Address to the Closing Plenary Session of the Microcredit Summit

by
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Thank you very much, Sam. Being a rather poor cellist, and being the last speaker after days of speaking, I rather think I would prefer to be in the final musical interlude than seeking to say something new at this stage. And so, let me not say something new. Let me simply tell you that as far as the Bank is concerned, we endorse what you and we have signed and that we are part of this effort to bring about microcredit to 100 million families. We do this with an enormous sense of enthusiasm.

And we do it with not a little bit of uncertainty and a little bit of pride, uncertainty borne out of the fact that we have tried over recent years to make our efforts into microcredit, and sometimes, we have succeeded, and sometimes, we have failed. But what it has taught us is that this is a tough business. It is not the singular answer to poverty, but it is a very, very important answer to poverty. And what we are trying to do is to learn, to learn with you and to recommit to those in our world who need opportunity and a chance for a better life.

We wake up every morning and think of our job and why it is that we work for the World Bank certainly, I do. And I ask myself what is it that has enriched my life in these last 18 months since I have been in this position. The first thing is that I think I am in an institution which has a capacity to do a great deal of good in this world. But I have become convinced after visiting 46 countries and after having met with friends in civil society and in the private sector and people such as Enrique and Gus and others in the international community that helping the world's poor is not a job for a singular star.

Helping the world's poor has to be a partnership. It has to be a partnership between people who are linked by various things, and it doesn't matter too much what the mix is. Some come to helping the world's poor out of a sense of economic opportunity. Why? Because we all know that in the developing world, there are 4.7 million people, and they represent 20 percent of the world's product and that it is growing rapidly and that in another 30 years, it will be nearly 30 percent of the world's products. So, yes, there is economic opportunity: opportunity for us, opportunity for exports, opportunities for growth.

But what I have learned in these last 18 months is that there is a far more real reason for committing ourselves to the work of this conference. Call it social justice; call it morality; call it what you like. Call it being a part of the human race. Tell it to your children, because for us in this room, being part of this globe at the moment is part of a certain equilibrium. There is a mix of developed countries and developing
countries, and somehow, we move forward together, with equity and with inequity.

But in the next 30 years, it won't be developed and developing world, nor indeed is it today, it is one world. It is one world of the same sort of people, of the same human race. And as I have travelled around this world in the last 18 months, I have come to recognize that the great hope for the Bank is not our brilliance; is not our money; is not our 50 years' experience. It is the strength and the dignity of the people that we are working with.

There is an enormous sense of dignity around this world. The people look different; the cultures are different, but the human spirit is the same: a desire for a better life, a desire for opportunity, not a desire for charity; a desire to grow, a desire to feel something in yourself, a desire to create something in the family. And, of course, central to this is the role of women, and central in our responsibility is the role of education of children, particularly girl children, because it is through them that all families, be they from rich countries or poor countries, emerge.

It is the mother who sets the tone of the family. And I have seen, whether be it in Africa or in Central Asia or in Latin America that this centrality is something that we have to support and which is absolutely essential to the development of both economic and social justice in our world. The Bank obviously is only a small player in all of this, a prominent one but a small one. And we commit ourselves at this summit to be your partner. We will help in whatever way we can. If we don't get it right, tell us how we can get it right. Let us work together, and let us work together as partners in trying to reach that 100 million goal and in trying to leave the world a more peaceful and safer place for our children.