Transcript: Vatican Press Conference with World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim

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World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim
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Transcript

DR. KIM: Thanks very much for coming.

I came here specifically to speak with the Holy Father about some of the things that have been happening in the World Bank Group that affect the entire world and that are much in line with his stated priorities.

As you may know, we have launched a target to end extreme poverty; that is people living on less than US$1.25 a day by 2030, and that means to bring it below 3 percent of people in the world living in extreme poverty. And we've done a lot of studies, and it turns out that it's going to be extremely hard to reach that target. Growth rates, and especially inclusion of the poorest in growth, are going to have to be at levels that are higher than we've seen in the last 20 years. In other words, we have to grow more quickly and we have to include more of the poor in growth if we're to reach that target.

Moreover, the second target that we have set is boosting shared prosperity. And by "shared prosperity," we are going to follow the income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population in developing countries, and we've now understood throughout the world that if you leave—if you have GDP growth but then don't include the bottom 40 percent, you build instability into your societies. We've seen this in the Arab Spring. We've seen this in Brazil and Turkey.
And so in so many ways, what the Holy Father has been saying about inclusion and poverty is exactly the same things as we've been saying. So I spoke with him at great length about our target to end poverty. I spoke with him also about our commitment to working in the most fragile and conflict-affected states.

But also I spoke to him at great length about my own personal--at some length about my personal background. I am a medical doctor and I'm an anthropologist, but I've been working in Catholic base communities for most of my adult life. I've worked in Peru, in Haiti, and in other parts of Latin America, and even Africa. I spoke with him in Spanish about my experiences in fighting poverty as both a physician and an activist.

I also explained to him that twenty years ago, I participated in demonstration against the World Bank. There was a movement called Fifty Years is Enough in which we tried to close the World Bank on its fiftieth anniversary, and I have to tell you that I'm very glad that we lost that argument because the World Bank has changed dramatically. And one of the things I explained to the Holy Father is that there was a time at the World Bank when we thought that growth was sufficient to solve the world's problems, and what I told him was now we know that growth has to be for the people, that growth has to be focused on being able to provide the poorest with good jobs, and we know also that growth won't happen if you don't invest in people, if you don't invest in health, education, social protection.

So we had a wonderful discussion about those issues, and we also talked about how we could work more closely together--his efforts in fighting poverty along with our efforts in fighting poverty--that we feel that if we can find ways of working together, we could build a social movement that could accelerate progress for ending poverty.

So I thank you for your attention and look forward to taking your questions.

**MR. DONNELLY:** So would you identify yourself and your outlets and--Do you want to start?

**QUESTION:** I'm [unclear 03:53.] from Reuters.

Thank you for this opportunity and your availability.

First of all, how long did you spend with Pope Francis?

**DR. KIM:** About 25 minutes.
QUESTION: Second is you may know that he has been very, very critical of the world economic situation, but not only the situation but the world economic structure, that he went so far as when he went to [unclear 04:18] he was saying that people have to stop worshipping this god called money [unclear], did you get into any of the details of his vision of what the world economy should be like and [unclear] redistribution of wealth, et cetera and [unclear] passionate about?

DR. KIM: We talked specifically about growth and the purpose of growth. I wrote a book at one point in 2000 that was titled Dying for Growth in which we really critiqued at that point many international institutions' approach to focusing just on growth and not enough on people. And so we actually agree on that point. And what he emphasized to me is that yes, growth is necessary but then the question you have to ask is: Growth for what purpose? And for him, he emphasized again to me that growth has to be for people and not for the sake of money, a point around which he and I, on a very personal level, agree.

Growth is critical, and at the World Bank Group we know that there's no question that growth is absolutely necessary to lift people out of poverty, but I think that with our now measuring how the bottom 40 percent is doing, we're sending a very strong message. Growth is extremely important but it must be inclusive, a fit—that's not only the right thing to do from a moral perspective but it's also the smart thing to do from an economic perspective. We know that if you have very high levels of inequality, you actually lose momentum around growth, and we've identified that the most unequal societies actually grow slower.

So we didn't have the economic argument. We had the moral argument, of course, but while there are details that we didn't get to, we certainly came to agreement on the notion that growth has to be for people, a point that we've been making for some time. Inclusive growth is the—the term we would use is "inclusive growth."

QUESTION: Were you alone, the two of your or—

DR. KIM: Yes, just an interpreter, but we spoke in Spanish so there was really no need.

QUESTION: I'm [unclear 06:47]. Pope Francis has been called the Pope of the poorest. Do you agree with that?
DR. KIM: Yes. I mean--you know, the thing is I know many of his friends. When I worked in Peru, I worked with the Society of St. James, La Sociedad de [speaking Spanish], and that is a group of diocesan priests who are missionaries in Latin America, a group that he knew very well.

In speaking with many of my old friends, that the Holy Father has been dedicated to serving the poor ever since he became a priest, and it's something about him which I admire tremendously. And we spoke almost the entire time about poverty and about what it would take to end extreme poverty.

QUESTION: Have you got a common project?

