World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim’s Remarks to the UN Security Council on the Sahel

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World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim
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As Prepared for Delivery

WASHINGTON, December 12, 2013 - World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim today made the following remarks in the UN Security Council meeting on the Sahel:

"President Araud, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Members of the Security Council and UN Member States, fellow panelists. It’s a pleasure and a privilege to take part in this briefing.

Thank you for the invitation.

As the Secretary General has noted, the joint trip to the Sahel was an historic opportunity to bring international attention to an often-neglected region. We are all so grateful to the Secretary-General for his leadership in bringing together the UN, the African Union, the African Development Bank, the European Union, and the World Bank Group on this trip, showing a unified front of support for the Sahel.

All of us also should express our deep gratitude to the government of France and President Hollande for the courageous decision to send in French troops, who have helped stabilize much of the Sahel. Without those troops, our joint mission, led by the Secretary-General, likely never could have happened. We are also thankful for the good work of MINUSMA, which we witnessed directly on this trip.
Our message today should be unequivocal: The world will support the Sahel.

Our joint visit last month gave all of us a better idea of the challenges facing the people and the leaders of the Sahel. It made me even more convinced that, if we work together, we can offer sustainable, potentially transformative solutions to the problems of the region.

I left the Sahel full of hope and optimism.

One of the conclusions we drew from our visit is the need for a coordinated and regional approach to tackling the major development challenges of the region. The recent formation of the Coordination Platform is exactly what this region needs -- foreign ministers from the Sahel countries will meet every six months to decide common priorities. We welcome Mali’s leadership in chairing the Coordination Platform for its first two years.

During our recent trip, the World Bank Group committed $1.5 billion in new regional investments over the next two years. This is in addition to significant existing country programs. These new funds will support major regional development priorities, such as social safety nets to help families withstand the worst effects of economic adversity and disasters. It will also support the private sector by encouraging entrepreneurship and an improved investment climate.

Exactly one week ago today, our Board approved the first part of the package – the $228 million-dollar Senegal River Basin Multipurpose Water Resources Program. This project will benefit countries like Senegal, Mauritania and Mali by improving water availability for agriculture and food production.

It is critically important that our work will support the social and economic empowerment of women. We need to harness the energies of all citizens, especially women, to build a secure and prosperous future for the region. During the trip, together with the President of Niger, we issued a collective “Call to Action” on Women’s Empowerment and Demographics in the Sahel. As part of our new investments, we have committed $200 million to address these issues.

The World Bank Group can provide this new level of support to the Sahel because of the commitment by our donors that support our fund for the poorest countries, IDA. We very much appreciate donors’ contributions to IDA because that funding translates into programs that create jobs, that empower women, and that build infrastructure such as roads and irrigation systems for fragile countries and regions.
The people of the Sahel have struggled far too long with too little economic growth. They've endured a harsh climate and periods of famine. They have suffered the intricately linked curses of high fertility rates and the world's highest number of maternal and child deaths.

But there is nothing natural or preordained about this unfortunate state of affairs.

For too long we have failed the Sahel. Our low aspirations reflect our inability to see past what are very real challenges.

But let me be clear, the people of the Sahel do not have low aspirations for themselves. They have very high aspirations, and we must respond appropriately.

When I was in Timbuktu, a diverse group of people all had the same message: They want just what all of us want: a good job, a good education, access to quality health care, and hope for a better life for their children.

In Burkina Faso, business leaders told us they are ready to invest more, but they need better access to affordable energy. Today, people in Burkina Faso pay 74 cents per kilowatt hour for their electricity – seven times more than we pay here in Washington, D.C. -- and still Burkina Faso is expected to grow at 6 percent this year and next. Think of Burkina Faso’s growth rate if they had affordable energy. All of us must raise our aspirations for the Sahel so they are as high and ambitious as those of its people. We must demonstrate our solidarity with them through effective, pragmatic support.

The lives of the people of the Sahel can be transformed. All they need is our sustained commitment to their vision for a better life. I look forward to working with all of you to make it happen.

Thank you very much.”