World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim’s Statement on His Upcoming Visit with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to Africa’s Sahel Region

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World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim
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Thank you, Mr. Secretary General,

I couldn’t agree more with the Secretary General. We need to work together so that the people of the Sahel can have both peace and development.

The partners he mentioned that are on this trip—and the many unsung heroes helping people on the ground—must coordinate closely to stop the destructive cycle of poverty and conflict.

Following our historic visit to Africa’s Great Lakes region in May, we are even more committed to this approach. We are committed because the stakes are so high.

The people of the Sahel have lived for decades with threats to their survival. They have been battered by conflicts, political instability and a harsh and unpredictable environment.

Now is the time to help them build more stable lives. They need better access to quality health care and education, as well as good jobs, especially for women and young people.
The Secretary General and I will hear first-hand from Sahelian leaders next week. We know their nations suffer from many interrelated problems.

Many of these countries have chronically low economic growth which lags behinds the urgent need for job creation.

The severe impacts from climate change threaten hard-won gains in poverty reduction.

As the Secretary-General mentioned, volatility in the price and supply of food now leaves millions at risk of hunger.

Tragically high infant and maternal mortality rates not only afflict families but also burden countries with high economic costs.

And tenuous government control over several large areas makes public services scarce or non-existent for the citizens who need them most.

Not surprisingly, the Sahel is highly vulnerable to a long-term “fragility trap” of fading economic prospects, high poverty and insecurity.

That is why we must act now—to give the people of the Sahel a chance for a brighter future.

The World Bank Group will mobilize behind a new approach to the Sahel. We will do this while working side by side with countries from the Sahel, the Secretary General and other development leaders from the UN, the European Commission, the African Development Bank, and the African Union.

As we will announce on the trip next week during our visit to Mali, our regional action plan will promote greater stability, resilience and sustainable development in the five core countries of the region: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

Our aim is to address the root causes of poverty, conflict and hopelessness.

As a part of this new approach, the World Bank Group will mobilize substantial public and private resources and support:

We will help strengthen social safety nets for people, lower the cost of energy, and expand support for irrigation and pastoralism.
We'll also work to transform the state of agriculture across the Sahel, and move even closer to the elimination of river blindness and other neglected tropical diseases.

Finally, we'll help create and support small- and medium-sized businesses through increased finance, trade incentives, better infrastructure and an improved investment climate.

I'm pleased to support this historic new vision for change in the Sahel. We see this as an essential component of the World Bank Group's global strategy to end extreme poverty and build shared prosperity.

Working closely with these nations and partners, we can empower families to achieve more prosperous, hopeful, and peaceful lives.

Thank you very much.