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Video Address by James Wolfenson

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James Wolfenson is the President of the World Bank. This remarks were delivered at the ***Asia and Pacific Forum on Poverty: Reforming Policies and Institutions for Poverty Reduction***, held at the Asian Development Bank, Manila, 5-9 February 2001.

Good morning. Let me say how grateful I am to have been invited by my friend Mr. Chino to participate in this poverty forum that is being held, and to recognize once again the strength of our partnership with the Asian Development Bank, and our enormous regard for both the leadership of Mr. Chino and for the steps that ADB is taking in combating and confronting the issues of growth and poverty in the Asian region. I am very happy to say that we have, in the past, been able to cooperate very strongly with ADB and look forward to doing so in the future. The ADB Forum and the Social Forum that we had in Manila are examples of the continuing association that we have, and indeed today we will be releasing the proceedings of the Manila Social Forum in a form that will allow both the broader distribution of those ideas and a discussion of the proceedings themselves.

I think, most particularly, what I am impressed by, in terms of the approach that is being taken by ADB, is the focus that the management has brought to the aftermath of the Asian crisis. Being on the spot in Asia, they have the opportunity to look first hand at the issues of poverty alleviation and they have determined, as indeed have we, that it is not just money alone that can deal with the questions of poverty. We already start with the issues of inequity in many of the countries in the region, the difference between the rich and the poor is increasing, not diminishing, in all too many countries and I think we are united in the understanding that trying to deal with the questions of poverty requires a comprehensive approach which must be based on addressing the questions of strengthening government, strengthening the financial system, and dealing with the evident questions of corruption which prevail in too many places in our world. Those structural issues are linked, of course, with the social issues; the issues of providing safety nets, of giving opportunities to more people, the issues of better programs in education and health care, and of course all these are associated with the strengthening of infrastructure.

We are as concerned as ADB is with the issues of changing demography. As we look at the question of poverty, we all know that two-thirds of the people in poverty live in the Asian region—the East Asian, South Asian, and Central Asian region—and we know that the

challenge for us in the context of the development goals that have been agreed to by the community of nations, the first being to halve the percentage of poverty by 2015, will only be met if we are successful in Asia. That is very clear just by the numbers, but Asia also reflects other demographics, with greater concentrations of people coming in the next years. In the next 25 years we will see 2 billion people added to our planet, moving us from 6 billion to 8 billion, with the largest number of those coming from Asia. Of course, of the 2 billion that are coming on to our planet, 2 billion of them will be moving into cities and towns. So we have very, very special challenges that we have to face together — challenges of a comprehensive approach to development, challenges that recognize that we must first and foremost have growth, but in addition to growth, we must have not only financial resources, but we must deal with questions of structural and social issues on an equal basis.

This is the message which my friend Chino has been looking at. It is the basis of the discussion which I know you will be having in this meeting. None of us here feel that we have the answer. We know that by dialog with people that are interested in these concerns, we have a chance, together, at partnership to try and make a difference in what happens in terms of social equity, social justice, and poverty. These issues are not just issues in economics. They are issues of individual people, of individual lives, of older people, of younger people, people who live and breathe and suffer and have joys like all of us. It is a human issue, but it is also an issue in a broader sense, not just of poverty but of peace. Unless we can deal with the question of poverty, there will be no peace on our planet in the next 25 years. So your discussions today are very important. I look forward to learning of your conclusions and your ideas, and I thank you very much for inviting me to say a few words at the beginning of this important meeting.