that's what - it's not just happening in Sierra Leone, it's happening everywhere. So the mines have shut down. People have left their fields and so the impact on the economy is enormous.

The only way things will get back to normal is if they feel that we're now competent at preventing new infections and that no matter where you are, you can get effective treatment for Ebola. So that's what has to happen and once we do that, we think that the people of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia will go back to work, will go back to their homes, go back to their villages. That's what we need to do.

So if you look back at SARS for example. That was a terrible epidemic, 800 people died. The cost was \$40 billion, in terms of economic productivity. So already more than 800

people have died from Ebola and yet because it's spread so much more slowly, it's not yet had like a \$40 billion impact. But the whole point is that the only way to stop that second contagion which is the fear that leads to the great economic losses and people staying in their homes, is to get the treatment out.

You know, pay attention over the next week, week and a half, you should be seeing announcements about very effective protocols that we're going to scale up everywhere. Thank you very much.