

Remarks at the Second Global Knowledge Conference (GK11)

Building Knowledge Societies Access, Empowerment, Governance

by  
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PRESENTER: Ladies and gentlemen, may we now formally invite Mr. James Wolfensohn to address the conference. Mr. Wolfensohn, please-

MR. WOLFENSOHN: Well, thank you very much, indeed, and Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Chief Secretary, Mr. Secretary, my friend Huguette Labelle, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I could not quite see the stamp from here, Mr. Deputy Prime Minister. I assume the one in red was my profile. Was it? If it wasn't, it certainly looks like me, and I will pretend that it is mine, and I thank you for putting out the stamp.

Let me say in seriousness that it is wonderful that you would, in fact, issue stamps on this occasion, because we regard this Knowledge Conference as a very, very important event. Following the first Knowledge Conference, there is very little doubt that the interest has been maintained and that the importance of global knowledge has become supremely well known as an issue of development. Certainly I would congratulate you, Deputy Prime Minister, on your own remarkable achievements in Malaysia: 99 mobile phones per 1,000 people, a multimedia super-corridor, more and more fully-wired schools and 21 internet hosts per 10,000 people. These are statistics which countries can be proud of, and may I salute you and the work that you and your government have done in terms of jumping to the opportunities of the knowledge generation.

ABDULLAH HAJI BADAWI: Thank you very much for your kind words, Mr. Wolfensohn.

MR. WOLFENSOHN: Certainly, we, Deputy Prime Minister, at the Bank and I think all the members of the Global Knowledge Partnership, which we have the honor to be Secretary to, have taken the view since the first meeting that we had in Canada and may I say how grateful I am to Huguette Labelle for her work at that time in helping us bring off that conference under her leadership.

Let me say that the Global Knowledge Partnership is something that for us is central to our work. This is not a fringe activity or just another technological advance. We believe, as I guess so many of you in the

audience believe, that knowledge and the digital revolution are really central to the considerations of development in the years to come.

When we look at the situation in the world today, with 4.8 billion people in the developing world out of the total 6 billion people in the world, and we look at the number of people in poverty, 3 billion living under \$2 a day and 1.2 billion living under \$1 a day, we recognize that whatever it is that we have done in the past has left the world in a state of social disequilibrium. And in thinking through what it is that might be done for the existing population, and more particularly for the 2 billion people that will be added to our planet in the next 25 years, the answer is not just another series of projects. The answer is not just trying to find a bit more money to send from developed countries to developing countries, or for developing country entrepreneurs and savers to invest in their countries.

The answer clearly is not just money. The answer clearly is knowledge, partnership, and opportunity brought about by this new revolution. And this is something which I think is known to all of you because you have come to the conference. But it is something that, as we look forward and we think of 6.8 billion people being in developing economies in 25 yearstime, when we think of the change in demographics when 2 billion more people will move to cities, and as we think of the new challenges that face us, the answer has to be in terms of increased partnership with us and increased transfer of knowledge.

We have just completed a study called "The Voices of the Poor," in which we have interviewed 60,000 people in 60 countries, people that live in poverty. And what is fascinating from that review, as it is from my own trips to over 100 countries, is that people who live in poverty are not looking for charity; they are not looking for a financial handout. What they want is opportunity. What they want is knowledge. They want a chance for themselves, a chance for their children, a chance for the women in the family. They want to ensure that they have self-respect and that they have an opportunity to grow.

Well, we can understand those desires. They are the desires that probably all of us in this room have a desire to make sure that our family is sound and our children have opportunities and that we have a chance to move forward.

The remarkable thing about the knowledge revolution -- about the digital revolution -- is that it is part of globalization which is not just a threat, but which is an enormous opportunity for everybody. And what we are looking at in our institution, as with many of our partners in the Global Knowledge Partnership, is not the sense of threat but the sense of opportunity.

We see it as a way in which knowledge can be transferred from developed to developing countries, but also that developing countries can exchange knowledge; that the knowledge learned in developing countries can come forward on an equal basis with the knowledge of development agencies, and, in fact, change that knowledge, contour it, describe it in a way that can be effective and useful in the countries in development.

