Remarks at the Inaugural Meeting of the Cities Alliance

by
James D. Wolfensohn
President
The World Bank Group

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President Mandela
Minister Wieczorek-Zeul
My Colleague Klaus Töpfer
Secretary Hayashi
Distinguished Colleagues And Friends

At the World Bank we have a lot of issues to deal with in relation to poverty. And it is very difficult to decide what to do first. The issues range from health, to conflict, to children in the streets, to the issue of AIDS. There are problems everywhere.

But, when you think about the move to the next millennium, we must recognize that in the next twenty-five years our world's population will increase from six billion people to eight billion people. The majority of this six billion people -- 4.8 billion -- currently live in developing countries. And, in the next twenty-five years we will have 6.8 billion people living in developing countries. The population growth rate in OECD countries will essentially be flat. And so we will be faced with a different world. And in that world of 6.8 billion in developing economies, about two billion more people will live in cities. That is a chilling prospect. When you know that of the 4.8 billion people on the planet already in developing countries, three billion or so live under two dollars a day, and 1.2 billion live under one dollar a day. The question is where do we go from here?

What can we do to reduce the number of people in poverty? How can we help to build a more stable and peaceful world?

Creating a stable and peaceful world requires enhancing equity and social justice in many societies throughout the planet. We cannot have peace if we do not have social justice. This does not mean that armies will be raised, it means that people's lives will be impacted by crime, by terrorism, by migration, by wars, by health problems, by environmental problems. We are living in an increasingly interconnected world -- one that is linked in every way from health, to trade, to finance, to communications, to crime, to drugs, to terrorism. This is the reality as we approach the next twenty-five years.

I stand here today not as someone who has come to these realizations through idealism and isolation. This is someone who has come from business, and who has for the last five years visited a hundred countries, and been in more slums and villages than I thought existed.
But what you find in slums and villages is not despair. Visiting developing countries you find that poor people living in slums and rural villages are the best people you meet. They are people with integrity, they are people like you and me.

We have just completed a study of sixty thousand poor people whom we have interviewed around the world. And of the sixty thousand people who were interviewed, these people shared with us a number of interesting perceptions about poverty. The first thing they told us is that they are not interested in charity. These people want opportunities and hope, for themselves and their children. They want a chance for their kids. It is not money that they envy, it is to have a whole life, to have respect, to have the chance to live with their families, to be free, to feel protected, rather than oppressed, by the police. They want access to justice. They want a voice, they want a chance to speak. They want dignity. They are not too different from anybody in this room.

And we are working on pilot projects in the area of urban renewal, greatly assisted by the governments of Japan and the United Kingdom, and by many others in this room, in efforts to address some of the problems in slums. These programs represent ways in which we know we can make a difference to people in urban areas. And what we are trying to do in this program, which we hope we can all embrace, is to focus effectively on many areas of life in which we help make safe water and sanitary environments available, and we deal with issues of health, crime, security and violence. All of us are working hard on these issues and we know we can tackle these problems together.

And it is our responsibility as we enter a new millennium - to scale up. It is not a mystery. It is something that everyone in this room probably knows how to do. And so the chance that we are grasping is a chance to set our goals in the range of tens-of-millions, as opposed to thousands, of lives affected - of people who are lifted out of poverty in urban areas.

When my colleagues Tony Pelligrini, Mark Hildebrand, and Nemat Shafik told me about this I was excited about the opportunity to address the current urban problems, while still recognizing that there are more challenges ahead - as about two billion more people move into cities in the next twenty-five years. But, we must tackle these problems one step at a time. Hopefully, we can address the first hundred million and then move on to the next.

Bringing peace, security, and opportunity to urban centers is important for us all - not just people living in these areas. It is important for us as a matter of conscience. It is important for us as a matter of social justice. It is important for us as a matter of self-interest. This is about our future, about the world we will leave for our children. That is why this meeting is not just another meeting, it is central to the challenge of facing poverty. And who better to act as our patron than Nelson Mandela, the former president of South Africa. He is an important actor and symbol for us all.
I don't know of anyone in my lifetime who has attracted such universal esteem as President Mandela - he has everything. He is a man who has dignity, strength, integrity, compassion, judgement, and humanity. There are very few people on this earth who combine all of these characteristics. And there are many pressures on his time. I had the chance of meeting with him recently in South Africa, and I have some knowledge of these pressures. And, I believe that he too has recognized that of all the competing pressures on his time, that this one is one of the most important - it stands out among the rest.

And so I, President Mandela, feel an acute personal sense of gratitude to you for flying out, for then flying back, in twenty-four hours. I told him before that he is much younger than I am so, he could afford to do that. But, he is surely making clear that what he said when he closed his presidency is true.

He said. "It is no easy thing to rest while millions still bear the burden of poverty and insecurity. Though I shall not be seen as much as I have been, I shall be amongst you and with you as we enter the African century, working together to make a reality of your hopes for a better world."

I am very proud and honored to introduce to you, President Nelson Mandela.