Transcript of Press Conference with World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim and President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

December 2, 2014

World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim and President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
Press Conference
Monrovia, Liberia

As Prepared for Delivery

PRESIDENT JOHNSON SIRLEAF: We have had from you and the team, the kind of support that has been given us, made a lot of progress on our Mission 2030 and our agenda for transformation.

Your support cross-sectors many sectors, energy, roads, agriculture, health, education. In all of those areas we have made progress because of your support and that of other partners.

Recently, with us facing Ebola, you have really been exceptional in your support. Not only have you brought to us your professional knowledge of the health sector and what you've done in that area and organized your colleagues in that sector to become partners with us. Through the Bank, you have provided support to enable us to fight this disease, and I daresay the progress we've made comes from that very quick support, including budgetary support, which is something that we value very much and we don't get too much of.

So, I just want to thank you for that--thank you as we continue to work with you, moving along our plan of being able to treat the disease, move on to getting sure our communities take responsibility in ensuring that we move towards [unclear 0:01:40] at some point in time, being very conscious that we have to be very resilient and to improve in our health facilities
and I can only reiterate once again, thank you for the investment, thank you for the exceptional support that you've given.

**DR. KIM:** Thank you very much, President Johnson Sirleaf.

Earlier, in meeting with Madame President and the Cabinet Ministers, I first expressed on behalf of the entire World Bank Group our deep condolences for the losses that the Liberian people have suffered.

I would like to congratulate the Liberian Government for their leadership in handling the emergency response to Ebola. I encourage President Johnson Sirleaf to continue working with Liberia’s neighbors to strengthen the regional response and promote greater regional integration.

In our meeting today, we discussed the importance of finishing the job on Ebola and beginning to work on economic recovery. The World Bank Group is committed to help the Liberian authorities in the coming 18 months in the following 5 areas:

First, the World Bank Group - which has already provided $200 million dollars to Liberia for the Ebola crisis - will continue to support President Johnson Sirleaf’s ambitious plan to get to zero cases as soon as possible. This involves making sure that every community is protected from Ebola and that all Liberians have access to the health care they deserve.

But we don't need to wait till we get to zero to start working on the economic recovery, so our second area of support is agriculture. Agriculture is a key pillar of the Liberian economy and we are concerned that agricultural production has dropped as a result of the Ebola epidemic. We will help Liberian farmers recover from this crisis. We must make sure that the Ebola epidemic is not followed by a food security crisis.

Third, we will help improve selected infrastructure that are critical for economic competitiveness - such as urban infrastructure, access to electricity and the construction of roads and bridges that connect farmers to markets. We need to help Liberians create jobs to help people recover from income losses as a result of the economic slowdown caused by the epidemic. The epidemic has stalled some of our existing infrastructure projects. We are working to bring the private sector back. Today in Accra, we are organizing a round table on this issue with private companies working in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.
Fourth, we will continue to work through IFC to provide liquidity to local banks to support Small and Medium-Size Enterprises and local entrepreneurs and farmers. Today, IFC's executive Vice President Jin-Yong Cai will sign a $7.5 million dollar loan to EcoBank.

Fifth we will help the government manage the consequences of the epidemics on the public accounts. We are working closely with the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank and we are preparing several tranches of budget support.

**QUESTION:** [Inaudible]

**DR. KIM:** We need Liberia to be in a position that's better than it was in before the outbreak of the Ebola virus. And in order to do that, we need to really focus on infrastructure. We need to really focus on getting the health care system in place so that these kinds of problems don't happen again, and we've really got to get the private sector moving. That's why I'm here with leaders of both the public sector portion of our work here in Liberia, and the private sector portion. We're committed to both supporting the government and ensuring that the private sector grows.

**QUESTION:** I'd like to ask a question, with the crisis [unclear], do you think that this [unclear] will do a shift in supporting countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Guinea? That is to say, in a shift in support.

**DR. KIM:** Well, let me put it this way: I think that what the Ebola epidemic has taught every single one of us is that we were not prepared for an outbreak of this size.

And if you consider, while Ebola is a terrible viral disease, it's not as contagious as other viral illnesses, for example, that are airborne. There were outliers in SARS, for example, or a deadly pandemic flu which--either of which could happen literally at any time. Bird flu, swine flu, all of these problems could reoccur. And what we learned is that we're not ready.

So, what we've begun to do is to start a conversation--in fact, I had this conversation in Brisbane, Australia, in a private session with the leaders of the G20. And what I said to them was that we found that we were not prepared. And what we also found is that the countries that we neglect the most very well could be the places that suffer the most or that even accelerate the epidemic. And so, we cannot leave any country unprepared. We've got to build surveillance and protection systems, we have to build functioning public health
systems. We have to build health care systems in every country in the world, in every village, to a level that we don't allow this kind of problem to happen to again.

Now, we're thinking of lots of different creative ways of raising the funds and the political will to do that, but I think we learned a very important lesson, and I for one, as President of the World Bank Group, will continue to remind all of the leaders that this flaw that was exposed must be taken care of and must be taken care of as quickly as possible.

MODERATOR: A final question


I'd just like to ask you, are you satisfied with what you've seen and what's your suggestion regarding the expedition of the fight against Ebola so that we can get down to brass tacks regarding the areas suggested [unclear].

DR. KIM: I've been extremely impressed with the leadership of President Johnson Sirleaf and her entire Cabinet. I've been extremely impressed with the strong, strong commitment of the U.S. Government as a partner to Liberian Government.

As we go through, we looked at all the different ETUs that have been--that have been erected. Now, it's great, and it's a good thing that they are less than 50 percent full with Ebola patients, but now we have to make the switch.

And to her great credit, you know, I think that somebody should give President Johnson Sirleaf a certificate in infectious disease----because she told me exactly what we now know, which is that we've got to switch the response from focusing on treatment units to prevention and treatment, both, in every community in Liberia.

So, now, the ground game has to change. We've got to have a system that can detect any case, anywhere, throughout--and get treatment for the people so they don't think they're going to die. And what we know is that in places where modern medicine has been able to care early for people with Ebola, cure rates are very high, are extremely high. There have been two deaths in the United States. Both of those deaths were from patients of Ebola who were detected too late, who were brought to care too late. All of the ones who were brought to care early have done well and then lived.
So, if we can bring modern medicine to bear, even in the rural villages and we can detect the cases through the contact tracing, we can get to zero, but it will take a huge effort and it will take a bit of a shift in strategy to focus more on communities and buildings.

Thank you very much.