But it is not just something which needs just to be limited to government, with the remarkable opportunities that are offered to us by Internet, the opportunities that are offered by distance learning, with the opportunities that are made available in terms of a global reach in terms of knowledge. It is very possible and, indeed, likely that within the space of five years we will have low-flying satellites capable of delivering wide-band communication to villages in every part of the world. It will be possible for us to arrange for communications to poor communities and to schools on a basis that will be free, because many of the companies have indicated to us that for poor communities and for education, connectivity will be free.

So one could imagine, in the years to come, people in villages throughout the world having access to knowledge, to experience, to advice, and to guidance in real time. And surely we at the Bank have been seeking to grasp this challenge in a way that is not theoretical but is, indeed, essentially practical.

Together with our colleagues at the UN, in UNDP, in the OECD, in the DAC, in the regional development banks, we are looking at the prospect of putting together what we call a Global Development Gateway, a gateway of knowledge in which information is garnered from governments, federal and state and local, from civil society, from the private sector, and from multilateral and bilateral institutions.

And it will be gathered on the subjects that are relevant to development on macroeconomic policy and growth, on structure, on legal systems, on justice systems, on methodologies for supervision and control of financial systems, on social safety nets, of activities to confront corruption, of work in education, in health, in water, in power, in communications, in rural strategy, urban strategy, environment, and culture.

In all these areas in which countries that are interested in development have a focus, we are looking to put together what amounts to an interactive framework in which information will be added by the participants I described, and it will be used not only by them but by individuals in communities to gather and benefit from information.

This is not just a pipe dream. This is something that we can see already as being technically possible, and what is required is for us to come together in a partnership to provide the information. The issue has become not an issue of technology, but an issue of management of information.

And so when we talk at this conference about technology, about access, about empowerment, and about governance, we need to think that at the core of the effective use of technology is a decision on the part of our leaders and the decision on the part of the participants, in our case in development, to ensure that there is a recording of information and a management of that information in the way that it can be transferred effectively, encompassing the linguistic barriers, encompassing the

difficulties of access. But there is absolutely no doubt that this will come within the space of five or ten years globally.

And the countries which do not grasp the opportunities of information and communications technology, both in terms of the development challenge and in terms of education -- be it at schools, be it at universities, be it in research organizations -- the governments which do not benefit from the knowledge base in terms of capacity building, in terms of management skills, these governments and these countries which decide not to accept this challenge will, in fact, fall back in the development program.

So the issue for us in this conference comprises several levels. It is at the level of access. And I know that work will be done in terms of the technical aspects of access and accessibility. Clearly, this is a central issue. But the second issue of empowerment -- the issue that says that as a matter of policy in our respective countries we will provide the software, the will to provide a knowledge base -- is central to the effective use of modern technology.

And then, of course, there is the question of governance which will also be addressed, to make it possible within the framework of a nation state or a region or, indeed, our globe for the information to flow on a basis that is economically sound and protects the interests of all parties.

There could not be a better time to have this conference than now. It is a moment in time at the beginning of a new millennium when we have entered not just a new millennium but a new age. We have moved from the Agricultural Revolution to the Industrial Revolution to the Technological Revolution, to a revolution which is built on knowledge, on technology, and on information. And surely we are enormously supportive of the element in your program which is the Action Summit, to try and come out with a series of programs which can be given effect not just in years to come but from tomorrow, because we cannot wait in terms of our fight against poverty, in terms of our desire to bring opportunity to people throughout our planet.

There is no more important meeting than this meeting to push forward the issue of social justice and equity throughout the world. Knowledge, if it is properly transferred, if it is made available to all, gives the greatest opportunity for people to advance themselves and to progress in the fight against poverty.

So the work that you are doing in this conference may be epochal. It is pivotal to what is required for the fight for development, the fight for equity, and the fight for social justice. And I can only assure you, Deputy Prime Minister and distinguished guests, that so far as our institution is concerned, we want to be there in the front line with you. We want to be a good partner. We do not believe we have anything like all the answers. We are entering a new journey. We are approaching new challenges. We look at it on the basis of the feeling that we can only do it together. And may I say how happy we as an institution are to be with you for discussions in these coming days and how much we look forward to working with you in the years ahead to combat the scourge of poverty

around the world and to give opportunity to make the world a better place.

Thank you for allowing me to join you by satellite. I am sorry that I cannot be there in person, but I thank you for this chance, and I wish the conference well.