Opening Remarks by World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim at a Joint Press Conference with Haitian Finance Minister Marie-Carmelle Jean-Marie

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World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim
Joint Press Conference with Haitian Finance Minister Marie-Carmelle Jean-MariePort-au-Prince, Haiti

Transcript

DR. KIM: Thank you very much. It's wonderful to be here, and I first want to start by thanking President Martelly, Prime Minister Lamothe, Finance Minister, and all the Haitian officials. But especially I want to thank the people of Haiti for being so welcoming to us in this visit.

I'm very much aware of the tremendous suffering that happened after the earthquake and also what was recently the Hurricane Sandy. But I must say that I leave Port-au-Prince today, I leave the Republic of Haiti today with a heart full of hope.

In my meetings with the President and the Prime Minister, what I found was that this is a very popular administration; that was born out of the very first physical transfer of power in the history of Haiti, and this is an administration that understands its most important tasks.

We're very focused on doing two important things.

The first is to create a vibrant private sector that is creating jobs and that is truly open to the entry of all Haitians. They understand that the private sector creates job, but they also understand that this new Haitian private sector can't look like the old Haitian private
sector. It has to be open to new entrants, to entrepreneurs, now I'm very glad to say that I
met some very bright young entrepreneurs who are now participating in Haiti's growth. This
is the path that Haiti must stay on.

In addition to building the private sector, this is a government that's deeply committed to
social justice and deeply committed to reviving the kind of social protection--education and
health care--that the Haitian people need and that the country needs in order to build a
foundation for the growth of the future.

I would just say to the Haitian people, I think it's perfectly reasonable for you to be impatient
in demanding services. But what I want to say to you today is that this is a government
whose commitment to providing social services is very deep. It will take some time for them
to find the exact right approach that will work here in Haiti. So I also ask for a little bit of
patience. But I have been completely convinced that this is a government that's committed
to its people.

We welcome the appointing of the task force. And when we go back to Washington, D.C.,
we will assign four of our very top people to working with the government of Haiti on the
task force.

What we are doing with this task force is saying that because the Haitian people deserve
quick, effective, efficient services, infrastructure, access to markets, basic social services,
that we are going to hold each other accountable so that we ensure that we produce results
as quickly as possible for the Haitian people.

When I first started working here in Haiti, the Haitians used to tell me a proverb so that I
wouldn't have too high of expectations about what we could accomplish here in Haiti, and
the proverb was: “Pipi marengwen fè monte larivyè.”

[The literal translation is “the pee of the mosquito can make the river overflow.” Closest
English equivalent may be “the straw that broke the camel’s back.”]

But I have a very different feeling today. I think that perhaps in one of the first times in
Haitian history, we have a historic opportunity to take giant leaps forward for Haiti.

We have a government that's committed to economic growth but also deeply committed to
social justice for its people. We have an international community that stands ready to
support the Haitian government and the Haitian people in achieving their highest
aspirations, and we have governments throughout the world who are watching and who
want to help. This is the time. We have to grab this opportunity to do the things that we know that the Haitian people deserve.

Thanks a lot. Vive Haiti [Long Life to Haiti].

QUESTION: [speaking in French and Creole] With a portfolio of $300 million that finances 16 diversified projects, with grants and no access to substantial credits, can we objectively talk about growth of the private sector? Can we talk about reforms especially in the aftermath of hurricane Sandy when the lost in the agriculture sector amount to $104 million (and over the year to $254 million) and there are not enough resources to address the necessary transformations to transform the agriculture sector? In these conditions do you think the World Bank can be a partner that will help us find solutions and support the government intervene in the necessary reforms?

DR. KIM: Thank you very much for your question.

One of the things I'd like to stress is that the World Bank is not only the donor in this country. And I have to say that I think that now an important point that I'm going to make to my colleagues and partners in the world is now is not the time to back off of our support for Haiti. I think that support for Haiti should continue to increase until we can really make the kinds of historic gains that we need to make.