

Youth Development and Peace 2004

Closing Remarks

By

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Let me thank all of you for coming to this meeting and for working with my colleagues in these last couple of days. I'm only sorry that I could not be here. There are a few other issues which are very pressing at the moment, and I think that it's important that all of us identify with the tragic happenings that have occurred recently in Russia as well as in Darfur, and that we all give a thought today to those that have been tragically put in these terrible situations recently with which the Bank is seeking to play--hopefully play a decent role.

I recognize very well that many of you who are joining us here today have years more experience than we do in making concrete your relationship with youth organizations. And we respect that very much and do not want to try and re-create what you've created, and what we want to do is to make a modest contribution and an addition to existing relationships, with great recognition of what has already been done.

I guess the third point that I'd like to make is that it is much easier for us to deal with internationally organized youth. If you take the scouting movement, for example, you're better organized than we are, so far as I can see. And so it's very easy for us to go with international organizations, and it's probably 10 or 11, but we're also very anxious not to exclude the millions of others that are not part of these formal organizations.

So our objective is to try and reach out to the youth community at large, and there I'm very grateful to all my colleagues in the Bank who are spending so much time trying to do this. And I know that the Bank is difficult for many of you to understand. I have heard that today, and someone suggested that we program for everybody on what is the Bank. But I should also tell you that it's quite hard for me to understand what is the organization of youth internationally, which is not a Bank problem. This is just a problem that maybe even you in the youth movements find difficult.

Just this morning, I heard people pointing out that there are already, as I knew, organizations on specialties. This morning someone spoke of drugs and the dangerous habits, just as I know there is an organization on AIDS and there are organizations on many other substantive areas.

Many of them are quite weak in terms of their organization because of lack of funding, but a very good start can be made if we can plug into those so that when we look, for example, at the question of AIDS, which is one of your four topics, what we want to do is to be able to use the existing frameworks that are there. So those are first a few comments.

Secondly, let me say that I have been trying with my colleagues to assess what has happened in the last year since Paris. And I guess my assessment is that it's been a decent start. Not everything is perfect. I understand that there's a young lady here from the Congo, for example, who had a very bad experience in coming to the Bank, trying to do something, and found it less than pleasant. I don't know what the specific was, but I think also there are some examples of things that are quite good that have happened. And I'd like to think of my friends from the Peruvian operation, and also I should tell you that when I was last in Russia, when we talked to a bunch of young people and got tremendous direct access. In fact, when I then went on to talk to Prime Minister Fradkov, I think I opened the door for these young people to see the Prime Minister because I was telling him about Russian youth. He actually got quite angry that I should have been talking about to Russian youth and his people had not.

For those who said you want us to have direct contact, we are trying to have direct contact, but you should understand that there is a limit to what we can do without engaging governments. But it may be that we can help youth in countries to get a better representation with their governments because of activities that we have directly with youth. And the Russian example I think was a good one.

I am simply saying that in the last year we have had our own New Voices program, have been reaching out on AIDS have been reaching out on other specific programs. And what I have concluded is that we're starting to build up a better understanding in the Bank of the power of youth and organized youth. And I hope that we're starting to establish some credibility that we're serious about trying to build the relationship between the Bank and generally youth.

And I just want to say again that it is a huge commitment for us to do this for one very simple reason: There are six billion people in the world today; 2.8 billion are under the age of 24, and a 1.8 billion under the age of 14. You cannot ignore the fact that half the world is under 24; and that in the next 30 years, roughly 100 million people are born every year, so that in the next 25 or 30 years, we will have 2.5 billion more young people. By the time we finish the 25 years, you will probably not be in this group--I hope you're not in this group--but there will be other people like you in this group. And so for us, the issues of youth employment, the issues of education, the issues of hope for youth, and the issues of challenges to youth in terms of AIDS and other communicable diseases, the four fundamental issues really that you have addressed-- education, employment, risky behavior, and also then the issue of conflict prevention and resolution--these are the key areas that you pointed to, and they're the areas that I think you will continue to have

to need to deal with. And you will have to deal with it with 50 percent of the global population which will be under the age of 24.

So it's not that we've suddenly come up with a new idea. It is essential that we utilize and work with and get the views of and partner with young people. It's not an option for us. Even if you were to reject us today, we have to keep trying because there's no alternative. It also is the most effective way that we can work, to work with young people, to understand young people, and to advance programs and to design them with you.

So from, I think, the point of view of me personally, this is a commitment, hopefully with all of you, but whether or not we can work something out here, we just have to keep going. And I hope very much that this structure will be the basis on which we can move forward.

Now, I've learned that you're thinking about an informal structure that we can move forward with, and I hope that I can hear from Jakamo and Lydia later what are your suggestions. But certainly we are very ready to be responsive. I guess the things that I'm most concerned about--and we can discuss it later--is that we can get some framework, as was suggested from some of the working groups, some specificity on what it is that we're doing, some continuity on what we're doing, so that next year when we meet we're not meeting again to try and reconstruct what happened in the last year, but that, in fact, it is the result of continuous contact between us over this next year. And for our part, we're very anxious to be able to do that.

Someone asked the question about what happens about sustainability in the event that I am not around. But I can tell you that for so long as I'm around, it has sustainability. And what I want to be sure of is that we really ensure inside the Bank and that there is continuity with my colleagues.

So I'm trying to take care of the inside issue in the Bank, and I guess the third aspect is that, were I to leave the Bank, I hope I'm not going to leave the planet so I'm still around to help you if you want it. I probably will have nothing to do. No one will speak to me anymore. But maybe you will, and if you're prepared to talk to me, then I'm continuously prepared to work, even if I'm not President of the Bank, to try and work with you to make sure that you achieve your objectives.

So let's come back then, my conclusion is it's been a decent year, maybe not perfect, but from the point of view of the Bank, let me tell you, it's a decent year. Things don't move at lightning speed in our organization, and you've made about as much progress as I've seen anything made. And we have pretty broadly support from the Board, or at least we don't have opposition from the Board. So I think we have made some progress. We've got our New Voices program. We've got the program for establishment of some youth activities in post-conflict areas. We have some individual initiatives here and there. We have some regional advances. Not perfect, but I think a decent start.

And now what we'd like to do is to make it more focused in the next year, with whatever informal arrangement you recommend, with some structure in it so that we can have a continuous dialogue, so we can establish specific things that we want to do during this year, and then come back next year and say this is what we set up, this is what we agreed by December, it's now our meeting in September or October, let's take a look at where we are, and we can then reassess next year and hopefully learn to work together.

I am tremendously enthusiastic about building this relationship. And, again, I repeat, I think we have a lot to learn from other international organizations and other national organizations that have been at this a lot longer than we have. So we will also be looking to our colleagues in the international community so that we're not coming in as someone who's just discovered youth and we're going to be the leader. We're coming in as an organization that has some strengths and where we want to add the value of what we do to what is now going on.

So we're not coming egocentrically. We're not trying to dictate. What I would like to do during this year is to settle down and do a pattern where we can establish certain things that we want to get done, test them, work on them, and then come back next year and take stock. And hopefully it will be very positive.

So I thank you most particularly. There are many people in this room I've come to know, who I've come to regard as friends, and I thank you. And let me say to my friends in the disabled community that the thing that I am most keen to do there is that we not just have a division of people with disabilities. The work of youth in the Bank has to be inclusive. It has to be that everything we think about must include persons with disabilities. The thing about persons with disabilities is that they have abilities, and we have to recognize the abilities and use those abilities and use those strengths in everything that we do. And I want to say to that group, whom I've come to know pretty well, that we will give special attention to engaging that group in all that we're doing.

So thank you very much.