DR. KIM: We talked about the possibility of working together, and it was the first conversation so we didn't come to any conclusion, but he expressed to me that he would like to find some way for us to work together on ending poverty.

And just to clarify for Reuters, we did not talk about global economics and we did not talk about economic systems. We just talked about the importance of ensuring that as economies grow, that the poor are included.

Yes?

QUESTION: [Unclear] from AFP news agency [uncler] on creating social movement to end extreme poverty. Can you explain that a little bit more? Did you come with proposals on collaboration—

DR. KIM: Well, I didn't come with a specific concrete proposal, but what I suggested to him was that we're beginning to see a social movement coming together. Right around the U.N. General Assembly, a group of young people called the Global Poverty Project had 60,000 young people in the audience for a concert where the whole focus of the concert was ending poverty. So we're beginning to see pieces of it coming together, and what I suggested to the Holy Father was that he is such an inspiring figure that his participation and his leadership around a global movement to end poverty could really solidify that movement in a way that I don't think anyone else really could.
**QUESTION:** [Unclear 09:24] looks like in one of your most important moments actually meeting him during your tenure as President of the World Bank. Do you think it's likely that the Pope will travel to Washington sometime in the future?

**DR. KIM:** Well, you know, I was extremely touched and moved by his warmth, his humility, his gentleness, and at the same time, his very lucid and cogent critique of poverty in the world. And so, on the one hand, he was so warm and so kind and so embracing of just me as a visitor and, at the same time, he had very clear perspectives on the importance of tackling poverty. I would love to see him come to Washington, D.C. We would invite him immediately but--and I'm sure that the reception in the United States would be overwhelming.

Did you want to ask something--

**QUESTION:** Yes. Which branch of the World Bank might work together with him in order to (further the relationship between the Church and the Bank)?

**DR. KIM:** We had--we used--right. We used to have an advisory council, an interfaith advisory council, and that was run by our external relations part. So we're now, once again, talking about recreating our interfaith advisory council.

I just wrote on article, an op-ed, in EL PAÍS--was it today?--EL PAÍS--on Sunday with Father Gustavo Gutierrez, and Father Gustavo was one of the original authors of The Liberation of Theology, and he is Peruvian and he's someone I've known for twenty years and worked with in Peru. And we wrote an article, basically arguing that all of the different faith communities should come together around this movement to end poverty.

**QUESTION:** [Unclear 11:42] in fighting poverty. How do you judge the [unclear] World Bank, that you turn to religious leaders instead of political leaders [unclear]?

**DR. KIM:** Well, the good news is that both the United Kingdom prime minister, David Cameron, and President Obama have also declared that they want to end poverty in a generation. So we feel that there's been very strong support from some of the most important leaders and the most powerful leaders. And so I think that the political leaders are also committed.
To have Pope Francis speak so clearly about the need to end poverty is really very important, but we're also reaching out to leaders from other faiths as well.

Yes?

**QUESTION:** Do you ever find development objectives that are at odds with Catholic doctrine on the ground and could that be a hindrance?

**DR. KIM:** Well, you know, I think that we have a very good working relationship with the Catholic church, and we've been working with them on the ground on many, many different issues. There are, of course, areas where they have very strong views, and areas where, for us, you know, we follow the evidence. I'm a medical doctor. We follow the evidence. But we have found ways where on those things where we are in agreement we work together. And I'm coming here today because on perhaps the most important area--ending extreme poverty--we're in complete agreement.

**QUESTION:** Apart from the Pope getting up at the window or [unclear] or leading with a speech at UN or at one of your own organizations [unclear] what do you think that he can do? What do you think you and he and World Bank [unclear] do something other than just being a spokesman to end poverty?

**DR. KIM:** Well, everyone has a different role. And so what we have seen is that the Holy Father is just an enormous inspiration to Catholics and non-Catholics, people of faith all over the world. And so for him to be able to bring the issue of extreme poverty to the table is so, so important. So, to just give you an example: In India, 400 million people live in extreme poverty. In Sub-Saharan Africa, you know, more than--even more, you know, half-a-billion people live in extreme poverty. And you don't hear them being talked about very frequently.

Now, for us, we have very specific programs. We talk about, you know, making sure that people have access to energy, to infrastructure--to other kinds of infrastructure; that, you know, we're helping them with agriculture; we're helping them with access to water. There's many sort of very concrete things that we work upon, but to have the entire world begin to have a consciousness about extreme poverty, pay attention to where we are in terms of making progress on extreme poverty and telling their leaders that we want to do something
about extreme poverty, that's extremely helpful. As an advocate, Pope Francis is, I would argue, unparalleled in terms of bringing this issue to the forefront.

If the children in Europe and the United States and other wealthy countries, if children are thinking about people living in extreme poverty, then our chances of garnering the support in order to really tackle it and make a dent is going to go up tremendously.

But more than anything else, I think, is just bringing the issue to people's attention.

**MR. DONELLY:** Anything else?

Thank you very much for coming.

**DR. KIM:** Thanks very much.