

# Questions with Korean Media and World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim

January 11, 2013

**World Bank President Jim Yong Kim  
Press Availability with Korean Media  
Washington, DC**

## Transcript

**QUESTION:** Okay, how do you assess your first year in World Bank?

**DR. KIM:** Well, I've been at the World Bank now for six months, and I've been extremely encouraged at the extraordinary quality of the staff and of the aspiration, which is to end poverty in the world and also to help every country in the world boost shared prosperity. You know, I've visited Korea twice now, and I have to say, as I said on the stage, I've been so impressed with Korea's forward-looking stance right now, that, you know, there's a Ministry of the Knowledge Economy. Everyone is looking forward to what it will take to be competitive in future years. I think Korea is really looking at this carefully and I think that's very, very important. And it's a message that we're sending to every country in the world.

What we're saying is the current situation is uncertain. You know, the growth in the high-income countries has not been what we would have hoped. But every country in the world has to focus on setting the foundation for future growth. You know, Korea did this magnificently over the past 30 or 40 years in terms of providing health care, education--a very effective educational system--providing a level of social protection, and they've also been thinking about what's going to be in the future: How is knowledge going to be part of our future? How is--even things like culture—Gangnam style--there's a whole idea is that Korea is going to start exporting its culture.

So, you know, we've been watching very carefully what Korea has been doing, and there's so many lessons there for all the developing countries. And so we at the World Bank are trying to now, at this point, with some aspects of the recovery seeming to be in place, with Europe having taken very concrete steps to solve their problem, you know, what we're now saying is: Look around, look to the future, make sure that the foundations for economic growth in the future are in place.

We're very encouraged about what we're seeing in Korea.

And also, I just want to take this opportunity to give my very warmest congratulations to Madame Park Geun-hye, who won the recent election. I know--I understand she'll be coming to Washington, and I look forward to meeting with her and I look forward to working very closely with her in helping Korea take that next stage to be competitive not only for today but for tomorrow and for the long-term future.

**QUESTION:** Do you know the Gangnam style?

[Laughter.]

**DR. KIM:** I do.

**QUESTION:** Any comments for Madame Park Geun-hye?

**DR. KIM:** I would say--you know, I have learned of Madame Park's very compelling story. She is a person of great substance who has gone through great suffering and come out of it as an extraordinary leader. So I'm very, very optimistic about the future of the Republic of Korea under soon-to-be President Park's leadership.

And I hope that we will continue to work very closely together. We're very excited about the fact that we have a new office in Seoul. We're very excited about the fact that the Green Climate Fund will be based in Korea now. And I just--I think that the lessons from Korea are ones that we now have to share more aggressively with the rest of the world, and I hope to do that in this position, and I think the prospects for the Republic of Korea are going to be very good.

**QUESTION:** Do you have any plans to work with North Korea?

**DR. KIM:** Well, you know, I've said on this many occasions. North Korea is not a member of the World Bank, but I have family members in North Korea. My father left North Korea when he was 17, and he has had no contact with his family members and he had six brothers and sisters. And so on a purely humanitarian basis, the problem of hunger, of tuberculosis, the humanitarian issues that exist in North Korea are ones that are very compelling to me.

Now, it's a very complicated political environment, but if the political environment were to get to a point where it would be possible for us to begin an engagement, the World Bank of course would be very open to it.

**QUESTION:** In case the World Bank is willing to help out North Korea, what kind of assistance are you going to provide and also is World Bank preparing anything for that kind of help in the future?

**DR. KIM:** Well, no, let me repeat. We are not--North Korea is not a member of the World Bank Group and they would have to become a member before we could do an all-out program.

But if you look at the work at the World Bank, we work on infrastructure. We work on health, education. And my understanding is that things like building roads and electrical grids and health care and educational systems and social protections systems, these are all things that many, many countries need. And if we were able to sort through all the very complex political issues that exist, those are the kinds of things that I think we could provide for North Korea.