

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks on the Nomination of Jim Yong Kim To Be President of the World Bank and an Exchange With Reporters

March 23, 2012

The President. Good morning, everybody.

In February, Bob Zoellick, the current President of the World Bank, announced that he would be stepping down at the end of his term in June. Bob's been a strong and effective leader at the bank for the last 5 years, and when he told me about his plans, I immediately began to search for someone to fill his shoes.

Now, despite its name, the World Bank is more than just a bank. It's one of the most powerful tools we have to reduce poverty and raise standards of living in some of the poorest countries on the planet, and in a world that is growing smaller and more connected every day, that's a critical mission, not just for those who are struggling, but for all of us.

When we reduce hunger in the world or help a farmer recover from a flood or a drought, it strengthens the entire world economy. When we put an end to a preventable disease, all of us are safer because of it. When an entrepreneur can start a new business, it creates jobs in their country, but also opens up new markets for our country. And ultimately, when a nation goes from poverty to prosperity, it makes the world stronger and more secure for everybody.

That's why the World Bank is so important. And that's why the leader of the World Bank should have a deep understanding of both the role that development plays in the world and the importance of creating conditions where assistance is no longer needed.

I believe that nobody is more qualified to carry out that mission than Dr. Jim Kim. It's time for a development professional to lead the world's largest development agency. And that's why today, after a careful and thorough search, I am nominating Dr. Jim Kim to be the next President of the World Bank.

Jim has spent more than two decades working to improve conditions in developing countries around the world. As a physician and an anthropologist, he cofounded Partners in Health and led a World Health Organization campaign to treat 3 million patients with HIV/AIDS. I have made HIV/AIDS and the fight against that dreaded disease and the promotion of public health a cornerstone of my development agenda, building on some of the outstanding work that was done by President Bush.

We pursue these efforts around the globe because it's the right thing to do, and also because healthy populations enable growth and prosperity. And I'm pleased that Jim brings this particular experience with him to his new job.

Jim was also the chair of the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School. He's earned a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship. And for the last 3 years he has served as the president of Dartmouth College.

I should also mention that after immigrating to this country from Korea at age 5, Jim went on to become the president of his high school class, the quarterback of the football team, the point guard of the basketball team. I just found out he is a five handicap in golf. I'm a little resentful about that last item. [*Laughter*] But he does it all.

Jim has truly global experience. He's worked from Asia to Africa to the Americas, from capitals to small villages. His personal story exemplifies the great diversity of our country and the fact that anyone can make it as far as he has as long as they're willing to work hard and look out for others. And his experience makes him ideally suited to forge partnerships all around the world.

So I could not be more pleased to nominate Jim for this job, and I think I can speak for Secretary Clinton and Secretary Geithner, when I say that we are looking forward to working with him.

And I also want to take a minute to thank Bob Zoellick once again for all his hard work. Over the last 5 years, Bob has made the bank more transparent. He has helped shore up progress made in places like Afghanistan. He's raised billions of dollars to help some of the world's poorest communities.

Jim is the right person to carry on that legacy, and I know his unique set of skills and years of experience will serve him well. So I'm grateful to him for his willingness to serve. I do not think that the World Bank could have a better leader. So, thank you.

Jim Yong Kim. Mr. President, thank you.

The President. Thank you.

Mr. Kim. Thank you, sir.

The President. You're going to do great. Thank you. All right?

Death of Trayvon Martin

Q. Mr. President, may I ask you about this current case in Florida, very controversial, allegations of lingering racism within our society—the so-called do not—I'm sorry—"Stand Your Ground" law and the justice in that? Can you comment on the Trayvon Martin case, sir?

The President. Well, I'm the head of the executive branch, and the Attorney General reports to me, so I've got to be careful about my statements to make sure that we're not impairing any investigation that's taking place right now.

But obviously, this is a tragedy. I can only imagine what these parents are going through. And when I think about this boy, I think about my own kids. And I think every parent in America should be able to understand why it is absolutely imperative that we investigate every aspect of this and that everybody pulls together—Federal, State, and local—to figure out exactly how this tragedy happened.

So I'm glad that not only is the Justice Department looking into it, I understand now that the Governor of the State of Florida has formed a task force to investigate what's taking place. I think all of us have to do some soul searching to figure out how does something like this happen. And that means that we examine the laws and the context for what happened, as well as the specifics of the incident.

But my main message is to the parents of Trayvon Martin. If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon. And I think they are right to expect that all of us as Americans are going to take this with the seriousness it deserves and that we're going to get to the bottom of exactly what happened.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:09 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President George W. Bush; Gov. Richard L. Scott of Florida; Trayvon Martin, who was allegedly killed by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman in Sanford, FL, on February 26; and Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton, parents of Trayvon Martin.

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